

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Sarah J. Mass's *Throne of Glass* and the evolution of female characters in the high fantasy genre

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Promoteur(s) : Arblaster Paul
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Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation générale, à finalité spécialisée:
sciences et métiers du livre

Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve
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Abbreviations

The Chronicles of Narnia = *Narnia, Chronicles*

The Magician's Nephew = MN

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe = LWW

The Horse and His Boy = HHB

Prince Caspian = PC

The Voyage of the Dawn Treader = VDT

The Silver Chair = SC

The Last Battle = LB

The Lord of the Rings = LOTR

The Fellowship of the Ring = FR

The Two Towers = TT

The Return of the King = RK

Throne of Glass = ToG

Assassin's Blade = AB

Throne of Glass = ToG

Crown of Midnight = CoM

Heir of Fire = HoF

Queen of Shadows = QoS

Empire of Storms = EoS

Tower of Dawn = ToD

Kingdom of Ash = KoA

I. Introduction

“There is too little of what we really like in the stories. I am afraid we shall have to write some ourselves”, wrote Lewis to Tolkien in 1936 (Carpenter 378). In the beginning of the 20th century, a new literary genre emerges: high fantasy literature. Fantasy has always been part of the literature from mythological and medieval tales; however, high fantasy only gains widespread attention in the 1950s through two authors: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. According to three surveys in Great Britain, the public opinion designated Tolkien with *Lord of the Rings* as the “author of the century”, surpassing *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (James 62). Those novels are the establishment of the definition of the genre, as Edward James says about Tolkien: “most subsequent writers of fantasy are either imitating him or else desperately trying to escape his influence” (62). The term “high fantasy” is used as such for the first time by Alexander Lloyd in ‘High Fantasy and Heroic Romance’ in 1971. In this thesis, the term will be defined by its contrast with “low fantasy”. According to the ‘Encyclopedia of Fantasy’ edited by John Clute, the latter is “set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it”, whereas the former is “set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms” (Clute 338), both include magical creatures or people with unique abilities. This clear differentiation will avoid any confusion as fantasy literature is divided in dozens of subgenres, which will not be analysed.

After the success of Lewis and Tolkien, the genre maintains its status with authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin in the 1970s. However, nowadays, recent high fantasy novels raise a question about their content. Indeed, Sarah J. Maas, a female author, has become a New York Times best-selling author with her high fantasy saga, *Throne of Glass*. This success is unconventional for the reason that her main characters are women. The heroine, Celaena, represents an important development for female characters in high fantasy, but Maas did not content herself with creating one sole strong woman, as she focused the whole series around them. This highlights the possible lack of

female characters or evolution of such characters in the initial novels of the genre. Nevertheless, there have been few studies about the evolution of female characters in high fantasy. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the presence of female characters in high fantasy, the evolution of those characters throughout the decades, the influence of feminism on them and how the initial works in the genre still affect the new generation of high fantasy authors.

In order to analyse female characters in high fantasy, three series have been chosen from two different periods of time. In the 1950s, J.R.R Tolkien with the trilogy *Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis with the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and in the 2010s, Sarah J. Maas with the *Throne of Glass* series. Those particular sagas have been chosen due to the success they have engendered and the status of the authors in the high fantasy sphere. The previously mentioned writers from two different times will enable a view on the possible evolution of women in those fictional societies. Thus, the research question of this master thesis is: How did female characters in high fantasy literature evolve from the 1950s to nowadays?

Gender studies began in the 1960s with the second wave of feminism. However, the term “women’s studies” is only commonly used since the 1980s (Pilcher & Whelehan 176). Those studies have highlighted the lack of female representation, as much in the social and political sphere as in the scientific one, while women were still mainly characterised as wives and mothers (9). However, the subject of gender equality has never been taken as seriously as nowadays. Literature is no exception to the rule, neither is high fantasy. Indeed, since the publication of Lewis and Tolkien’s series, feminism had a vast impact on children’s literature and on, what will later become, young adult fiction. Therefore, women’s rights need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the different novels, which either followed the feminine stereotypes of that time or took advantage of an imaginary world to surpass it.

Even though fantasy evolved, the fathers of the genre, such as Lewis and Tolkien, might still have the most influence on the readership and on contemporary authors, while their representation of women is outdated. In order to confirm or reject that statement, the last series mentioned will be

compared with *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* to emphasise the characteristics that are still in later works, or, on the contrary, those which have faded.

This thesis will contain two main chapters, the first one includes a section on Lewis and one on Tolkien while the second one only focuses on Sarah J. Maas, dividing the analysis of her series into four sections. The different parts of the thesis will contain two key points. Firstly, the description of the female characters' role in the plot and their evolution in the different books. Secondly, an analysis of those characters which will include a comparison made between the three authors to raise a question on their similarities and differences. The evolution of women's rights will also be mentioned in order to draw a parallel between the novels and feminism.

II. High fantasy in the 1950s

High Fantasy has always existed in fantasy literature, but was not a genre as such. It was present through mostly crossworlds fantasy, a sub-genre in which the protagonists come from the real world to ultimately find itself in a fictional one, such as *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carol in 1865 or *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum in 1900. However, the rise of the genre began in the 1950s through the wake of two famous authors: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien.

According to Edward James, they are the fathers of modern fantasy as their work, mostly Tolkien's, establish the main characteristics of high fantasy literature: thinning, wrongness, quest, recognition and eucatastrophe (James 64). The fictional world is declining from "its former state" (thinning) through the rise of an evil force (wrongness), therefore "healing" will be the purpose of the protagonists (quest), during those adventures the main characters will understand their "role in the story of the world" (recognition) and, at last, the ultimate plot twist (eucatastrophe) (64), "a catch of the breath, a beat and a lifting of the heart, near to tears, as keen as that given in any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality" (Tolkien 62-63). Through this "standard", Tolkien made it possible to write high fantasy novels without the need of it being a crossworlds fantasy (James 65). However, those characteristics alone could not make the reader believe in this "Secondary World", therefore Tolkien created a "historical and cultural depth to Middle-earth" (66).

Even if both Lewis and Tolkien follow the same pattern, their novels are quite different. In 'The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature', Edward James explains that while Tolkien was interested in the "Finnish epic", "the culture and languages of the early Middle Ages", Lewis was more drawn to Graeco-Roman and Norse mythology and "chivalric romances of the later Middle Ages" (James 67). Religion is at the same time a similarity and a difference in their work. Indeed, Lewis's *Chronicles* are a retelling of Christian stories while Tolkien classifies *LOTR* as "a profoundly Catholic work" (69), although it actually has very few Christian references.

According to Tolkien, fantasy novels, although based on an imaginary

world, “can express real and important truths” (67). Are gender, feminism and women’s rights part of these “truths”? In ‘20th Century Britain: The Woman’s Hour’ by Jenni Murray, she explains the situation of women at that time. At the end of the 19th century, women were still expected from a young age to marry, have children and be good home keepers, their access to education was still very limited. The early 20th century and the suffragettes have tried to change those conceptions. The suffragists dedicated their lives “to securing the vote for women to enable them to take full part in the democratic process” (1). However, their actions were put on hold when the First World War began. This first war highlighted the effort of women and led to the Representation of the People Act in 1928, according the right to vote to men and women. Nevertheless, a certain proportion of female citizens, mostly mothers or grandmothers from the countryside, did not benefit from those new rights. During the Second World War women were given a taste of freedom, indeed, while men were battling, they were shown to be able to carry the same responsibilities as the male population. Unfortunately, when soldiers came back to their homes, women were “sent back to the kitchen sink” (2). After that, they returned to their domestic status, but changed the way they ran their household. The responsibilities inside their homes were equally shared and they pressed their daughters to seize the opportunity to get a good education thanks to the Education Act of 1944 which “established the principle of free education for all from primary to secondary” (2). In spite of this, the end of the first feminist wave did not mean equality for women, even in education, with quotas limiting girls’ admission to grammar schools. This context influenced Lewis and Tolkien, the extent will be analysed in the following chapters.

To study their female characters, another tool will be used: archetypes. Laura Măcineanu in her article ‘Feminine Hypostases in Epic Fantasy: Tolkien, Lewis, Rowling’ was able to demonstrate that, in both series, female characters could each fit in clear archetypes: the Holy Mother, the personification of Virgin Mary, a person with divine or spiritual attributes; the Earth Mother, also generally associated with fertility; the Wise Woman, an advisor or an intellectual; the Female Warrior, courageous with a taste for adventures; and the Temptress, usually the evil character. This classification,

although Măcineanu's paper solely concerns the work of Lewis, Tolkien and Rowling, could be applied to most novels in the high fantasy genre.

A. C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis is still one of the most read series in children's literature, even though it was published in the 1950s. The main novels follow the adventures of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie who discover a magical world called Narnia. They will have to vanquish different enemies with the help of the Narnians, but also of the god-like creature that is Aslan. In addition, three other books were written following other characters but happening in the same world. The part of the five female protagonists in the plot will be studied (Lucy, Susan, Polly and Jill, Aravis), but also of the two main antagonists (the White Witch and the Green Witch).

To that purpose, Lewis's deep inspiration in Christianity and the Bible for the conception of the *Chronicles* will be taken into account. Indeed, as mentioned by Edward James in 'The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature', each novel in this series represents a Christian story. *The Magician's Nephew* would be the Creation; *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* "the death and resurrection" of Jesus; and *the Last Battle* the apocalypse (71). The other books would be inspired by "classic Christian fantasies" such as *Voyage of St Brendan* for *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Footprints in the Sand* for *The Horse and his Boy* and *Pilgrim's Progress* for *The Silver Chair* (71).

In terms of gender, Laura Măcineanu's 'Feminine Hypostases in Epic Fantasy' will be used to classify each of the little girls and the witches. The post-Victorian female stereotypes will also be taken into account to understand the depiction of certain female characters.

1. Lucy

Lucy is the youngest of the Pevensies, but her age does not discredit her in the eyes of Lewis. It is made clear from the beginning, when she is the first of her siblings to discover Narnia, that she will be the main female

character, to the detriment of her older sister Susan.

According to Karla Faust Jones, the part of Lucy's character in the plot is essentially her spiritual connection with Aslan (15). She will be, throughout the *Chronicles*, the one to see him the most and to be the closest to him. Lucy is very dear to Aslan, his "lioness" (*PC* 182), like an apostle, this lion Christ speaks through Lucy to help the children in their adventures (Faust Jones 15). In *LWW*, which represents the death and resurrection of Christ, Lucy and Susan are the ones to see him die and resurrect (James 71). However, on the contrary to her sister, she does stay faithful to Aslan during the entire series and Karla Faust Jones asserts that she is the established spiritual power in the group. However, her siblings at first do not see her with the same respect, they call the little girl a "goose" (*LWW* 31) and believe that she is making Narnia up. Nevertheless, at the end of *VDT*, her relationship with Aslan will not change the fact that she needs to leave Narnia, but this farewell does not have the same connotation as with Susan. Lucy's sadness is not due to the fact that she will not be able to come back to the magical place, but to the fact that she will not meet with the lion again. Aslan refutes that by saying: "[in your world] I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there" (*VDT* 380). This goodbye resonates more as the end of her religious upbringing.

Lucy is not solely favoured by Aslan, but also by Lewis (Frederick & McBride 37). She is given opportunities that most female characters in Lewis's work do not have. Firstly, she evolves from the little girl she was to a grown woman. Indeed, in *HHB* the story takes place during the Pevensies' first voyage to Narnia which lasted until their adulthood, therefore Lucy is a grown-up and is well respected by the Narnians. It is said that she is "as good as a man, or at any rate as good as a boy", with that sentence, Lewis might imply that to have such respect she may have to let go of the stereotypical features of femininity. Indeed, Lucy will show almost no interest in clothes and jewellery, unlike her sister. For Katherine Fry, this can be explained by Narnia being "unfriendly to femininity" because in the series "corruption and evil have a feminine face" (107).

According to Măcineanu, Lucy would be the representation of the

wise woman archetype whose role is “not to do battle [...] although both are brave enough, but to act as advisers, believers, comforters, loyal friends and even healers”. This assumption could have been made due to Father Christmas’s presents. In *LWW*, the children meet Father Christmas who gives each of them gifts. He offers Lucy a healing cordial that she uses at many key moments in their adventures. However, he gives her a second gift, a dagger, but that she must only use to defend herself, not in a battle, because: “Battles are ugly when women fight” (*LWW* 135). This remark is addressed to both girls, but only Lucy seems to be affected by it, as she says “I think I could be brave enough” (135). This leads to believe that Măcineanu’s classification might be simplistic. In Karla Faust Jones’s opinion, “Lucy is known as The Valiant for her acts of bravery” (15) as she has always been the most adventurous of the girls. She is also one of the only female characters who are said to take part in a battle and in the elaboration of one, even if her involvement is not made explicit. Once more, this development happens in *HHB* in which it is said that “Lucy and Edmund and Peridan were busy with their plans for the battle” (249) and that “the Queen Lucy’s going to be with the archers” (243). Therefore, one could argue that Lucy fits in the female warrior archetype.

Regardless of Lucy’s qualities, she is not exempt from gender stereotypes. When Lewis wrote “battles are ugly when women fight” in the first novel of the *Chronicles*, it was a sign that the Pevensie girls would not take part in the action but also that Lewis puts a limitation on women as a whole (Faust Jones 15). Indeed, apart from this mention of Lucy taking part in a battle in *HHB*, she is always excluded from it. This is a strong representation of the separate spheres during the post-Victorian period: there is the world of the boys who go to war and save Narnia, and then the girls who seem not to get involved in most of it (Vermeij 17). In *PC*, this opposition is apparent, while Peter, Edmund and Caspian are fighting against the Telmarines, Susan and Lucy are going from village to village where “everyone was laughing, flutes were playing, cymbals clashing” (*PC* 252). Lucy does not seem to mind that she is safe and enjoying her time while her brothers might die in battle. She has the same reaction in *VDT* when every time there is danger she is kept safe, while Edmund, who is only a few years

older than her, has to face it. She does not revolt and, through Lewis words, she seems to find it logical. The only scene in *VDT* where Lucy is the centre of the action is when she has to go “upstairs” into the Magician’s quarter to help the inhabitants of the Island of Voices (*VDT* 182). However, she learns, a posteriori, that there was no actual danger. The real challenge was for her to read magical spells but not to use them in her own profit and not to cede to vanity as her sister did. This lack of vanity is actually contradicted at the end of *HHB*. When she meets Aravis, she “succumbs to stereotypic images” as they start to talk about “Aravis’s bedroom and Aravis’s boudoir and about getting clothes for her, and all the sort of things girls do talk about on such an occasion” (*HHB* 303) which is the complete opposite of the image built around Lucy’s character (Faust Jones 17).

2. Susan

Susan is the oldest of the Pevensie girls and her character is built as an opposition to Lucy’s. She will be described as “sensible and practical”, and at the age of 12 during *LWW* it is already said that she talks like a “grown-up” (Faust Jones 16).

Susan, since the moment she enters in Narnia, is not depicted as adventurous as she says: “I-I wonder if there’s any point in going on [...], it doesn’t seem particularly safe here and it looks as if it won’t be much fun either. And it’s getting colder every minute, and we’ve brought nothing to eat” (*LWW* 54). Due to that, she is more than once criticised by her siblings, telling her to stop behaving as a child, enhancing the sentiment that Lucy is superior to Susan in Narnia.

Măcineanu describes Susan as a female warrior (78). Once more, this classification does not reflect the image given in the books. Indeed, Susan has never fought in a battle and is not prone to bravery, always having a fear of fainting during complicated times. The warrior archetype might have been chosen due to Susan’s abilities. She received a bow from Father Christmas in *LWW* and she is described as really talented, but the only time it is said she uses it, is when in *PC* she shoots an arrow to save Trumpkin the Dwarf. Those abilities are acknowledged in *HHB* where it is said that “Queen Susan is more like an ordinary grown-up lady. She doesn’t ride to the wars, though she is an

excellent archer” (*HHB* 250). According to Karla Faust Jones, she represents a “self-limiting character” as she has the abilities but does not exploit them (Faust Jones 16).

According to Fry, Lewis only saw qualities in female characters “who challenge the typical gender roles associated with their sex” (Fry 103). Unfortunately, Susan’s character is built around those stereotypes. In *HHB*, Susan is 22 year-old and is going to bring war into Narnia because her “vanity” led her to see Prince Rabadash as a potential suitor, but once she arrives at his castle and sees who he truly is, she refuses to marry him (Faust Jones 16). Rabadash demonstrates how women can be objectified. He is ready to invade Narnia to bring “to my palace by her hair the barbarian queen” (*HHB* 311) and to marry her “though she shall learn a sharp lesson first” (156). As it was enhanced by Frederick and McBride, the statements of one character should not be confused with the beliefs of the author, therefore no conclusion on Lewis’s depiction of women can come out of this excerpt. However, this scene portrays great violence against women and, even if Rabadash is ridiculed, he will receive no severe punishment. Whereas, Susan will not be able to get absolved for this foolishness, as she “is the only one who is not forgiven or given the opportunity to work out her problems” (Frederick & McBride 164). Furthermore, she does not take part in the battle whose main goal is to save her from an abusive husband.

In Lewis’s work, it is the depiction of Susan which is the most criticised by scholars. At the end of *PC*, Susan and Peter are told that they will not be able to come back to Narnia, but unlike Lucy’s and Edmund’s departure, it does not have a religious connotation. For Graham, it is a sign that Lewis believed that “puberty ends the freedom of girls to assume nontraditional roles” (Graham 1) and that he implied that “normal adolescent behavior can result in damnation for girls” (17). During *LB*, when the Pevensies are brought back to Narnia, Susan’s punishment is greater. While her siblings die in a railway accident and are able to access Aslan’s country, she is not given the option. Peter says that she is “no longer a friend of Narnia” and Jill that “she’s interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations” (*LB* 270). Therefore, all her siblings and even her parents, who were on the train by sheer chance, are able to go to the heaven version

of Narnia, while she is trapped in England because by “entering adolescence she has allowed stereotypically feminine interests to displace her spiritual life” (Graham 16). Fry believes that it is her femininity and beauty that will keep her from heaven (Fry 105), because Lewis connected those two features to corruption and evil (107). For Faulk Jones, Susan represents the “hesitant convert” as she decided to give more importance to the “conventions of the time” than to her religious upbringing (Faulk Jones 16-17).

3. Aravis

Aravis is the main female character of *The Horse and His Boy*. She is the daughter of Calavar’s lord and when she hears that her father promised her into marriage to the next Grand Vizier, a 60-year-old man, she decides to commit suicide. She takes her horse and a dagger with her, but at the last moment the horse puts her head between Aravis and the dagger. This horse is actually a talking creature from Narnia, and it tells the young girl what its life in Narnia was before being stolen, a land where women are not married against their will. Aravis decides to flee her country to go to that mysterious land, lying to her father about her whereabouts, bounding her maid to punishment when the truth comes to light. On her way to Narnia, she meets a boy, Shasta, who is also going to the magical land. They decide to help each other reach their goal, even if at first their relation is not friendly.

Aravis is the most interesting character in the Chronicles as she does not come from the real world and has only lived in this secondary one (Faulk Jones 17). Unlike in the other books, the little girl is as much at the centre of the plot as the boy. She decides to leave her life of luxury in her noble family to be free of a forced marriage. As Lucy, she succeeds in overthrowing the typical gender stereotypes and therefore frees herself from the “femininity” that is dreaded by Lewis (Fry 107).

In Măcineanu’s opinion, Aravis could either be described as a wise woman or a female warrior. Her former choice relies on the fact that the character received a good education as a “young noblewoman” (Măcineanu 78). What the author does not take into account is that Aravis decides to abandon her noble status to take her future into her own hands. Therefore, one could believe that she represents the latter archetype. She is courageous,

independent, adventurous, the only one among the little girls to reflect all those qualities. However, Father Christmas's admonition about women and battles is not forgotten. Indeed, just before the confrontation of Narnia's allies and Calormen's soldiers, a mysterious lion injures her, leaving Shasta to be the only one to fight in the battle. Later, she meets Aslan who reveals himself as the lion and explains that he wanted to give her a lesson. According to him, he gave her the opportunity of admitting her arrogance and pay the price for her servant's punishment. Aravis seems to understand why she had to be punished, when none of the boys were ever punished for their arrogance. This shows once more Lewis's "unfriendliness" towards women (Fry 107).

Aravis's detachment from stereotypical femininity is once more stressed when she meets her friend Lasaraleen in Tashbaan, Calormen's capital, and asks her help in escaping. Lasaraleen accepts to hide Aravis in her house, but she does not even listen to her story. She makes Aravis have a bath and appears to be only preoccupied by the dress she will wear. The parallel between the two women is explicit as it is said that Lasaraleen is only interested in "clothes and parties and gossip" while Aravis in "bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming" (*HHB* 143). Lasaraleen does not understand why her friend refuses to marry Ashota who will give her everything she wants, but Aravis gives a simple reply: "he can keep his pearls and palaces as far as I'm concerned" (144). According to Faulk Jones, Lewis uses Lasaraleen, who represents the "female stereotype" to "magnify" Aravis's character and her rejection of those gendered roles (Faulk Jones 17). Later, Lasaraleen describes our protagonist as "a queer girl" (*HHB* 144), which leads once more to believe that for Lewis to acknowledge a female character, she needs to reject her feminine part (Fry 107). However, as was already mentioned, the end of *HHB* undoes that portrayal. When she meets Lucy, they start to act in the same way Lasaraleen is reproached for (Faulk Jones 17). Moreover, the book will end with the mention of Shasta and Aravis's wedding which leads Graham to believe that "the true destiny of an adult woman in Narnia is to marry and bear the heir to the throne" (18).

4. Polly

Polly Plummers only appears in *MN* and briefly in *LB*. She is the least developed female character in *The Chronicles* as the story revolves around Digory (Faulk Jones 18). She is the first one to discover the different magical worlds, including Narnia, when she is tricked by Digory's uncle who offered her a ring. This present makes her disappear as soon as she takes it.

Polly is highly criticised in the book, either by Digory or by his uncle. While the uncle has an inappropriate way to treat this "attractive" little girl, transforming her into a "lady in distress" (*MN* 43), his nephew will take a ring and go to find Polly. Unfortunately, when the children are reunited, a "battle of the sexes" begins (Faulk Jones 17). Every time Polly tries to reason with him on a subject, the boy decides to insult her because he cannot make her see things his way (Faulk Jones 17). This happens, for example, when the children encounter a bell with a warning not to ring it, Polly tells him not to touch it and leave, to that Digory answers: "It's because you're a girl. Girls never want to know anything but gossip and rot about people getting engaged." (*MN* 70). Later, when they go back to the real world and that Jadis manages to follow them because of Digory, Polly asks him to admit that it is his fault and to apologise. He refuses, telling her that she is acting just like a girl by asking him to do so. This representation of the young girl does not reflect the treatment of female characters in Lewis's work, but more Digory's foolishness, even if it is never mentioned as such in the books.

This character is much more than the little girl stereotype. She is a wise woman, she is smart, practical and is immediately wary of Jadis (Măcineanu 76). When the children first meet the witch, they have completely opposite thoughts. While Digory falls for her charm and believes she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen, Polly thinks that she is a "terrible woman" and seems like "a beast" (*MN* 96). When they discover Jadis's real face and try to escape her, Polly has only one objective, to leave and go back to London. Digory, on the other hand, makes them lose time because he is sorry that the witch is weakened, time which will enable her to go to the real world. Therefore, even if the little girl is ridiculed, it is actually Digory which lets evil into Narnia (Faulk Jones 17).

5. Jill

Jill appears at the beginning of *SC* and meets Eustace at school who tells her about his adventures in Narnia. Bullied by her classmates, she asks him to go to the magical lands with him. When they arrive, Aslan requires from them to find Prince Rilian who has been missing for years. Jill will come back in *LB*, this time helping King Tirian.

Jill is a character that will greatly evolve between the beginning of *SC* and the end of *LB*. She is just a nine-year-old little girl, crying because she has been bullied, but these characteristics do not make her seem less than Eustace. For the first time, a girl is given a companion that is her equal. Indeed, between the two children it will be a “sparring match”, Jill “vying openly with Eustace from the beginning” (Faulk Jones 18). She is, therefore, less stereotyped than the other girls, not letting him command her. Even if she is still portrayed as tearful and as less strong than Scrubb, she also shows that she can outsmart them. Indeed, when they are trapped at the Giant’s, she is the one to use her “childish smile” to trick them and get the information she needs to escape. Scrubb is not able to help her because “girls do that kind of thing better than boys” (*SC* 269). One could believe that Lewis might have implied girls are better liars. Nonetheless, thanks to that information, they are able to leave Harfang without being eaten. However, in *SC*, Jill is not described as a warrior. She is still a little girl scared of the dark who does not take part in any of the battles.

When Jill comes back to Narnia in *LB*, she then perfectly represents the archetype of the female warrior (Măcineanu 78). She is confident and assured in her decision-making. Her abilities, as an archer and a pathfinder, are highlighted and even praised by King Tirian. Later in the novel, she goes on her own to capture the donkey who was pretending to be Aslan. Eustace thinks that if she were not a girl, she should be knighted for this masterstroke, while Tirian says: “If she was a boy, she’d be whipped for disobeying orders” (*LB* 109). The King will add later that she is “the bravest and most woodwise of all my subjects, but also the most malapert and disobedient” (110). Even if she is reprimanded, none of the other female characters have taken such decisions or have been such an important asset in the adventure. She is also unique because she is the first female character shown battling and killing for

Narnia. She is not afraid as she would “rather be killed fighting for Narnia than grow old and stupid at home [...] and then die in the end just the same” (156). At the end of the novel, she is one of the Kings and Queens of Narnia to enter Aslan’s country.

“Battles are ugly when women fight” (*LWW* 135). Father Christmas’s warning does not seem to apply to Jill as it was for the other girls. Indeed, on the contrary of Aravis and Lucy, she does show stereotyped femininity and, surprisingly, her feminine side does not keep her from Narnia as happened to Susan. It is shown through her love for clothes, unicorns, how she enjoys comfort such as a hot bath and a pleasant bed, but also through her interest in the other sex as pictured with Rilian or Emeth.

6. The White Witch and the Green Witch

Regarding the antagonists, there are two evil female characters: The White Witch and the Green Witch. They are the main villains of the *Chronicles* and are the only ones to be killed. Jadis, the White Witch, appears in the *MN* and in *LWW*, while the Green Witch is only in *SC*. Jean Graham dedicated an article to them titled ‘Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia’. In this article she studies Lewis’s inspiration behind the creation of both witches. She concludes that there are three main references: Lilith, Circe and Satan.

The White Witch’s connection with Lilith is explicitly stated in *LWW* by Mrs Beavers says: “She comes of your father Adam's [...] first wife, her they called Lilith” (*LWW* 81). Besides that mention, one of Lilith’s characteristics is present in *LWW*: the White Witch puts Narnia in an eternal winter, making the country “sterile”. As mentioned in Graham’s work, there are two portrayals of Lilith’s fertility, in one she “has no children, for God made her barren” and in the other she “took many lovers, producing demon children to plague mankind” (Graham 4), offspring later killed by Adam. Therefore, sterility could be a specificity shared by both the White Witch and Lilith.

As for Circe, the resemblance is due to the presence of a wand. Indeed, in Homer’s Circe, she has a wand “capable of transforming men into swine” (Graham 1) while Jadis turns them into stone. According to Graham, the wand

is not solely a magical element but also a phallic representation which enhances her “usurpation of masculine power” (2).

The most important reference in Jadis’s character is Satan. Indeed, as it was previously mentioned, *LWW* is a retelling of the death and resurrection of the Christ. However, in the Bible, it is men who are to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus and women weep, while in the *Chronicles* it is Jadis who kills Aslan, turning her into a “female evil” (Graham 13). Furthermore, the White Witch is represented as opposed to Narnia’s “Christ-figure”, taking the power in Narnia and threatening the Narnians, turning her into the “satanic figure” (13).

With regard to the Green Witch, her likeness to Lilith is even more striking. She takes the form of a serpent, as Lilith has been mentioned doing as well (Graham 4). Lilith’s sterility leads her to hate children as the Green Witch who will try to get Jill and Eustace eaten by giants (5). Also, the sexuality which is not represented with Jadis is a main characteristic of her spiritual descendant. Indeed, with her beauty, the Green Witch asserts a certain form of power over Rillian (16). This opposition of fertility and sexuality which goes against the Christian idea of the sacred union reinforces the evil characteristic of the Emerald Witch. In one of Lewis’s letters to Arthur Greeves, he says “[Lilith] is not primarily a sex symbol, but includes the characteristic female abuse of sex, which is love of Power” (Blasdel 4). One could argue, once more, that Lewis dreaded women’s beauty and, therefore, turned it into a vice for its antagonists.

The last reference in the character of the Green Witch is Circe. The version which inspired Lewis is Milton’s *Comus*, which is the one the author was the most familiar with (Graham 3). In *A Mask presented at Ludlow Castle*, Comus imprisons a Lady in a chair in the same way the Emerald Witch traps Rilian, during the only moments the prince is not under her charm. At the end of *SC*, the children liberate Rilian from her control and from the chair, ultimately vanquishing the witch.

B. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*

The Lord of the Rings is a trilogy written by J.R.R. Tolkien and which was published from 1954 to 1955. The story relates the journey of the fellowship of the Ring, and more precisely Frodo's, to destroy the ring before the Dark Lord, Sauron, finds it. The plot is focused on a group composed of hobbits (Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin), a wizard (Gandalf), men (Aragorn and Boromir), a dwarf (Gimli) and an elf (Legolas), all males. Indeed, there are only a few women portrayed in Middle-Earth. It was pointed out by Lisa Hopkins in her article 'Female Authority Figures in the Works of Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams's' in which she explains the clear imbalance between male and female characters in the trilogy. However, those women still have an importance in the story, four in particular: Éowyn, Arwen, Galadriel and Goldberry. Their part in the plot will be studied and compared to the position of the women during the Second World War and the 1950s but also with the work of C.S. Lewis and different archetype classifications.

1. Éowyn

Éowyn is the female character which appears in the most scenes in Tolkien's trilogy. She appears for the first time in *The Two Towers* when Gandalf and his company arrive in Rohan and are permitted to see the King of the Mark of Rohan. She is his niece and is in charge of his care. It is only later that it will become clear that she will have a much more important position than being the caregiver of the king, as her part in the plot will be further developed in *The Return of the King*.

During the fellowship's first encounter with Éowyn, they arrive seeking the help of her uncle in the War of the Ring, which would lead the king and her brother to leave the land and join the battle. Therefore, a leader is needed during their absence to watch over Rohan and their people, at that it is said: "She is fearless and high-hearted. All love her. Let her be as lord to the Eorlingas, while we are gone" (TT 200). The passage might seem surprising as only few female characters are portrayed in a position of power in Tolkien's work, but actually the decision is rather consistent with the time in which the book is written. As Melissa McCrory Hatcher explains in her

article 'Finding woman's role in The Lord of the Rings', during World War II women were "controlling the home front" and they were even "taking over 'male' jobs" (McCrory Hatcher 44). The sentiment given is not that she will become the power figure of the land, but that she will, consequently, be left in charge while the men go to war, not having an impact on her status once her uncle returns.

The reader does not encounter her again in this second volume, but she reappears in *RK*. Aragorn, on his way to the battlefield, decides to halt in Dunharrow and to meet the Lady of Rohan. He sets out his plan to go through the Paths of the Dead, from which she tries to dissuade him, but nothing will change his mind. In reaction to his stubbornness, she tells him: "Lord, [...] if you must go, then let me ride in your following. For I am weary of skulking in the hills, and wish to face peril and battle" (*RK* 101). She even begs him on her knees, but Aragorn refuses and tells her to stay where she belongs. Her motivation to take part in the battle can have two origins, the first one being her love for Aragorn pushing her to try to impress him, the second her real desire to take part in the battle, to take action instead of being passive in all that is happening in Middle-Earth. According to Lisa Hopkins, her impulse would be "a deeper sentiment, of family and personal loyalty and of integrity", she acknowledges Éowyn's desire to be a shieldmaiden, but also states that her feelings for Aragorn have a certain importance (365). Melissa McCrory Hatcher has a more feminist view on this subject, she explains that Éowyn embodies "the fight of women throughout the 20th Century" (McCrory Hatcher 47). Indeed, she challenges the stereotypical position of female characters in *LOTR* as it is exemplified when she says to Aragorn: "All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house" (*RK* 103). She wants to show her worth in the battlefield, not only as a nurse or a home keeper (McCrory Hatcher 48). For McCrory Hatcher, "Éowyn fears being put in a cage of conventional female submissiveness" (48) as the character itself admits its deepest fear is to be caged, "all chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall and desire" (*RK* 91).

According to Măcineanu, Éowyn embodies the Warrior archetype, a "female warrior forced into behaving in line with the damsel in distress archetype" (Măcineanu 77). While at first this could seem surprising as she

was refused to join combat, it will later in the book get clearer. A new character appears among the soldiers following the King of Rohan, Dernhelm, who is actually Éowyn who decided to dress as a man to fight alongside her uncle and brother. As claimed by Frederick and McBride, Tolkien could not have made Éowyn the warrior she has become without her taking a male appearance (Frederick & McBride 113). This reminds greatly of female warriors in *The Chronicles of Narnia* in which they needed to be associated with men or male characteristics to be acknowledged. However, the distinction is that when Éowyn faces the Nazgul, it is her femininity, that is so rejected by Lewis, which enables her to defeat it as it declares: "Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!" (RK 221). What the creature does not know is that she is not a man, she reveals herself as Éowyn and slays the creature (Hopkins 365). This aspect could be an evidence that, in some situations, Tolkien saw women as more powerful than men.

The aspect which divides most academics on the subject of female characters in *LOTR* is Éowyn's fate after her confrontation with the chief of the Nazgul. She is deeply injured in combat and is brought to the House of Health where only the hand of a king could save her. At first, when her brother believes her dead, he exclaims: "Where is the Lady Éowyn, my sister; for surely she should be lying beside the king, and in no less honour?" (RK 280), recognising her achievements on the battlefield. However, when he realises that she is alive and meets Aragorn at her side, they try to uncover the reason behind her actions. While Éomer attempts to explain it by talking about her love for the King of the Reunited Kingdom, Aragorn has another opinion. "Her malady begins far back before this day, does it not, Éomer?" (RK 291). In this excerpt, it could be understood that he compares her desire to follow them into battle and to get rid of her stereotypical occupations to a sort of disease.

McCrory Hatcher also believes this idea of "disease" that would have spread into Éowyn's body: "[her] vanity is depicted as an evil shadow that overtakes her as the Dark Lord overtakes Middle-earth" (51), comparing on some level Éowyn's actions with the evilness of Sauron. This perspective leads her to a particular vision of Éowyn's destiny. Indeed, when Aragorn and the soldiers are about to leave, this one says to the people at the Houses of

Healing: “The Lady Éowyn, will wish soon to rise and depart; but she should not be permitted to do so, if you can in any way restrain her, until at least ten days be passed” (*RK* 300). It is during that period of rest that she meets Faramir who will be immediately drawn to her and to her strong spirit. He will learn to know her for seven days before proclaiming his love, saying that, on the contrary to Aragorn, he will not pity her, that she will not have to prove her brave heart to him. For McCory Hatcher, “by showing Éowyn her vanity and expressing his love for her, Faramir allows Éowyn to see the limits of her desires and her true potential”(52). Her reference to the limits of the Lady of Rohan is to some extent in conflict with the capacities which were demonstrated in battle where the character was perfectly capable of fighting among the other men. Therefore, one could argue that she is actually talking about the limitations implemented to females as a whole, which would reinforce the sentiment that women’s desire to be active in any kind of male associated situation should be repressed. This point of view might be the closest to Tolkien’s when he wrote the series. Indeed, when Éowyn finds love, not with Aragorn, but with Faramir, all her previous ambitions vanish. “The Shadow has departed! I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders, nor take joy only in the songs of slaying. I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren”, to which Faramir answers: “Here is the Lady Éowyn of Rohan, and now she is healed” (*RK* 510). She is then healed of that disease, this shadow, seen as “vanity” for McCory Hatcher. The same stratagem is used by Lewis when Aslan injures Aravis in order to make her aware of her own arrogance, while no male character in the *Chronicles* is ever punished for such doings, her healing becomes a time for her to reflect on what Aslan considers as flaws. The feminist analysis of Éowyn’s character made by Frederick and McBride is utterly different. According to them, her “sickness” is “due to unwillingness to accept her lot in life: living as a female who, as such, is disbarred from a life of glory on the battlefield”, Éowyn heals to become the woman and the wife the society expected of her, “a beautiful, helpful, and cheerful companion to a man” (Frederick & McBride 35).

Nonetheless, Éowyn’s future is a happy one and she manages to find a path in which she can evolve with Faramir, the ultimate achievement in the eucatastrophe created by Tolkien. She could have been given a tragic end, as

it happens for Frodo, if her implication in the plot had been restricted to Aragorn's rejection and her injury in battle, but she is given a chance with Faramir. However, it still can be argued that her growth as a character could have been more rewarding if she had been given credit for her exploits as a shieldmaiden.

2. Arwen

Arwen is, on the contrary to Éowyn, the least developed female character in the trilogy. The fellowship first encounters her in Rivendell before the Council of Elrond, her father. The initial impression she leaves on Frodo regards her beauty. As explains Justyna Brzezińska in her article 'The Function of Female Characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Arwen and Galadriel', Arwen's name means "Royal Maiden", which the author relates to her appearance "both regal and innocent" (Brzezińska 59). She also stresses the meaning behind the name given to that character, "Evenstar", as "[Arwen] is said to be the most beautiful of the last generation of High Elves in Middle-Earth" (59). It is also promptly acknowledged that she and Aragorn have feelings for one another and are in a romantic relationship. That position as Aragorn's love interest is the main feature of the character, Hopkins even states that Arwen "seems only to exist to provide a suitable bride for Aragorn at the end of the story" (Hopkins 366).

Arwen is the centre of the trilogy's romance aspect, she is at the same time Aragorn's motivation in his quest and "the prize to be won" (Brzezińska 60). Their relationship is comparable to "medieval romances": Aragorn falls in love with an "otherworldly" woman, to "prove worthy" he faces various challenges during the War of the Ring and survives the Paths of the Dead (60). Emerging victorious from the battle, he becomes the King of Gondor and is "reunited with Arwen and takes her for his wife", the ultimate prize of his quest (60).

Arwen's part in the plot can also be analysed through another character than Aragorn, Éowyn, as both women will have feelings for the same man. In her article, McCrory Hatcher explains why she believes that Éowyn never could have married Aragorn, while Arwen has always been the obvious choice (McCrory Hatcher 47). The idea of Éowyn's "shadow" is

omnipresent in her argument, as she explains that when the shieldmaiden decides to follow her brother into the battlefield, she “takes an active role” that is driven by her “hidden demon” (47). Her shadow which “loves only the shadow within Aragorn”, accentuates that idea of “vanity” that McCrory Hatcher allocated to Éowyn (50). This idea is obviously shared by Tolkien and Aragorn as he says: “in me she loves only a shadow and a thought: a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan” (*RK* 293). The author of the article does not believe that Éowyn’s love is genuine, instead she identifies it as means to fulfil her desire of glory, her greater vice (McCrory Hatcher 50). While for Arwen, she sees her as an image of perfection, far from Éowyn’s flaws, only taking a passive role in the story, a “passive waiting” for her beloved to come back to her (47). She will face “the Choice of Luthien”, having to choose between her husband and her immortal life, from which she decides to lead a human life with Aragorn (47). That ultimate sacrifice, the one of her immortality, will make her a wise woman as she forfeits her right to the Grey Havens and cedes it to Frodo, knowing it is his sole opportunity to heal “his inner wounds” (Măcineanu 74).

Even though Arwen is the least represented female character, Brzezińska believes, without denying her passive role in the books, that she actually had an important influence in the story line. She affirms that even if the character only appears in occasional scenes, she actually affects the fellowship through Aragorn, his “choices dictated by his desire to know peaceful life with his beloved” (Brzezińska 61). Arwen also sends him presents, the first one being the Elfstone. “Then Aragorn took the stone and pinned the brooch upon his breast [...] for they had not marked before how tall and kingly he stood, and it seemed to them that many years of toil had fallen from his shoulders” (*FR* 664). This gift seems to make him regain strength through the “reminder of what he will feel like when allowed to be with his lady” (Brzezińska 61). The second one is a banner that Aragorn will bring in the final battle against Sauron. For Brzezińska, Arwen uses “the traditionally female craft of weaving” to, in some ways, make Aragorn “muster all of his strength and willpower for this final effort” (61). With the banner, she also offers him words of hope regarding their love and a reminder of their imminent reunion. One could believe that the gifts and the specific

time they were sent were chosen meticulously, which would mean that Arwen had a more active importance in the plot (62).

3. Galadriel

Galadriel is introduced when Frodo and his companions arrive at the city of Galadhrim, under the reign of the Lady of the Golden Wood, herself, and Celebom, her husband. She directly makes an impression of great power and beauty on the Fellowship. “‘I feel as if I was inside a song, if you take my meaning.’ Haldir looked at them, and he seemed indeed to take the meaning of both thought and word. He smiled. ‘You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim,’” (*FR* 621).

On the contrary to Arwen, or even to some extent Éowyn, Galadriel’s part in the story is not dictated by her relation to a man. Indeed, even if she is married, their relationship is never shown as romantic and she is represented as her husband’s equal physically: “Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful” (*FR* 628). The surprising aspect of this couple is that the wife is manifestly the most powerful. She “eclipses her husband Celebom” as she is the one to wear one of the Elven Rings of Power and is capable of seeing the vision given by a mirror named after her (Hopkins 365). Therefore, she sees things that he is unaware of and even if they reign together, they “are accustomed to reach decisions separately rather than together” (365). This clear break from the stereotypical image of wives, usually inferior to their husbands, or even from the reality of a grown woman being powerful without being evil, as Tolkien presents Galadriel, was completely unthinkable in the work of C.S. Lewis.

Her role in *LOTR* is the one of the Holy Mother (Măcineanu 69). Galadriel has many powers, including “perceiving what stays hidden from the sight of others” or being able to sow ideas or even challenges into the minds of the people around her, as the fellowship experienced (Brzezińska 64). “‘She seemed to be looking inside me’ [...] each had felt that he was offered a choice between a shadow full of fear that lay ahead, and something that he greatly desired” (*FR* 634). However, her role in the War of the Ring is to be the guide of the fellowship, not imposing her opinion to Frodo and the others, but more as a “careful adviser” (Brzezińska 65). Her help to the fellowship

does not end when they leave the forest. Indeed, she offers each of them a gift before their departure. Through those gifts, she has a place in all the major moments in the storyline and those presents reveal themselves as highly useful in desperate times, as if she had felt that those exact objects would help them in their journey. Another archetype could have been attributed to Galadriel in her youth, the one of female warrior as it is mentioned in the trilogy that she took part in several battles. However, her powers seem now “more mental and magical, rather than physical” and her part in those combats has never been expressly written in any scenes (Frederick & McBride 33). However, if we compare her to Éowyn, the clear difference between them would be that the Lady of the Woods, in all her femininity, is shown as powerful, while the Lady of Rohan has to pretend to be a man, not getting credit for her actions once she is back in female attires.

Galadriel can, therefore, be considered as the most powerful female character of the series and one of the most powerful characters in general, but also the most empowering. She manages to assemble strength and femininity, she is the equal of her husband and she governs her lands instead of being solely a wife. She evolved from a female warrior to a holy mother, but she still remains one of the most necessary allies to the fellowship during the War of the Ring.

4. Goldberry

Lady Goldberry appears in the series when Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin begin their journey and decide to use a shortcut, ending up in the Old Forrest. After being attacked, they are rescued by Tom Bombadil who brings them to his home. There, the four hobbits have a marvellous vision of a woman, it could have been a dream or an illusion at that point in the plot. She is cheerful as those newcomers arrive in her house and she welcomes them with no further explanation. “‘Come dear folk!’ she said, taking Frodo by the hand. ‘Laugh and be merry! I am Goldberry, daughter of the River.’” (*FR* 240).

Only scarce details about the potential powers of Goldberry are given, but her connection to nature is the most evident, characteristic which led Măcineanu to assimilate her to the Earth Mother archetype (Măcineanu 72).

This bond the daughter of the River has is actually common for female characters in fantasy literature, a reference to women's cycle and motherhood, a gift from nature. However, her appearance is not usually the one associated with that archetype, she is more slender than luscious which is generally a sign of "the fertility of nature" (72). It is also said that she is capable of bringing peace to the mind of those around her. While the extent of her abilities is not specified in the book, it seems that it could have been more considerable than what is associated to Goldberry in the few pages she appears into.

The most significant characteristic allocated to Goldberry is her "wife" title. She "embodies domesticity and hospitality", but even more the idea of the perfect wife in the 1950s (McCauley Basso 138). Indeed, she is waiting for her husband to come back home, "impeccably dressed in a green and silver gown" (138). At his arrival, all he needs to do is sit down and dinner is ready, "providing an ample supper" for even those "unexpected guests" (138). When the meal is over, "she excuses herself from the masculine company, retiring to bed early and leaving the men to their talk" (138). Candice Frederick and Sam McBride in their article 'Women Among the Inklings' believe that this female character is actually inspired by Tolkien's wife, Edith Tolkien. He admired her beauty, her cooking and housekeeping skills and she always left "before the men [began] serious conversation" (Frederick & McBride 110). This vision of a wife is the complete opposite of Galadriel's situation. While both women are rather similar in terms of physical appearance, Goldberry is solely a "Galadriel Lite", preferring her wife duty to the exploration of her true potential (McCauley Basso 142).

In conclusion, Lewis and Tolkien's representations of female characters largely differ. While in *LOTR* there is a restricted number of women who appear in limited scenes, in *Narnia* half of the main characters are female. However, Tolkien has a positive vision of femininity and women's strength which is absent from the *Chronicles*. He empowers female characters to a certain extent, personifies women's fight for rights and liberty, while still not totally according it to them, and associates women with the position of a power figure. On the other hand, Lewis, through the seven books

in the *Chronicles*, demonstrates his aversion for femininity. He turns puberty into the desecration of women, most grown up females becoming the antagonists of the story. The only less stereotyped characters, such as Jill, Lucy and Aravis, are the little girls who have proven their faith to Aslan. Nonetheless, both stories contain elements of women's reality at that time, a reality of stereotypical occupations and society driven representations, either through portrayal from the Second World War and the situation in the 1950s or through religious beliefs. As for the genre, both sets of books mark the beginning of high fantasy literature as it is known today which made it possible for several authors along the years to make this sub-genre of fantasy evolve.

III. Contemporary high fantasy literature

The second feminist wave began at the end of the 1960s and was incited by “white, well-educated ‘baby-boomer’ women” (Paul 149). Their feeling of relative powerlessness led them to ally in order to win the “right to be included” which would become the main principle of feminist theories (149). According to Lyssa Paul, feminist demands since the end of the 1990s have still not changed from the second wave. In 2004, the year of the publication of the ‘International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature’ in which Lyssa Paul collaborated through the article titled ‘Feminism revisited’, there was still no “gender equity” and the glass ceiling preventing women from rising in the professional hierarchy was still in place (140). Moreover, social expectations were unrealistic as women had to have at the same time “a successful career, a good marriage, a happy family – and perfect beauty” (140).

This movement for gender equality has also affected children’s literature, including, at the time, high fantasy. The main aspect which has influenced the literature is the aim to end “the male-order, hierarchical world” (Paul 144) which was present in most novels at that time. However, in the 1970s, numerous authors simply transformed their male characters into females, women now rescuing men, without allocating them any feminine characteristics (146). In the same perspective, these feminist authors also aimed to end “boundaries between male and female, child and adult”. The overstep of the latter being called the “cross-age phenomenon” permitted the introduction of adult main characters in children’s novels during 1990s (146-147).

Nonetheless, these authors also desired to combine adventure with domesticity. Indeed, while in most fantasy novels at that time “relationships, affection, friendship, family life” (Paul 147) were generally secondary subjects, authors, by introducing female characters in the story, also aspired to prove that a quest can be connected to the domestic sphere. This has also led authors to study the effect of the social aspect in the construction of people, creating more realistic characters with a backstory which has been

influenced by “parents and families, class, gender and cultural patterns and expectations” (150).

According to Lyssa Paul, feminism stopped developing in the 1990s, with no new demands having been added to those already present during the second feminist wave (Paul 140). However, this article has been written in 2004 and, since then, numerous gender prejudices were stressed by feminist activists, one of the most significant being sexual abuse. Other subjects at a more limited scale were also highlighted, as the access for women to combat and special force positions within the army, such admissions banned since 1994, which has only been granted in 2015 (Markasović 30).

While feminism had an impact on high fantasy novels, the genre itself evolved. Although Tolkien is still the reference to which the latest novels are compared (Sullivan 444), there has been a partition into two separate spheres within the genre. While Lewis and Tolkien’s work were considered as children’s literature, but with the development of young adult novels in the 1980s, triggered by women, high fantasy is now present in young adult and adult ones.

Although teenage novels are not solely read by teenagers but also by adults, they are usually written to reflect the life and struggles of individuals from fourteen to twenty-one years of age (Eccleshare 542). Romance, and not high fantasy, was the first subject approached by those novels, picturing a girl, as main character, discovering love (544). This aspect might explain why young adult fantasy stories are partly centred on the love story between the two main characters, without marginalising the quest, while, generally, in adult fantasy novels, romance is not an important part of the plot. The focus on romance and the clear distinction between teenagers and children also permitted the introduction in the genre of sexual relations and the recognition of young adults’ sexuality (545). This was also the first step to acknowledge and explore characters’ development throughout the book as teenagers themselves evolve rapidly on an emotional and physical aspect (548). The introduction of disabled characters was also present during the ascent of young adult literature, giving a perspective of empowerment that lacked the pity which was previously attributed to those teenagers (551).

While most young adult characters were female, in the 1990s, the genre was impacted by the “girl power” movement which led those books to be then written especially for girls with them as main characters (Eccleshare 547). Moreover, a stress was put on “close friendship between girls” and the importance of such relationships (546). This perspective might have drawn more female writers to choose young adult literature while writing a high fantasy novel, creating a more pronounced separation between the young adult and the adult genre. Most young adult high fantasy authors are women and they create worlds with a female heroine, considered a teenager while acting as an adult, with a romance at the centre of the plot. Most adult high fantasy authors have a male hero and the story’s main focus is on the quest. However, the case of Sarah J. Maas proves that some authors feel obliged to fit into a certain category due to their gender. While her main series, *Throne of Glass*, which will be discussed in the following chapters, does narrate the story of a teenager, her other work, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, has mainly adult characters and is read by people of over twenty-one years old (limit established by Eccleshare to be considered a young adult). Nevertheless, being a high fantasy romance, it was advertised by the publisher as a young adult novel. Five years after the publication of the first instalment, Sarah J. Maas now has a solid readership and has decided to officially reissue this series as an adult one. This might be an evidence that women read more young adult literature as they do not feel represented in adult high fantasy, which leads authors to choose the category of their novel according to their gender. Nonetheless this aspect of high fantasy literature will not be analysed in the following chapters as the main focus will be on *Throne of Glass*, how it does have feminist characteristics which were implemented in children’s literature during the second feminist wave, how it follows the principles of young adult literature and the similarities or differences with Tolkien and Lewis’s work.

A. Celaena Sardothien

Sarah J. Maas is an American author whose first book was published by Bloomsbury in 2012. According to the publisher’s website, Maas’s books “have sold more than nine million copies and are published in thirty-seven

languages” in only eight years. She became popular through her two main series, *Throne of Glass* (published from 2012 to 2018) and *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (published from 2015). She is today one of the most popular female high fantasy authors.

Throne of Glass relates the story of Celaena Sardothien, who is, at only eighteen years old, the most famous assassin of Adarlan. After being betrayed by her master, she becomes a slave in the salt mines of Endovier. While most people do not survive more than a few months in those camps, Celaena, a year later, is still alive. She is then requisitioned by the Prince of Adarlan to enter a competition to become the King’s Champion, his assassin. She will eventually win and be mandated to kill the enemies of the crown, but will instead help them run away. At the end of the third instalment, the reader discovers that she is actually the heir to the Terrasen crown (one of the most powerful courts of the continent before being invaded by Adarlan), her real name being Aelin Ashryver Galathynius, and that she is destined to save the continent from the king.

This thesis will be centred on the eight books of the *Throne of Glass* series. The story will be analysed in a chronological manner and not in the reading order which will enable a more accurate understanding of the characters’ development. *Assassin’s Blade* is a collection of short stories which plot happens prior to *ToG*, but it will be considered as the first instalment of the series as the different novellas actually follow chronologically the year before Celaena’s enslavement. Due to the length of the series, the analysis will be divided into four parts which are equivalent to the different stages in the protagonist’s development and in the plot. The first three books (*Assassin’s Blade*, *Throne of Glass* and *Crown of Midnight*) represent the main character’s achievements as Celaena, Adarlan’s Assassin; the next books (*Heir of Fire* and *Queen of Shadows*) coincide with the training and the rise of Aelin as a leader; the following instalments (*Empire of Storms* and *Tower of Dawn*) relate the trials Aelin has to face in order to claim her crown; finally, the last book (*Kingdom of Ash*) recounts the ultimate battle and Aelin’s efforts to become Queen of Terrasen.

Before analysing the different female characters of this series, it is necessary to highlight the similarities and differences between the magical

worlds built by Maas, Tolkien and Lewis. This will enable a more accurate assessment of Sarah J. Maas's possible inspirations and of the evolution of female characters' part in high fantasy novels.

Tolkien's Middle-Earth might be closer to Maas's Erilea as they both set their stories in a medieval setting. As emphasised by C.W. Sullivan in the 'International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature', most high fantasy secondary worlds have a medieval background with the matching technological advance (438), although Maas has taken some liberties in this regard. While Erilea is more urban and Middle-Earth more rural, they are more similar to each other than Narnia would be. Indeed, Lewis's cross-over world is more like a fairy-tale setting.

Regarding the peoples of each world, in *ToG* there are only five sentient "species": faes, humans, witches, shape-shifters and Valgs (demons). The list is more extensive for *LOTR* with in common the elves, which are rather similar to the faes depicted by Maas, and the humans. Sentient species such as hobbits and dwarves were most certainly not included due to the urban atmosphere of Erilea. The principal connection between *ToG* and *Narnia* on this subject are the witches which in both series have a relatively important impact on the story.

The gender spread of the main characters is what will differ the most between Maas's series and the two fathers of high fantasy literature. Indeed, Tolkien has four female characters who have an importance in the plot, only two of them are actively linked to the development of the story, Galadriel and Éowyn, in contradiction, for example, to Arwen whose main part is to be a motivator to Aragorn. In Narnia, almost half of the characters are female and they all are essential to the plot. However, only three of them are given a positive outcome and are able to take part in the action, while only one, Jill, embodies the female warrior archetype. In the first two books of the *ToG* series, after the prequel, Celaena, Dorian and Chaol are the main characters, Elena and Nehemia are given important roles, but they are only secondary characters. In the prequel, *Assassin's Blade*, there are a certain number of women appearing throughout the novellas; however, their part in the story will only be revealed in future books. Later in the series, Celaena's point of view will cease to be the only one in the plot, with the introduction of several

main female characters. In the last book, the apogee of the series, there will be a balanced number of female and male main characters, nonetheless, all women will have a key role in the outcome of the plot and take part in the last battle, whichever archetype they embody.

1. Celaena

a) *Character development*

What could be seen as the prime characteristic of Maas's female characters is their development. They have the possibility throughout the story to evolve, change, make mistakes and learn from them. The obvious representation of this is Celaena. At the beginning of *Assassin's Blade* and up until half of *Crown of Midnight*, she is described as selfish and childish. She is very self-centred and refuses to help discover the king's plans and to aid Erilea's people. She is obviously not utterly passive in front of the empire's revolting treatment of its people as it is portrayed in *AB* when she risks her life to free numerous slaves.

Celaena is only sixteen at the beginning *AB* and eighteen at the end of *CoM*, therefore she does not have the maturity to save an entire kingdom that she will have at the end of *KoA*. However, this childishness will lead her to perilous situations, but which will end up being beneficial. Indeed, when her first love interest and fellow assassin, Sam, dies during a mission, she loses control of her senses and decides, in retribution, to kill Sam's murderers, without understanding that it is only a trap. She is brought to Endovier where she was supposed to die. Nonetheless, if she had not been detained in the slave camp, she would have never been brought to the castle and would have never met the ghost of Elena, first Queen of Adarlan, who asks her to save the kingdom from the king.

The importance of friendship will be further developed in the following sequence of the series, but the first indications of Celaena's growth through her friends in opposition to her lonely selfish self are already present in *AB* with her relationship with Sam, but is furthered when she meets Chaol, Dorian and Nehemia. Cooperative Heroism, as explained by Barbara Starink in her thesis 'We Are All Individuals Together: On the Development of Cooperative Heroism in High Fantasy Fiction after Tolkien', is an essential

part of Maas series, but which will only become relevant from the fourth book.

In *LOTR*, the development of female characters is limited by their sparse appearances in the story. Indeed, Goldberry, by representing nature, is not expected to evolve and Arwen's only, while crucial, change happens at the end of the story when she gives up on her immortal life to marry Aragorn. Galadriel has already reached her ideal status and has evolved before *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Éowyn is the only character who actually undergoes a change throughout the novels as she appears in a larger portion of the trilogy. Indeed, in *Two Towers*, she is a young woman caring for her uncle, the image of what is expected of her. Even if her motives might not seem obvious, she does decide to leave the safety of her home to go and fight alongside her brother and uncle in the War of the Ring. After showing great bravery, she does not get credit for her actions. Her choice to marry Faramir could also be seen as a development, whether positive or negative, as she decides to abandon her desires to be a shieldmaiden to become a wife and a healer.

Narnia's world does not let either much potential for women to evolve in a positive way. As has previously been argued, Lewis might have seen puberty as the end of most women's implication in their faith and are, therefore, not welcome in Aslan's land. This is represented through three female adult characters, Susan and the witches. Susan does change and grow up from the little girl in *LWW* to the young woman in *HHB* and *LB*, but in a negative way. From a gifted archer and Queen of Narnia, to a person obsessed by her appearance and her social life, Susan is the opposite of what Maas yearns to prove. As for the White Witch and the Green Witch, they are pictured as using their adult bodies to manipulate men. The other characters, most precisely Jill, Lucy and Aravis, are given a positive growth. Jill is the best example as she is only nine in *SC*, but will come back at the age of sixteen in *LB* to become one of the greatest embodiments of a female warrior in Lewis's work.

b) *Female warrior*

Sarah J. Maas has more than once tried to prove through her books that being a woman could be an advantage in life and in battle. As previously mentioned, Celaena is sixteen to eighteen years old in the first three novels of the series, which is outstandingly young for her reputation. Adarlan's Assassin is known to be a woman, but most men expect her to be much older and masculine as she has always hidden her face while she was on missions. This will be beneficial on numerous occasions as in *AB*, when the Pirate Lord, in a state of shock, lets her go, after discovering her face, allowing Celaena to escape.

This will be further exploited in *ToG* when she enters the competition to become the King's champion. At the beginning of the book, Dorian and Chaol, the Prince and Captain of the Royal Guard, ask Celaena not to reveal her true identity and to try to be average in all the different trials, with the aim of seeming inoffensive until the last duels and not being targeted beforehand. This strategy will be valuable as most men do not even acknowledge her as a competitor. However, when she is weary of being underestimated and does show talent, she is immediately reminded of her condition as a woman. "You'd be better off on your back, learning tricks useful to a woman. In fact, I can teach you some tonight, if you'd like", says Cain, one of Celaena's most dangerous opponents, after she excels at knife throwing (*ToG* 107). She will only tell them who she really is during the final duels, when she manages to defeat one of her opponents in less than two minutes. "My name is Celaena Sardothien, but it makes no difference if my name's Celaena or Lillian or Bitch, because I'd still beat you, no matter what you call me" (*ToG* 352).

Tolkien uses the same stratagem to highlight the strength of being a woman in a fantasy world. Indeed, Éowyn tries to blend into the background of the troops going to battle, no one suspecting that she is actually a woman. When she faces the Witch-King of Angmar, the leader of the Nazgul, he believes himself untouchable as "no living man may hinder [him]", but to that she answers: "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Eomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Be gone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him" (*RK* 177). This scene is very similar to the end of *ToG*, but with one

clear difference. When Celaena wins the duels, she does so through the image of women as weak and unskilled in the art of combat, but she succeeds in proving her opponents wrong and that their preconceived notions led them to their defeat. While Éowyn demonstrates that she can do something that no male could do by showing that women, in their singularity, can transcend men.

For Lewis, this approach was not exploited; quite the contrary. Indeed, as previously argued, Lewis saw grown women, mostly represented in his series by the White Witch and the Green Witch, as the representation of evil and the rejection of the Christian faith as they put themselves in opposition to Aslan, the Christ figure. Therefore, there are no signs of Lewis using the femininity of one of his characters as an advantage in combat. The only resemblance on this subject is that Lucy and, most particularly, Jill are really young but at the same time show talent in battle. However, as the vast majority of the characters are children or teenagers, no actual stress was put on their exceptional capacities for their age.

Even if there are no actual battles in the first three books of *ToG*, it is already obvious that, according to Măcineanu's feminine hypostases, Celaena embodies the archetype of the female warrior. She surpasses all the expectations the other characters might have for her: she becomes Adarlan's Assassin, she survives a year in Endovier, where she is the first person to come close to escaping, she is not afraid of Dorian and Chaol when they come to recruit her and does not falter in front of the other competitors. She never doubts her strength because of her gender and does not let other people do as such. She has been training since she was a little girl to have such strength and she never stops trying to improve her skills.

In spite of the fact that Celaena does not believe herself lesser due to being a woman, some powerful figures do not want to see her become the King's champion. Indeed, she does enter the competition to become champion by being sponsored by the Prince, but, from the start, Adarlan's King has no intention to let her win. A mystical creature will try to kill her and she will need several magical symbols to protect her during her training and the trials. When she, against all odds, makes it to the final duels, they will drug her and even try to kill her once she defeated her adversaries.

While Celaena is an assassin, she is also an intellectual. “Libraries are full of ideas - perhaps the most dangerous and powerful of all weapons” (*ToG* 56). She reads a lot, studies a large range of subjects and she speaks several languages. She also has a very perspicacious assessment of the political situation of the Empire. When in the first novel she suggests to Dorian that people should govern themselves, he only sees in that idea anarchy because he has never lived without his royal privileges while Celaena, who is actually revealed as a queen later in the series, has. Such combination of strength and knowledge is very rare in high fantasy when usually the female character embodies only one of those features.

These two characteristics explain her impressive skills as an assassin. Indeed, instead of negligently heading into an altercation with her target, she studies the case meticulously and finds the perfect strategy to fulfil the task. She is usually perspicacious enough to decide if she can win a fight or not. However, as was previously explained, she is still very young and prone to being led by her emotions.

“Battles are ugly when women fight” (*LWW* 135), this quote states quite clearly Lewis’s point of view on female warriors. Indeed, as it was explained in the first section of this thesis, Narnia excludes most women from battle, only allowing them in it if they give up most of their feminine traits. Aravis might be the character the closest to Celaena from Narnia as she received a good education, but is at the same time courageous and adventurous. Nonetheless, she does not take part in any conflicts occurring in *HHB*. Only Jill, once more, is allowed to battle and truly embody this archetype.

In *LOTR*, Éowyn is the only warrior among the female characters, but her achievements are not rewarded or recognised, unlike Celaena in *ToG*, who becomes the most feared woman in the Kingdom. Furthermore, according to McCrory Hatcher’s analysis of Éowyn, her actions and desire to be a shieldmaiden could be compared to a darkness or shadow inside of her (McCrory Hatcher 51). However, Celaena is shown in numerous scenes killing people, but never depicted as evil or as ill for doing what is asked of her and taking glory from it. While Celaena’s actions in the real world are unthinkable, it is common for male high fantasy heroes to act as such and

Maas does not make a differentiation with her female characters. Another similarity could be that both women were raised in royalty and therefore should be well educated; however, Éowyn is never pictured actually using this knowledge. Galadriel could be a better representation of the unification of a warrior and an intellectual. Indeed, it is known that in her youth she battled among men, and in *LOTR* she becomes the advisor of the fellowship.

c) *Femininity*

The need to refute femininity in strong female characters is present to a certain extent in both Lewis and Tolkien's work, but is, mostly, absent from Sarah J. Maas's series. Indeed, while it could be thought that Adarlan's Assassin would be a man, it is common knowledge that she is a woman. However, she is, by most people, pictured as an older and more "masculine" person. Sarah J. Maas did not choose that path, she instead created a character very similar to any eighteen-year-old American adolescent who adores clothes, food, jewellery and dancing, but who is at the same time the deadliest assassin in Rifthold (Markasović 27). This does not annihilate Celaena's rejection of stereotypical boundaries. She is not shy about her beliefs and opinions, she swears and has a dry sense of humour. Moreover, she does not become a great assassin by sheer coincidence, she is trained from a young age and has had a difficult life which shaped her strong personality.

However, she is seen as not feminine enough by some. Indeed, her maid, Philippa, tells her: "You're still a woman, and so long as you're under my charge, you'll act like one" (*ToG* 46), repeating this injunction on a number of occasions, and intimating that being the prince's lover would be a better occupation for a young lady than being an assassin, or that she needs to smile more. Therefore, her rejection of certain stereotypes might be seen by other women as a denial of the role in the society that they see fit for her.

In Lewis, strong women are mostly associated either to men or to evil beings. The two witches are greatly preoccupied by their appearance and their belongings, described as extremely beautiful women who will use those features to manipulate men. Both are deeply inspired by Lilith, a representation of women using their looks to serve their personal interests. Once Susan shows such fascination for "nylons and lipstick and invitations"

(LB 270), she is banished from Narnia. Lewis, by suggesting that feminine traits and puberty are a sign of the mind's corruption, has turned most of his more feminine characters into antagonists. Lucy's case differs from this as she never shows such inclination. However, when her abilities are discussed, she has been considered by some men "as good as a man, or at any rate as good as a boy" (HHB 219). Aravis is herself opposed to Lasaraleen to show the superficiality of some feminine characters and to highlight the fact that Aravis's rejection of such superficiality is a strength. Nevertheless, she is still punished by Aslan who considered her too arrogant and therefore decided to teach her a lesson. At the end of *HHB*, Lucy and Aravis are seen talking about "Aravis's bedroom and Aravis's boudoir and about getting clothes for her, and all the sort of things girls do talk about on such an occasion" (HHB 303), but this scene is in contradiction with the previous portrayal of those characters, being more stereotypical than empowering regarding femininity. Jill is, once more, the exception as she displays some feminine traits while still being strong.

Lord of the Rings does not have a negative vision of femininity of the sort. Still, Éowyn needs to disguise herself as a man, Dernhelm, after Aragorn ignored her plea to fight alongside him and her brother. Once she reveals her true identity, she is forced to stay away from the troops and is maintained in the House of Health in a way which suggests she will be released only when she has healed of her physical and mental wounds. Galadriel is very feminine, but in a holier manner; Goldberry is considered as a nature spirit and not an actual woman; and Arwen is described as one of the most beautiful women of Middle-Earth. Nonetheless, neither Arwen nor Goldberry could be considered as strong women due to their brief appearances in the novels.

d) *Romance*

Romance is a significant part of the *ToG* series and it will evolve in every instalment. In the first three books of the series, Celaena's love interests are Sam (a fellow assassin), Dorian (Adarlan's Prince) and Chaol (Captain of the Royal Guard), the first and last of them being the more impactful in the plot of this first segment of the series. While her relationship with Sam influences Celaena's character evolution in the series, he is only present in

the prequel in which he dies. Therefore, the romance in *ToG* and *CoM* could be seen as a love triangle. She is in the first book in a relationship with Dorian, but she brings an end to it when she becomes the King's champion, and in the second book she is with Chaol, who had feelings for her since the first book, which will spark some jealousy between both characters.

When taking into account the series as a whole, it is clear that Sarah J. Maas does not intend on using the typical love triangle trope, but actually innovates the genre. Indeed, in most fantasy series, the love interests are usually decided from the first book, either the story will follow the evolution of the relationship or there are two potential aspirants and the ultimate goal of the romance aspect will be to see the triangle unfold. This view usually restricts the main female characters to evolve, change and, thus, to find someone more suitable for the person they have become, if they are given the chance to. As previously argued, the evolution of the characters is central in *ToG*, therefore it is evident that Maas goes against these canons. Throughout the series, the author will show the normality for a woman of changing partners, without any competition between them, or of simply deciding to be alone.

Her relationship with Dorian starts as a friendship, they have several interests in common, such as reading. However, their bond will always be affected by Dorian's status of authority over her as he is the prince and her sponsor in the competition to become the King's champion. When, after numerous trials, she is given the position, she decides to break off the relationship. She knows that it will not be possible to keep it a secret and that, as a Prince, he has obligations which do not include being romantically tied to an assassin. Moreover, the prime argument in her decision is that she craves freedom. As champion, she will be set free of her servitude to the Empire after four years and she realises that being with a prince would make it impossible for her to leave. "I'm going to be free, and I've never been free in my entire *life*. And I want to know what it feels like." (*ToG* 395). At first, he seems to understand her decision, but in the second book as he discovers her involvement with Chaol, he will be driven by jealousy. He accuses her of having used him to win, and while Celaena has on several occasions used her femininity to have an advantage, she never had sexual relations with Dorian

and never in any situation used sex as a tool. This dramatises how easily a man may believe women unworthy of the position they earned, questioning their success. Later in *CoM* he will apologise and they will decide to be friends.

Chaol and Celaena are a more plausible couple. Like her, he is in the service of the court, although their positions are completely different. Unlike Dorian, Chaol is never seen as superior to the assassin; she uses him, several times, as an accessory in her strategies and she is the one to save him from traitors to the crown when he is abducted. Their relationship is rather peaceful and most readers could think that he would be her partner for the rest of the series; however, when he demonstrates that his allegiance lies with the King and not Celaena, she will not forgive him. Indeed, when the King confides in Chaol about his plan to interrogate her closest friend and ally in the palace, Nehemia, Princess of Eyllwe (another country invaded by Adarlan), he fails to tell her. When he is captured by enemies and she goes to rescue him, they seize the opportunity of her absence to murder her friend. She will not forget that he did not mention to her the King's scheme, with which she believes she could have prevented Nehemia's death. She refuses to see him after that, but when he discovers that she is a demi-fae, he wants to save her and manages to send her to another continent where magic is still allowed. It is only in the last pages of *CoM* that he understands that she is actually Aelin Galathynius, lost princess of Terrasen, and that he has just sent her to the most powerful enemies of Adarlan.

What transpires from these two relationships is that both men loved a facet of Celaena, but never her as a whole. Dorian fell in love with Lillian Gordaina (her pseudonym in the competition), daughter of a wealthy merchant, jewel thief, not with the assassin. Chaol loved Celaena, but not the King's champion. They both do whatever is in their power for her to have the position, but once they see her actually executing orders or using her assassin skills, they do not seem to accept her being a murderer. This might be another explanation to why she decides to be alone at the end of *CoM*.

In the first instalments of the series, there is no idealisation of relationships or marriage. Indeed, Celaena always puts her freedom over her love life, as Chaol explains it: "[she] belongs to herself, and no one else" (*ToG*

297). As for marriage, when she discusses it with Dorian, her point of view is very practical. She sees it as a “legal contract” or made “for the sake of alliance” and tells Dorian, who believes that love is required to get married, he should let go of his “fanciful notions” (*ToG* 231).

The romance aspect in both *LOTR* and Narnia is very limited. Indeed, in Narnia there is little romance as most grown women are the antagonists of the story and love or, more accurately, sexual relations are seen as a way to manipulate a person, as pictured through the Green Witch and Prince Rillian. The only prosperous relationships pictured are of secondary characters. However, marriage is depicted in a very violent way in *HHB*. Indeed, after Susan decides that Prince Rabadash would not be fit to become her husband, this gentleman decides to invade Narnia to bring her back “by her hair the barbarian queen” (*HHB* 311) and to marry her “though she shall learn a sharp lesson first” (156). A positive depiction of marriage is given through Cor and Aravis as “they were so used to quarrelling and making it up again that they got married so as to go on doing it more conveniently” (209).

In Tolkien’s series, romance is a motivator for some characters, but not central to the story as it is not seen as compatible with the battle setting. A love triangle could be imagined between Arwen, Aragorn and Éowyn, as, at different stages of the book, the main male character seems interested in both. Éowyn is passive in her love life compared to Celaena, she meets Aragorn and later decides to go battle alongside him, her decision possibly tainted by her desire to get the man’s attention. He leaves her, seeing in her a shadow that he does not desire in a woman, in the Houses of Healing with Faramir. The man will be the one to initiate their relationship. She then loses that “shadow” and conforms to the eucatastrophe setting by finding love once more. The story ends with the resolution of the triangle, Aragorn marries Arwen and Éowyn gets married to Faramir.

e) Abuse

AB is the book which focuses the most on how women are treated, especially by men. When, in *The Assassin and the Healer* (one of the novellas in *AB*), Celaena encounters Yrene, a young woman working in a tavern, she cannot fathom how an aspirant healer could be staying in such a place. The

story reveals that Yrene was only supposed to work at the White Pig a few weeks, but then the owner started taking an increasingly bigger portion of her salary, making it impossible for her to leave. Her goal when she arrived in Innish was to earn money to afford the boat trip to Antica, the healer's academy. When Celaena listens to her story, she advises her to simply steal the money and leave, but Yrene rejects that plan. On the protagonist's last night at the tavern, she saves the healer from the assault of three men and, after that, teaches her how to protect herself. She asks her to "teach it to any female who will take the time to listen" (*AB* 108). On Celaena's departure, she leaves money and a ruby brooch because "the world needs more healers" (*AB* 115), Yrene takes it and leaves for Antica. It might be the shortest story of the book, but perhaps the most interesting in terms of female characters' development. It is clear that the healer was stranded by the White Pig's owner who would decide every day to lower her salary, making it seem to her that it would be impossible to leave. Celaena has a very different mindset, nothing keeping her away from her objective. Teaching women how to counterattack and protect themselves might give them even more freedom and a feeling of power in their lives. While Yrene does not reappear in the following books, she will become a key character in the final battle, which would have never happened without the help of the assassin.

Another point highlighted in *AB* is the courtesan system. Even if Lysandra, the main courtesan in the series, will only become a main character in *QoS*, she is introduced already in the prequel. She is a seventeen-year-old apprentice who is about to fulfil her training. Most apprentices are orphans, handed over to one of the brothels as children. At seventeen, their virginity is sold to the highest bidder, an event called the Bidding. They do not receive any of the money, which goes to their masters, and after that they have to repay their training by working as prostitutes for most of their lives. Lysandra's story is slightly different as she is thrown out of her home by her parent when they discover she is a shapeshifter. After spending years on the streets, she is trapped in the body of a gorgeous young girl when magic evaporates from Erilea. A short time after that, Arobynn Hamell (Celaena's master) finds her and leaves her with Clarisse DuVency who runs Adarlan's brothel. In *AB*, Lysandra, at seventeen, is really proud of her position, not

seeing any shame in it. She ends up breaking the record of the highest bidding, thanks to Arobynn. In *CoM*, a different perspective on the courtesans is given by Archer Finn. When Celaena is given the order to kill the most popular male courtesan of Adarlan, a man she knew as a child, she decides to use him to get information instead. In those scenes, Archer explains how, at twenty-five, he still has not repaid his debt to Clarisse and that his only desire is to be finally free, even if it means leaving his life behind.

The Assassin's Guild operates in a similar way. Children are trained until they are fit to work and, from this point forward, they are to repay the cost of such training to their master. In the case of Celaena, Arobynn found her the night her parents passed, almost dead on the bank of a river. After that, he will name her his heir and train her to become the best assassin. Celaena will, therefore, always feel indebted to him, which he will use against her on numerous occasions. When Arobynn discovers that his protégé ruined his slave trade, he will beat her and send her away. After months in the desert, she returns to Adarlan, even more skilled. Her master, fearing to lose such an important asset, tries to redeem himself. He offers her jewellery, expensive armour or even theatre tickets. At some point, Celaena even starts to make excuses for his behaviour, trying to find a reason to why the man who raised her would ever be this cruel. In his, supposedly, attempt to get her to forgive him, he gives her a contract to assassinate an important slave trader. Once her target has been killed, she understands that Arobynn actually gave her the name of an advocate against slavery to remind her of what he is capable of. He used her filial feelings towards him to make her do his bidding, but once she paid her debt and was set free of his control, he punished her by using all her money to win Lysandra's virginity. This is one more argument towards Celaena's naivety as, ruled by her feelings towards Arobynn, she did not see the man as he really was.

f) Importance of names

Celaena's different names throughout the series is also a detail worth developing. Indeed, it is quite evident that each name corresponds to a stage of the character's development. She is first Celaena, Adarlan's Assassin who finds strength in her loneliness and only lives to train and become the best;

then in the palace she becomes Lillian Gordaina, who spends her time reading books and having secret meetings with the prince; and, finally, she is Aelin Galathynius, Queen of Terrasen, whose mission is to save the continent from Adarlan's King, or so it seems at the end of *CoM*. This importance of names is similar to that in Ursula K. Le Guin's series, the Earthsea cycle. In the second and fourth books, a woman, Tenar, is the main character. Her true name was obscured since she was a child, taken from her in order to turn her into the Priestess of the Nameless One and she then answers to the name Arha. Once she decides to regain power over her destiny and leave Atuan, she reclaims her birth name, Tenar. However, she also has names for intermediate stages in her lives as she is called Goha when she becomes a wife. As for Celaena, she is not called Aelin to keep her true identity hidden and be able to become Adarlan's Assassin. She only reclaims her name once she is ready to grow, when she decides to help Erilea's people get free of the Empire, revealing her identity to Chaol. As for Tenar, Aelin has more than two names, she uses the pseudonym Lillian in the castle but is nicknamed Elentiya by Nehemia, which means "Spirit That Could Not Be Broken" (*ToG* 321).

2. Nehemia

While these three books are mostly centred on Celaena, two other female characters have a significant impact on the story: Nehemia and Elena. Nehemia, Eyllwe's Princess, was supposedly sent to Adarlan to learn the common language. She rapidly becomes the assassin's closest friend, but the princess true purpose is only revealed at the end of *ToG*: Nehemia has been using the fact she is a seemingly harmless woman to become a spy inside the castle to try to gather sensitive information of the King's plans for revolutionary groups. Her friend only discovers that she is not as ignorant as it seems when she finds her, in the middle of the night, reading a book in the common language, despite the fact she was only supposed to know the basics. After that event, it is discovered that Nehemia's knowledge is not only limited to languages, but that she is actually capable of using a form of magic, which should have normally been erased from the continent, through symbols called Wyrdblocks, but she is also capable of seeing "what lurks beyond the veil of this world" (*ToG* 379). These magical abilities will save Celaena numerous

times as she marked her room with protection spells, but also when the assassin is attacked by a mysterious creature. She believes her role as princess to be much more important than representing her country in beautiful gowns, she is ready to risk her life to save her people from Adarlan's dominion. "What is the point in being a princess of Eyllwe if I cannot help my people?" (*ToG* 252).

Nehemia might be the most important character in the plot development of the series through her sacrifice. In her desire to help, she meets regularly with Elena, or, more correctly, her ghost form, who reveals Celaena's real identity to her. She rapidly understands that her friend is not ready to help the cause, she is still too selfish, her only goal being her freedom and that Celaena does not see any hope for the continent. Nehemia reacts to this behaviour by saying to the assassin that she is "nothing more than a coward" (*CoM* 246). She cannot wait for her to grow while Ardarlan is massacring Eyllwe's inhabitants. Therefore, while she knows people are trying to kill her, she lets them, because she knows Celaena, in her honour, will try to save her people. "I knew what my fate was to be, I embraced it. [...] Because it was the only way for things to begin changing, for events to be set in motion" (*CoM* 363). Without Nehemia's death, Celaena would have never become Aelin or even the Queen of Terrasen, but it did not only impact her. When slaves in Endovier hear that their princess has passed away, they revolt. Eyllwe's Princess shows how a character which embodies the wise woman archetype can be as crucial to the plot. Nehemia might have had more impact through her death than her life and while only appearing in two novels, with her sacrifice, she became a key character in the *ToG* series.

In Narnia, sacrifice is also a crucial element to the Winter Revolution. Indeed, Aslan offered his life to the White Witch in exchange of Edmund's. However, after his death, his life is restored as the Stone Table states that "when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward" (*LWW* 185). Maas does not decide to resurrect Nehemia through magic, only giving Aelin one last opportunity to talk with her friend's spirit, which might have lessened the impact of her sacrifice and Celaena's reaction to it.

3. Elena

Elena is the last secondary female character which appears in this section of the series. She is not a person per se as she died centuries before the beginning of *Throne of Glass*. She is a holy force which appears to Celaena to make her understand her destiny and help her in her task, she is the one to demand the help of the assassin in the hope of destroying Adarlan's empire. To protect the young Queen of Terrasen, she gives her her necklace, the Eye of Elena, which will alert her when she is in danger. She is not only a holy mother, but also a female warrior when she comes to help Celaena as she is attacked by demons during her last duel in *ToG*. When later the young girl asks to the late Queen how she managed to defeat them, she says: "There are many things history has forgotten about me. I fought on the battlefield during the demon wars [...] but your legends portray me as a damsel who waited in a tower with a magic necklace" (*ToG* 398). History forgets female warriors, while her husband is still remembered as a great soldier; however, she still has faith in Celaena: "You could be great. Greater than me - than any of us". As the assassin will, Elena fought to save Erilea, she was the one to lock away the darkness which crept through the continent, but the difference is that Celaena, or more so, Aelin, could become a legend.

Elena might be the character which is the more similar to Galadriel from *ToG*, the main contrast being that one is dead and the other one is still alive. They were both great warriors while, nonetheless, they will not take part in the battles happening in their respective series; they are the advisors of the new generation; and their gifts will save the main characters throughout the series. However, Elena denounces how history turned her into a damsel in distress while her husband became a hero, whereas Galadriel is never pictured as less powerful, if not the contrary, than Celeborn. There is also a parallel between her and Aslan from *Narnia*. As with the Pevensie children, the queen is the holy force which appears when Celaena needs her the most, but which is also absent in other moments to allow her to learn how to succeed by herself. However, there is no explicit Christian symbols associated with Elena, while Aslan is undoubtedly analogous to Christ.

In conclusion, the first three books of the series already show great resemblance with Lewis and Tolkien's work on several subjects. However, in most cases, Maas transcends these preconceived characteristics. As previously argued, she succeeded in creating flawed female characters, but which are not punished for it, whose evolution is related throughout the series. She also created realistic relationships in which a woman is given the opportunity to change partners and is not restricted to her first love interest or trapped in a love triangle. Her prime achievement being that Celaena is capable of saving herself, but at the same time is not degraded when in need of help and does not lose any credibility for it. However, it needs to be highlighted that these three novels are the first ones ever published by Sarah J. Maas, with only 1250 pages for the three gathered, while the last *ToG* book is by itself 984 pages. Therefore, the world is still very limited and so are the characters, nonetheless, in the following sequences, the universe will become more complete.

B. Aelin

Heir of Fire and *Queen of Shadows* are the two novels in which Celaena, or Aelin, begins her epic journey. In the first chapters of *HoF*, the reader discovers Celaena across the continent in Wendlyn, where magic has not disappeared. Still devastated by Nehemia's death, she has no desire to survive other than to fulfil the promise she made to her friend to save Eyllwe's people from the King. Maeve, the Fae-Queen, sends one of her cadres, Rowan, to bring her back to the frontiers of Doranella. There, Celaena is given the choice: she will either train with the fae male until she proves herself worthy to be welcomed into the fae city, where she will be given information that could help her overthrow Adarlan's King, or she will be sent back to the empire. She is, therefore, confined in Mistward with other demi-faes until she completes her magical training. Once she manages to face her past and yield her powers, she retrieves the information she needs and frees Rowan from Maeve's blood oath. She then returns to Adarlan to help the revolutionary groups overthrow the King and bring back magic. *QoS* ends with Aelin and

Dorian killing him, but also discovering he is only a pawn in the threat that is Erawan, the Valg King.

With these two novels, the series gained fame and the *ToG* world started to expand. However, it will also mark the end of most possible comparisons with female characters from *LOTR* and *Narnia*. Indeed, Sarah J. Maas's development of Erilea's women will go beyond anything explored by the two other authors. Moreover, sexual and physical abuse against them will be largely discussed in these two novels, subjects which are touched only indirectly by Tolkien and Lewis. In order to display a vast range of female protagonists, *HoF* and *QoS* introduce several new female characters. In *HoF*, the main change is the arrival of Manon, heir of the Blackbeak clan, giving a voice to the witches who were absent in the previous books. Maeve, Queen of Doranelle, also appears in that novel and becomes the first female villain of the series. *QoS* discusses the establishment of Aelin's court including Lysandra (a shape-shifter), Nesryn and Elide (both of them becoming main characters in the following instalments). While the main character is still referenced as Celaena in *HoF*, to avoid any confusions, she will only be named Aelin in the following sections of this thesis except in certain quotes from the novels or when referencing to previous instalments.

1. Aelin

Heir of Fire distinguishes itself from the rest of the series by being one of the only books being mostly character-driven instead of plot-driven. The book's main objective is to let Celaena accept herself as Aelin, Queen of Terrasen. At the beginning of the book, she has no desire to claim her crown and wants to vanquish the king while still being Adarlan's Assassin. Her meeting with Rowan is decisive for her character's development. Indeed, in *HoF*, she is still rather selfish and childish, believing herself more powerful or smarter than the person she faces. Rowan makes her recognise that, at nineteen years old, she still has a lot of progress ahead of her to truly master her magic and the art of combat. He and Nehemia are the most important characters in her development as they will push Aelin to evolve, while the others generally reinforce her idea of superiority.

“She has no hope left in her heart. Help her. If not for her sake, then at least for what she represents - what she could offer all of us, you included. [...] A better world” (*HoF* 280). It is made clear in the novel that in order to assume her responsibilities and destiny, she needs to evolve from her lonely and selfish self. The introduction of Rowan in the plot is necessary as it becomes obvious he will be the person Aelin needs to face and accept her past. Once more, her capacity to evolve is strained by her childhood with Arobynn. Indeed, he has always reinforced the idea that she had to forget about her powers and her heritage, making her believe that it is a monster. “For the past ten years, I have worked every day, every hour, to keep that monster locked up. And the moment I talk about those two days, [...] there will be no accounting for what I do” (*HoF* 374). Rowan, on the other hand, will show Aelin that he accepts her entirely and that she should not be ashamed of what happened in her past. However, once she has assumed that aspect of her life, the need of freedom that was a key element to her character in the first three books still poses a threat to her destiny. She still has to choose between being free, but therefore staying as her selfish self, or giving up certain aspects of her life to become the queen everyone is hoping for.

Jacqueline Lopour in her thesis ‘Representations of Violent Women in Popular Culture and World Politics’ has a vision of Aelin’s evolution which is very distinct from the message which stands out from the series. She characterises the main character as a “monstrous heroine” as we discover that she is half fae. Through Sjoberg and Gentry’s theories, she concludes that Aelin is not a woman, she has “a biological flaw that disrupts their femininity” or a “self-denial of womanhood” which leads her to choose a life of violence and not one where she could thrive while following the “traditional gender role of peaceful wife and homemaker” (Lopour 35-36). She bases her argument on the fact that in the book itself, that aspect of Aelin is mentioned as a “monster” which she learns to accept instead of rejecting it. This representation discards the entire aim of women’s empowerment in the series, which strives to make women equal to men in all the main topics present in high fantasy novels, and disregards Arobynn’s influence and manipulation on the young girl, which led her to believe her true self was a monster.

Besides her evolution from Celaena to Aelin, she also needs to learn how to yield her powers. As it was previously argued, the young assassin was incapable of controlling her feelings and therefore could not wield her magic which was making it deadly. Once more, men's influence in her life, here represented by her upbringing with the King of the Assassins, worsens this aspect. As it is revealed in one of the flashbacks of her parents, they believed that: "Training, and friends. If she doesn't have either, that's when she'll turn into what they're afraid of" (*HoF* 243), which is exactly what Arobynn achieved as, in order to make her Adarlan's Assassin, he isolated her and made her repress her fae side. Therefore, it is obvious that the main objective of *HoF* is for Aelin to learn how to be herself once again and to begin the formation of her court.

Nonetheless, this character development is tainted by some shame brought upon the young queen which was absent in the first three books of the series. Aelin, who until then was just an assassin, becomes a murderer in Chaol's eyes and starts believing it herself. Once more, such critics are absent for most of the male characters, putting Aelin apart from them while the rest of the series tries to erase such gender stereotypes. However, with her development and Rowan's help, it is made obvious that without her training as an assassin, she would not have survived all these years to rescue the continent. It is highlighted that in that period of her life she "had no joy, or love" (*QoS* 397), but that she has done what she had to do in order to survive.

In *QoS*, the character development of the main character is completed and the series reverts to a plot-driven narrative. Aelin's first function in it is to rally people to the cause and create her court. Indeed, while in the previous books she has always behaved following the principle that the more people she cared about, the bigger the threat, she realises that she is actually stronger when surrounded by people. This process begins with Rowan but becomes even more relevant with the introduction of Aedion and Lysandra in her court. Nonetheless, Aelin now has more to lose and therefore has to be much more rational in her plans, which will lead her in numerous cases to believe she has to do everything alone to protect them. When she plans Aedion's escape from the castle, she leaves every night when the rest of the group is asleep to prepare in secret the background of the scheme to take down Arobynn. While

this demonstrates that she is capable of doing it on her own, it also proves that she puts her friends' lives before her own, which is not preferable for a queen.

As a matter of fact, Aelin does indeed become a warrior queen in *QoS*. While most people would believe her safer kept away far from battle, she decides to fight alongside her friends, risking her life and Erilea's only hope. However, this does not mean people will not try to protect her, most particularly Aedion and Rowan. Indeed, their fae's primal instinct to defend the people they love leads them to believe that one of them has to be her protector, to what she answers that they should "stop doing that alpha-male nonsense" (*QoS* 247). The situation will actually be reversed on a certain number of occasions when she is the one saving the males. Other than Aedion's rescue, when Rowan is attacked by the witches and hurt by Manon, she is the one to face her while her friends bring her mate to safety. However, this tendency of female characters saving male ones increases in the next instalments.

Nonetheless, Aelin is not depicted as the ultimate hero of the series. Indeed, as it is also the case in Tolkien's work, Barbara Starink argues in her thesis that Sarah J. Maas uses cooperative heroism in her saga. While has a greater importance in the following book, it is already present in *HoF* and *QoS*. According to Starink, Maas attaches importance to individuality as each character has a specific set of skills which is not shared with others (Starink 79). In the same idea of individuality, she explains Aelin's tendency to act on her own as most probably due to her years of loneliness and of distrust of others (80). However, she emphasises how this individual aspect exists in order to enrich the collective one. Indeed, in *QoS*, as for Aedion's execution than for the overthrow of the king, the power or specificity of each person will grant them success, including Aelin's personal plans.

Other than reclaiming her throne, she needs to eradicate the burden of her past and most precisely Arobynn. While all she has lived before *HoF* as an assassin will be beneficial in the rest of the series, control is still a very prominent topic between her and her former master. Through those two novels, Aelin learned that while she was in Endovier or at the castle, the Assassin's King always planned to get her back at some point, but without any intention to help her in the meanwhile. Once he discovers that his

manipulation on Aelin has no more effect, he tries to turn her into a personal puppet through magic, even envisioning using her sexually. This last betrayal of the main paternal figure in her life is the ultimate element she needed to end his influence.

All these changes in Aelin's character have a great impact on the romance of the series. While she was very detached to any sentimental aspect of her life in the first three books, she builds a real relationship with Rowan through the two books. On the contrary to Chaol, he does not shame her for what she has done and accepts her completely. He is more dominant than her previous love interests, but he considers her his equal and therefore it does not have an impact on their relationship.

In Katherine Cruger's analysis of the *ToG* series, she considers the fae male as violent, physically abusing Aelin, as he, indeed, hurts her during their first encounters (Cruger 121). This point of view is most likely deeply rooted in the fact that Aelin is a woman and therefore presumed fragile who needs protection. This might lead to a questioning on her interpretation which might have completely differed if the assassin had been a man. Indeed, Aelin's force as a female warrior is that she refutes stereotypes of females' capacity to fight as being less impressive than males' while still being openly feminine in her way of living. Moreover, she is hurt numerous times by women, Manon in particular, without it being considered problematic. Physical abuse is discussed in *ToG*, but not regarding Maeve's cadre. The main abuse which Aelin suffers is when Arobynn punishes her in *AB* for ruining the slave trade and that she has no way to defend herself. Rowan's action does not result from a wish to punish or dominate Aelin, he certainly reacted as he would have with any other person, disregarding her gender.

As for Chaol, while Aelin is still hurt by Nehemia's death, she stopped hating him. On the contrary, throughout these two books, he will be the one having to decide whether she is his enemy or his friend. As it was previously explained, Chaol only loves a part of her, a fact that is stressed numerous times by Dorian in the series. While he loved Celaena as she was at the castle, he questions the motives of the Queen of Terrasen, a demi-fae, determined to overthrow his king. He tells her on different occasions his despise for what she has done before her departure to Wendlyn and compares her to a tyrant

queen. He also does not understand the work she has done with Rowan at Mistward in order to become who she needed to be, alluding that it was some sort of vacation while he and Dorian were still suffering in Adarlan. “You’re still the same assassin who walked away. You came back when it was useful for *you*” (QoS 51). However, as Dorian will always be faithful to his friendship with Aelin and become one of her allies, Chaol will become grateful for what she is doing for the kingdom.

2. Manon

Another main subject treated in *HoF* and *QoS* is whether monsters are born or raised. Indeed, Manon becomes one of the main characters of the series and, through her character, the witch system is introduced into the story. While similar to a matriarchy, if compared to Heide Göttner-Abendroth’s theories, it lacks some of the main characteristics. First of all, most of these societies are agricultural and egalitarian. While Maas’s witches do not seem to have any interest for any sort of food production, they do seem to have a similar aversion to the accumulation of goods (Göttner-Abendroth 5). Each clan has a “matriarch”, while in *ToG* they are “matrons”, which represents each clan. However, such communities are usually “free of domination” with no oppressive hierarchy, they are “societies of consensus” (6). In *ToG*, the decisions are exclusively taken by the three matrons, sometimes taking into account the opinion of their heirs, but the other lesser witches do not have a say. Moreover, the hierarchy is strongly established and any disrespect of it will result in physical punishment. Although these previous topics might be quite similar, the most important difference is the complete absence of men in the Iron Teeth clans. It is not clear whether it is rare for witches to produce male offspring or if witches can only be female. Therefore, the entire aspect of marriage between clans or “social fatherhood” is absent, which makes it a pure “matrilinearity” (5-6). Maas never characterises it explicitly as a matriarchy, but as a society following three strict commands: loyalty, obedience and brutality.

Loyalty might be the most important aspect of Manon’s character. She is the leader of the Thirteen coven, a group of the best witch warriors chosen by her. In this group, there is a strict hierarchy with Manon at the top and then

Asterin as her Second and Sorrel her Third. While all the covens are under the control of the Matron of each clan, it is clear that the Thirteen's allegiance lies with Manon and not her grandmother. This is most likely due to the friendship which was created between these women in a world where most witches value cruelty more than any other feeling.

Decisive moments in her life will also be led by loyalty. Indeed, as each witch assisted to a presentation of the different wyverns (creatures similar to dragons) in order to choose theirs, Manon is thrown into the arena and attacked by the most ferocious beast. The bait, a smaller wyvern used to demonstrate the others' capacity to kill, protects Manon and they both manage to kill their predator. She sees in him a true warrior and she chooses him as her mount, naming him Abraxos. As he was caged all his life and malnourished, his capacity to fly is not certain, but Manon does not give up on him. As she is the Wing Leader (leader of the airborne witches), her wyvern is expected to establish control over all the others, which might seem impossible for a beast obsessed with flowers and stars. The heir will be humiliated and beaten by her grandmother for this choice which might seem completely absurd, but the bond that will be created between Manon and her wyvern surpasses these preconceived ideas. Moreover, there is a clear similarity between the rider and her mount, he has been caged all his life, beaten and unappreciated, while she has always been entrapped by her clan, told she was never enough and beaten publicly to humiliate her.

Obedience is tightly connected to loyalty. They are physically abused for every single one of their wrongdoings since childhood, even Manon exerts this power on her coven, usually publicly to make the punishment a humiliation. Furthermore, there is a strict hierarchy which makes it challenging for them to rebel. The use of the female body and the possible curse of fertility is a subject which Maas decided to approach through the "institutionalized rape" of the different witches (Markasović 30). Indeed, when Manon is asked to select a coven to bear Valg offspring, it is believed to be, by the concerned witches, an honour as they were promised to be "sacred vessels" (*HoF* 392). However, once the treatment of such witches is revealed, the heir does not know if she should react as her grandmother sees the situation as natural. Witchlings are regarded as sacred among the different

clans; however, in the Blackbeak one, the loss of a pregnancy is synonymous of rejection and most certainly death of the mother. Indeed, through Asterin's story, Manon's second, the leader decides to put a term to this violation of her fellow sisters. She learns that one of her closest friends was branded "unclean" on her stomach while the still born child was thrown into the fire without giving the chance to hold him. Asterin was later thrown from the coven to die alone, not taking into account the ties between each member of the Thirteen who hid her until she was healed. The subject of women being sexually used is present in the entire *ToG* series through mainly the courtesan system; however, such inhumanity regarding motherhood was not. This representation of rape is also a "plot device" used by Maas in order to make the Thirteen rebel and to personify "Erawan's brutality" (Markasović 30).

Brutality is anchored in the witches' way of life as they are told they have no hearts and no feelings other than the lust for blood. The Ironteeth witches have as ultimate objective to eradicate their rivals, the Crochan witches, who had a peaceful way of living, while still being warriors. When Manon is asked to kill one by her grandmother, the Crochan tells them: "We pity you [...]. For what you do to your children. They are not born evil. But you force them to kill and hurt and hate until there is nothing left inside of them - of you. [...] They have made you into monsters. *Made*, Manon. *And we feel sorry for you*" (*HoF* 533). While the Ironteeth seemed as they were predicted to become the antagonists of the series, Maas proposes a reflection on the monsters depicted in high fantasy.

In *Narnia*, the Green Witch and White Witch are rather similar to the witches in *ToG*, even if Maas's witch world is developed through four books while in Lewis they are only given a few scenes. In both series, they use their physical appearance as a weapon to manipulate men (or women as in *ToG* a significant portion of the witches are homosexual or bisexual), they are depicted as inherently evil and use violence to impose loyalty. While Queen Jadis and the Lady of the Green Kirtle are the ultimate villains of the saga, no background is given to explain how they became wicked, only hinting that their use of power would distance them from the spiritual path which is represented by Aslan, or simply letting the reader presume they were born as such. In *ToG*, the concept of born monsters is refuted and an important section

of the witch storyline is allocated to this “making”. Indeed, while Manon is the heir of the cruellest clan, she is already in *HoF* showing signs of feelings that no other would have. She has a deep relationship with her coven and her wyvern, but a more surprising event happens when she saves the life of her rival. Indeed, when the heir of the Yellowlegs clan attacks Petrah’s wyvern, heir to the Blueblood, Manon cannot stomach seeing the beast’s effort to stay alive long enough for her mistress to be saved going to waste. She, therefore, puts her life at risk to save her. This will be one of the first suggestions that the Wing Leader has, indeed, a heart; however, this is intricately tied to Abraxos. The beast is a warrior, but sensitive at the same time (represented by its love for flowers or stargazing), showing that the two characteristics can be combined. He also becomes the first thing that Manon thinks utterly hers and which she fears to lose. Those feelings towards her wyvern will make her empathise the death of her rival’s mount and save her, while before meeting Abraxos she would have most certainly let her die.

Given this circumstance, one would argue that Maas not only wanted to prove that monsters are not born, but also that this influence can be annihilated. Indeed, it is quite apparent that Manon’s objective in *HoF* and *QoS* is to understand and prove that she has a heart, contrary to what she had been told all her life. This is also represented through Aelin who has been made into Adarlan’s Assassin by Arobynn. She will have to learn how to live with her past and how to sever the connection with the Guild in order to become Queen of Terrasen.

While Manon might seem to have an utterly different part in the plot than Dorian and Aelin, they have actually the same function. While *ToG* highlights that all women can be part of the plot development, there is also a strong argument regarding symbols and how it can be even more impactful for the plot than actions. Indeed, as it is repeated numerous times, Aelin’s importance comes, for a substantial part, from the hope she represents throughout Erilea. Dorian, while not on the same scale, is Adarlan’s inhabitants’ hope for a better King. “What [Aelin] represents, what [Dorian] represents, is what you fear most: hope. You cannot steal it [...] and you cannot break it” (*HoF* 549). Manon has a similar function. While she is only a symbol for the Crochan and the Thirteen, her desire to prove she has a heart

could deeply change the witch system. Other than the fact that all three of them are symbols of hope, their survival will also depend on one another. Indeed, when Manon wounds Rowan and that a duel starts between her and Aelin, she is almost killed by the Queen. At the last moment, seeing Asterin's plea, Aelin decides to save her life. To return the favour, Manon alerts that Dorian, which has been infected by a Valg spirit, is still inside the body, while most of his friends were certain of the contrary and about to kill him.

3. Lysandra

Lysandra's character brings a new topic around female characters and beauty. Indeed, it will be in her case a weapon but also a weakness. Her story since its beginning is tied to her physical appearance. When she lives on the street, she uses her powers to shift into beautiful women to get food and money; however, when the magic disappears and she is stuck with a face of great beauty, she gets noticed by Arobynn who will make her a courtesan. Nonetheless, if she had been in an average body at that time, she might have not survived much longer.

When Lysandra appears in *AB*, she seems very proud of her position; however, as Aelin, her character completely changes with the years. While it was certainly her jealousy towards the assassin which made her act as such, she will in *QoS* reveal what she has lived through the years and how she despises what the courtesan system made her become. She dreads that life to a point that she could not see it happening to another person. When she is assigned a protégé, an eleven-year-old girl sold by her mother, she cannot fathom teaching her how to become a prostitute. The only way for Evangeline to avoid that fate is to lose her beauty and she lets Lysandra scare her face beyond repair. This proves Maas's vision of beauty as also a threat. Her substitute mother will keep her at her side and protect her, also will take responsibility for this affront. Indeed, while at nineteen, thanks to her coveted physical appearance, Lysandra had almost reimbursed her debt to Clarisse, her mistress decides to make her repay the entirety of what the little girl could have earned her, cursing her for years of prostitution. However, Lysandra never regrets her choice of saving Evangeline.

Once more, development has been crucial regarding Lysandra's part in the plot. As children, the assassin and the courtesan always hated each other; however, when Aelin comes back to Adarlan, they start to understand that they are very similar. They were both raised in an extreme environment and then had to repay their master or mistress, never gaining a taste of freedom. It is also implied that Arobynn turned them into enemies as he was afraid that together they could become too strong to still be subjected to his control. Indeed, their master always knew their secret, a Fae Queen and a shapeshifter being a substantial threat even to the King of the Assassins. However, they did not wait to regain their powers to prove their strength. Indeed, once more, Maas shows that every female character can be important in the scheme of things. When Aelin decides to rescue Aedion from the King, it is thanks to Lysandra that they manage to escape safely. Indeed, she is in a carriage waiting for them with clothes and makeup for her friend and, once the man hidden, the guards do not even try to search them, never taking into consideration that a courtesan might be gifted for other things than prostitution. Later in the book, Aelin will pay back Lysandra and Evangeline's debt to Clarisse; however, this will not be the reason behind the courtesan's loyalty. She also sees the future queen as the symbol of a world where people like her could be safe. This is why, when Aelin's plan to kill the king is about to fail, Lysandra leaves the security of her shelter with Evangeline to come and save them in the body of a ghost leopard. "For Evangeline, for her freedom, for her future" (QoS 568).

Her choice to favour the form of a ghost leopard most of the time instead of simply changing her physical appearance is a clear reaction to the years she spent unable to protect herself from the courtesan world. She has been Arobynn's prostitute since the age of seventeen but he never treated her as more than that, even sending her to Aelin as a gift thinking the assassin would kill her longtime enemy. When Aelin plans to murder her former master, she offers Lysandra the privilege of murdering him, knowing very well that he would never believe her capable of it and that no one would consider her a suspect. "For the child she'd been, for the seventeen-year-old on her Bidding night, for the woman she'd become, her heart in shreds, her invisible wound still bleeding" (QoS 373). When she was set free of both

Clarisse and Arobynn, she says that if it were not for Evangeline, she would “just turn into something with claws and fangs and live in the wilderness forever”, to what Aedion will suggest to her the ghost leopard who are “devils cloaked in fur” with green eyes just as Lysandra (QoS 404-406). She will use that form to protect her friends and battle alongside Aelin in the war to come.

While Lysandra might be one of the most powerful female characters in *ToG*, Jacqueline Lopour has, once more, a divergent point of view. She believes that the shape-shifter, another monster as Aelin, could only be characterised as “literally a whore” which has no desire to help Erilea (Lopour 46). According to Lopour, she only desires to get free of the man who “owned her body”, which will lead her to violence (46). She then concludes her argument by stressing Lysandra’s disinterest for the cause and declaring that the shapeshifter is just “a sex-crazed whore attacking her john” (47). Once again, this argument is totally opposite to Maas’s point of view, Lysandra’s journey and her involvement with Evangeline.

4. Kaltain

Maas uses another secondary character to discuss sex abuse and most particularly rape. Kaltain Rompier, rich member of the court, appears in *ToG* as one of Dorian’s potential love interests, but who will end up being chosen by Duke Perrington. Due to her jealousy towards Celaena, she is the perfect puppet. The duke asks her to drug the assassin before her final duel with Cain and then makes her imprisoned for it. While she could have been considered as an antagonist due to those actions, there was actually no scheme behind them, just a jealous young woman manipulated by a man who wanted her to do his bidding.

The first suggestion of her being raped happens when Celaena comes to interrogate her in the castle’s dungeon and that she tells her that “the night watch looks the other way when Perrington visits” (CoM 70). According to Markasović, this sexual abuse is a “method” used by Erawan to “[make] her compliant with his plans” (Markasović 29). The assassin is the only one to offer her kindness in that moment, giving her a cloak to keep her warm, gesture which will not be forgotten. However, not only her body will be used, but also her powers. In *QoS*, it is revealed that the man is actually Erawan,

the Valg King. When he learns that she has a very strong power which disappeared with the rest of the magic, they put a Valg spirit inside her and turn her into a deadly weapon while still being abused by Perrington.

Nonetheless, they underestimate women and do not realise that Kaltain managed to kill the Valg inside of her, taking back the control. At the end of *QoS*, she saves Elide, another secondary character, to a similar kind of slavery by destroying an important part of Morath, making it impossible for them to use her anymore and setting free, at the same time, the witches producing Valg offspring by offering them a swift death. Before dying, she entrusts Elide what will be revealed as one of the three Wyrkeys. She asks her to give it to Celaena Sardothien as repayment for her kindness and to remind her of her promise: “Make sure they are punished someday. Every last one of them” (*CoM* 242). This is one more argument to prove that Maas value acts of kindness which are always “repaid” (Starink 86).

5. Elide

Elide Lochan lived most of her childhood in the Terrasen court with Aelin before Adarlan took hold of the lands. She is the daughter of Marion Lochan, one of the key characters in Aelin’s survival as she gave her life to buy the young girl time to flee. When both her parents died, she has to live with her uncle Vernon, Lord of Perranth, which will later bring her to Morath. She is crippled due to her uncle’s distrust of healers and she is chained to try to prevent her from running away. She is, as most female characters in *ToG*, smarter than what she lets people believe. Eighteen years old in *QoS*, she plays the role of a fragile and shy child in order to gather enough information to escape. She had always hoped that Aelin would come to save her, but then she decided she wanted to survive in order to find her queen and to fight alongside her.

Manon senses immediately that she has witch blood in her veins and claims her as part of the Blackbeak, therefore under the Thirteen’s protection. However, this fact only worsens Elide’s fate. Indeed, the abuse of women being a central topic in *HoF* and *QoS*, Vernon believes her strong enough to give birth to a Valg King and destines her for the same use as the Yellowlegs witches. Moreover, he also offers her to a Valg prince whose host liked

“playing with young women” (QoS 589), destining her to a future similar to Kaltain’s. When she asks him the reason behind his cruelty, he only says: “Because I can” (589), demonstrating once more that she is nothing more than a pawn to him. In *ToG*, it seems that every female character exists in the story for a particular reason and to fulfil a specific destiny. When Manon first meets Elide, the young girl tells her: “I’m nobody. I’m nothing” (QoS 206). The witch answers with a phrase which characterises most of Maas’s characters: “Everybody is something” (206). Indeed, while at the beginning of the book it could have been thought Elide would be a secondary character, she actually becomes a main one in the following books thanks to Kaltain. When she asks her to find Celaena and to give her the Wyrddkey, the entire resolution of the plot depends on her capacity to achieve that goal.

6. Maeve

In the first three books, all the antagonists were male: Duke Perrington, Adarlan’s King and the Valg princes. However, *HoF* introduces, besides the witches, the first female villain, Maeve. She is the last of the three original Fae Queens, as her two sisters, Mab and Mora, surrendered their immortality to live with their human mates. She is the oldest fae who ever existed and the most redoubtable as her second form (which for most fae is usually an animal) is “shadows and claws and a darkness to devour your soul” (*HoF* 55). She retrieves Aelin from Varese and will only answer to her question once the assassin could master her magic, a stratagem to learn about the extent of her power.

In *QoS*, although Maeve is not present, she will be the reference to determine if Aelin will become a tyrant queen. The subject that is the most criticised is the blood oath (Starink 82). Indeed, all of Maeve’s closest soldiers pledge their loyalty to her; therefore, they can never betray her and have to follow all her orders; however, most males do not take it willingly, as it was proven through Rowan (82). Indeed, when his mate dies, which will be revealed later to be at Maeve’s orders, he is in such a state of grief that he accepts to take the oath hoping to get killed rapidly protecting her in order to find his mate in the afterlife. On the contrary, people decide to follow Aelin

without any sort of obligation and if they pledge the oath, as Rowan does, it is on their own accord (83).

Maeve is very comparable to Lewis's witches. They both have people following them through fear and trick them into pledging their lives, as with Jadis and Edmund. However, the backstory, as previously mentioned, of these two characters is very limited, while Maeve's story expands in the following instalments.

In conclusion, in these two novels the most important characteristic is the development of female characters. With *HoF* being mostly character-driven, the reader discovers Celaena's transformation into Aelin thanks to Rowan's introduction into the series. Moreover, the new protagonists introduce sensitive topics to the saga such as prostitution, physical abuse, sexual abuse and rape through Lysandra, Elide and the witches' storyline. Many questions arise in *HoF* and *QoS*, mostly on whether monsters were made or born, which is not entirely answered by Manon yet, and if beauty is truly a weapon as it was for Lysandra, but which was not for Evangeline. Sarah J. Maas also emphasises the importance of each character to the plot, whether it embodies the female warrior archetype or not. While the books diverge from Tolkien and Lewis's characteristics, some parallels can still be drawn, mostly between Narnia's witches and Erilea's. However the following novels have more similarities to *LOTR*'s plot and structure.

C. Queen of Terrasen

Empire of Storms is the beginning of the war against the Valg army. In order to have a chance against them, Aelin is seeking allies. However, this turns out to be rather complicated. Not accepted by the remaining Lords of Terrasen, she needs to cross the sea to prove herself and find an army. She calls in owed debts and wins over the armada of Skull's Bay. However, it will not be the Valg that her court confronts at the end of the novel, but Maeve's army. With the Thirteen joining them, they manage to win, but not before Aelin sacrifices herself to save Elide's life, becoming the Fae Queen's prisoner. It is also revealed in this book that, if Aelin or Dorian were to obtain

the third Wyrldkey, one of them would have to die to send the Valg into their world. *Tower of Dawn's* events happen during the same timeline as *Empire of Storm's*, but following Chaol and Nesryn trying to rally allies in the southern continent and find a way to heal the Hand of the King's spinal injury. One of the most powerful healers will be assigned to the task, Yrene Towers. While Nesryn tries to convince the Rukhin people to join their cause, Yrene heals Chaol and discovers the power of healers in this war, as they can cure people possessed by Valgs. The book ends with Yrene managing to convince healers and the Khagan's soldiers to join Aelin, while Sartaq, Heir of the southern continent, and Nesryn provide them with an aerial army of ruks, beasts similar to eagles, but of the size of a Wyvern.

EoS and *ToD* are very different in terms of plot as the former is plot-driven and the latter character-driven. *EoS* is the beginning of the ultimate battle, with Aelin seeking allies, while *ToD* is centred on Chaol and Nesryn's character development. The main novelty in those books is the introduction of the healers and, more particularly, Yrene, which first appeared in *AB* as a side character but who becomes a main one in *ToD*. The two novels are marked by the loss of Aelin's storyline as the main one. Indeed, Elide's quest and Manon's development are more prominent in the book while the preparation for the war against the Valg is still central. Although *ToD* is summarised as Chaol's story, it is actually mainly centred on Nesryn and Yrene's evolution from side characters to main ones.

1. Aelin

In the previous books, most characters regarded Aelin in a positive way. It is the main switch in *EoS* as most of the book centres on how the Queen can prove herself. When she meets the Lords of Terrasen, they have a very stereotypical vision of her. They believe her to be a little girl who will be manipulated and let Rowan steal the throne, criticising her for having a sexual life and expressing their conviction that she is just a "spoiled, arrogant child [having] temper tantrums" (*EoS* 58). The reality behind their refusal to acknowledge her as the ruler of Terrasen is their desire to seek this opportunity to seize power. Aelin, in that mindset, describes Lord Darrow as an "old bastard [who] has learned he likes playing king" (*EoS* 68). While the

reaction they expected was that of a selfish child, she actually acts as a Queen and puts her kingdom first, telling them that when they will need her, she will come and forget her pride. “I think the true punishment will be seeing me on the throne for the rest of your miserable life” (72). This scene pictures the evolution of Aelin’s character who might have killed them for their remarks in the first book, but also the ease with which men keep a woman from claiming her throne.

In *EoS*, the main character really begins to “[embrace] her ‘bitch side’” (Markasović 23). Indeed, while this characteristic was generally more present in Celaena, Aelin is described as the “fire-breathing-bitch-queen” (QoS 15). Markasović explains that such insult is usually the result of an action showing “acquisitive nature, intellect, persistence, ambition and self-preservation instincts” which would be praised if it had been performed by a man (Markasović 23). She is not ashamed to lead Valg soldiers into Skull’s Bay in order to display her power and prove herself as a leader, which will make the Pirate Lord ally with her. According to Markasović, this acceptance of this side of her proves that Maas, in her feminist writing, creates female characters with “more nuance than the idealised heroines written only in positive light” (23). Indeed, in Tolkien and Lewis, characters displaying such vanity were either punished, as in *Narnia* with Aravis in *HHB* or as with Éowyn’s evil shadow in *LOTR*, or designated antagonist, such as the Green and the White Witches.

One more argument to why her time as Celaena is crucial to the plot are the means she uses to rally people (Markasović 21). Indeed, in the entire book, Aelin calls all the debts people owed her from *AB* in order to create an army to vanquish the Valg Kings. It is not common in Tolkien or Lewis to see people ready to follow a female character, this side of the story usually endorsed by Aslan, Peter, Gandalf or Aragorn, in other terms, male figures.

2. Manon

While *HoF* and *QoS* were mainly centred on the witch system, *EoS* focuses on Manon’s development and the Thirteen as a group. In this book, Manon is still very obedient and follows the three witch principles discussed in the previous chapter. However, when her Second is meant to be killed

because of her decisions, she faces a dilemma. Before the execution, the Thirteen designates her as their Witch Queen, title not given in the last five hundred years. When she is about to kill Asterin, the Thirteen's forgiveness and loyalty makes her understand once more that she has a heart, that she is different from the other Ironteeth witches. She decides to risk her life while her friends escape and rebels against this tyrannical system, trying to kill her grandmother without success.

It is discovered that Aelin is not the only queen in the series, as it is revealed that Manon is the last Crochan Queen. Her grandmother finally tells her that her father was Crochan (a male is an extreme rarity among witches) and that she is the last heir to the Crochan crown. This discovery only reinforces Maas's points on how monsters are made and not born. Indeed, Manon's parents had the intention to make her a "child of peace", but when her grandmother kills her daughter and claims the baby as the Blackbeak heir, she does everything in her power to transform her into a "child of war" (*EoS* 400). However, it needs to be noted that the change in Manon's character is not due to this revelation as she had already proven that she does have a heart. As Aelin, Manon's life also has a precise purpose. Rhiannon Crochan, the last Crochan Queen, cursed the witches' land when the Ironteeth seized it, so that all nature would die and witchlings would be stillborn. Only a child of both clans could break it and "bring [their] people home" (*EoS* 163).

3. Lysandra

Lysandra's part in the plot becomes more prominent in *EoS* than it was in the previous instalments. She trains to be a warrior and is usually the key character during battles, saving the entire group multiple times, even risking her life in the process. The main evolution that she does undertake is to overcome her sexual trauma. Indeed, while she saves her friends, she also has a tendency to put their lives before her own, most certainly due to her impression that her survival is insignificant to the story. "[Aedion] hated the people who had left such scars on the shifter that Lysandra was so willing to throw her life away" (*EoS* 334). While Lysandra's capacity to shapeshift makes her one of the series' true heroes, Lopour believes that, on the contrary,

when she becomes a beast, devoid of judgement, “acting according to base instinct, absent human thought” (Lopour 37).

The trauma from her life as a courtesan in Rifthold also affects her potential relationship with Aedion. Indeed, the male who has fallen in love with both her human and leopard form declares his intention rather early in the novel. However, she always has the impression that it is some sort of humour on his part, believing her story is making her “unappealing” (*EoS* 562).

Lysandra’s true purpose at the end of *EoS* will be to take Aelin’s place. Indeed, as the Queen has been taken prisoner by Maeve and does not believe she will be able to escape or to survive, she asks her friend to take on her appearance. Aelin represents the hope of the continent and so that her sacrifice would not be in vain, she cannot die or disappear. Lysandra will not only have to reign over Terrasen but also provide an heir with Aedion. According to Lopour, this evolution might be the absolution of the character. Indeed, as she will take the role of a mother and will have to leave behind her leopard form, she “renounces her monstrosity and deviant violence, and she re-enters the traditional domestic sphere” (Lopour 62). Lysandra’s decision to accept this fate would make her gain her “lost womanhood” and prove that “a woman cannot be both violent and a good mother” (62). This argument completely erases the shapeshifter’s motherhood towards Evangeline whom she saved from a life of prostitution at the detriment of her own good. Moreover, most mothers in the series are described as violent or warriors and are usually seen as role figures to the new generation.

4. Elide

Elide could be considered the main character of *EoS* as her adventure to find Aelin and give her the second Wyrldkey is one of the most important parts of the book. She is left in the forest by Manon and is quickly found by Lorcan, one of Maeve’s cadre, who will help her in her adventure. While one could believe that Elide needed him in order to survive, it is actually false. In most scenes, she manages to save herself through her intelligence or thanks to the element of surprise. When she is about to get brought back to Morath, she has no preconceived idea that someone is going to save her and, therefore,

decides to take matters into her own hands. As Elide is about to kill herself rather than going back to her personal hell, Lorcan arrives to help her. However, once she sees there is hope, she is the one killing the ilken. “I want Erawan to know that the next time I see him, I will carve Manon’s name on his gods-damned heart” (*EoS* 474). This proves Maas’s intention to show that even a character which seems fragile as Elide with her handicap is capable of fighting and protecting herself. Elide truly desires to embody the female warrior archetype to her own capacities, she wants to fight alongside Aelin “if only to keep just one girl, just *one*, from ever enduring what I did” (387).

In this novel, the conditions of her enslavement by her uncle are gone into in more detail than in the scenes in *QoS*. One of the topics discussed is how she was forbidden to learn how to read, given a nursemaid herself illiterate. This lack of knowledge, mostly due to Lord of Perranth’s desire to have more control over her, made her incapable of reading her uncle’s documents but also slimmed her chances of escaping. Indeed, when Lorcan tells her to simply read a map to situate herself, she says that it is impossible as she could not read it. Nelly P. Stromquist’s in her publication ‘Women and Illiteracy: The Interplay of Gender Subordination and Poverty’ explains that, even though not a necessity in order to gain power, the capacity of reading and writing is “an essential tool” for women to “gain [...] rights” (Stromquist 95). This situation of control by men leads women to be incapable of “[performing] some critical functions in society” and of surpassing their stereotypical roles usually limited “to nurture and raise children and to take care of their husbands and kindred” (98).

Lopour has once more a vision of Elide rather opposite to Maas’s point of view. In Lopour’s division of *ToG*’s characters, she describes Elide as a “real heroine” as she is the perfect image of “pure, self-sacrificing, apolitical, innocent women in need of rescue by the strong, warrior men” (Lopour 52). In other words, as she, in Lopour’s opinion, embraces stereotypical characteristics of the damsel in distress, she is one of the only acceptable women in the novels among all the “whores” and “monsters”. Therefore, according to Lopour, the perfect high fantasy female character is thoughtless, powerless and under the complete control of men, the opposite of Maas’s objective in her different series. This perception of Elide is utterly

erroneous as she saves herself and Lorcan numerous times (which will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter). Moreover, Elide's independence towards Lorcan is once more highlighted when at the end of the book, as he crawls to Maeve, she decides to end any relationship she had with him.

5. Yrene

Tower of Dawn, while supposed to be the only book with a man as main character, is actually mostly centred on Yrene and Nesryn. Yrene is a very strong character but more similar to the wise woman archetype than the female warrior one. She is one of the most gifted healers of her generation and only desires to leave the safety of the Torre, the healer's academy, to go back to her native land and help in the upcoming war. She was introduced for the first time in *AB* in which Celaena opened her eyes and gave her the opportunity to fulfil her dreams. In addition to this, the assassin also taught her self-defence tactics. While there are very few scenes of aggression by strangers towards women in the books, the capacity to defend oneself is one of the characteristics that all women have or work towards in the series (Markasović 31-32). In the Torre, all the healers have to contribute to the daily chores. However, when Yrene arrives at the academy, she offers another service: to teach the female residents of the Torre how to protect themselves. While Celaena only demonstrated the basics, the healer will use guards, who will be used as guinea pigs for the women to practice, in order to teach thorough techniques.

Though Yrene is physically capable of saving herself, her best weapon is her intelligence. Numerous times, in order to escape dangerous situations in which she knows she is not capable of fighting her opponent, she uses stratagems to get away, such as pretending to be accompanied or that someone is waiting for her. Furthermore, her deductive capacities lead her to understand information about the Valgs which had not occurred to the others.

Like most of Maas's female characters, Yrene grew and evolved since *AB*. She was a young girl who let people abuse of her kindness and easily take control over her life, now she is a woman who is assertive and who knows her worth. She is as powerful as Aelin, but in a different way. "I am the heir

apparent to the Healer on High. Through my own work and suffering and sacrifice. [...] So I may not be a warrior waving a sword about, may not be worthy of your glorious tales, but at least I save lives - not end them” (*ToD* 452). Indeed, most “strong” women in the series were principally warriors (with the exception of Nehemia). With Yrene, Maas creates a character just as strong and essential than Aelin is, but who is not a female warrior but a healer.

In Tolkien’s work, healers were seen principally as passive and they did not have an essential part in the war beyond their help towards soldiers, but he still stressed their absolute necessity. When Éowyn decides to end her quest to become a shieldmaiden and take the path to be a healer, it is seen as a clear separation between her and her implication in the battle. In Maas’s work, healers are intricately tied to the success of the final war against Erawan. Indeed, the value of the Torre is discovered in *ToD* as it is revealed that they can eradicate Valg spirits from the host. “[Healers are] more valuable than gold” (*ToD* 297). This transforms them into a sort of warrior, capable of saving lives and decimating Erawan’s army, which does not reflect reality as doctors and nurses in war zones are usually protected rather than confronted to any conflict. The process is not spiritual, but a battle in itself. As it is shown through Yrene’s experience while saving Duva, the Khagan’s daughter, the healer actually has to fight against the spirit with her magic to kill the it. Therefore, Yrene and all healers could be, to some extent, seen as female warriors. Through this, Yrene becomes a symbol of hope as Manon and Aelin, bringing the possibility to save all the soldiers who would have been killed otherwise. Furthermore, she is also the one who persuades the Khagan to join Aelin. Indeed, when she saves his daughter from the Valg princess, he offers her one wish, her answer was: “Save my people” (*ToD* 656). This is one more similarity with Aelin who is usually the one to rally people, whereas in *ToD* it is Yrene and Nesryn.

The romance aspect of Yrene’s story is rather similar to Aelin’s. She was courted by Kashin, Prince of the southern continent, but refused his overtures, knowing he would try to keep her from fulfilling her objective to go back to Erilea and help in the war. Nonetheless, as in *ToG*, a false love triangle begins between Nesryn, Yrene and Chaol. Once more, it could not be

actually described as a love triangle as there is no competition between the three characters. From the beginning of the story, it is highlighted that Chaol and Nesryn are taking different paths and changing, making them not as compatible as they previously were in *QoS*. Indeed, while the new Captain of the Royal Guard, Nesryn, sees him as a fragile injured being, the healer does not change her attitude towards him because of it. Nonetheless, the real love struggle in *ToD* does not concern Nesryn, but Aelin. His relationship with the assassin and the healer is very similar to the one between Arwen, Éowyn and Aragorn in *LOTR*. While Aragorn did not accept Éowyn's darkness and shadow, he was attracted to Arwen's light. In *ToG*, Chaol has always refused to see Aelin's dark side, only loving a part of her, but not as a whole. "He could see [Aelin], in the dark" (*ToD* 565). He marvelled about Rowan's capacity to love her after all she had done and accept it. "She had come to Rowan, [...] and she had returned whole" (568) When he meets Yrene, he sees the light which is, to his eyes, lacking in Éowyn and Aelin, but which is also present in Arwen. "Yrene. [...] Here in the darkness... here she was" (567). The difference between the romance in *LOTR* and in *ToD* is that Aragorn never understands Éowyn's shadow, while Chaol does for Aelin. "He had called her a monster. For her power, her actions, and yet... He did not blame her. He understood" (569).

6. Nesryn

Nesryn appears first in *QoS* as a side character before becoming a main one in *ToD*. She is introduced as a rebel and Chaol's lover. However, she becomes, at the end of *QoS*, the new Captain of the Royal Guard. Before acquiring this title, she was a city guard in Rifthold. In *EoS*, it is for the first time clearly expressed that no woman was accepted in the royal guard, the only possible career in Adarlan's army being the patrol duty. The rejection of female soldiers in important military positions is very similar to the reality. Markasović in her analysis of the military system in *ToG* explains that it is only in 2015 that female soldiers in the United States were allowed to apply to the special operation units and "combat positions" (Markasović 14). From 1994 to 2013, an actual policy, the "Ground Combat Exclusion Policy", was preventing American female soldiers from taking part in combat (13). While

Rifthold's military system follows such prejudices, it is also emphasised that Terrasen, before its invasion, did not. In numerous flashbacks, women are seen as royal guards and the King asserts the gender equality in important military positions.

When Dorian becomes the new King of Adarlan and allocates her the title of Captain of the Royal Guard. Nonetheless, Nesryn's value in that position is shadowed by Chaol's presence. Indeed, the man, hurt and incapable of taking part in any battle, always seems upset when reminded of his lost title, while not thinking less of his lover for it. On the other hand, Sartaq, heir of the southern continent's Khaganate, empowers her in her position and shows her that she is not a replacement, but a legend just as her other companions. When she arrives in Antica, its people already know her story and have named her Neith's Arrow, in reference to her impressive talent as an archer. As with Dorian, Aelin and Chaol, the position of power is detrimental to the love story. Indeed, while Sartaq has a higher position than Chaol, one being the heir to an empire and the other the Hand of the King, Nesryn has always felt belittled by her lover. The heir, to the contrary, never puts himself in a position of control or power towards his new friend. He considers them as equal, "two captains" (*ToD* 395) as she is the Captain of the Royal Guard and him Captain of the Rukhin army.

Similarly to Aelin, she is very realistic regarding her romantic life. Indeed, when she sees that Chaol and her are changing too much to still be in a relationship, she tells him so and lets him engage in his romance with Yrene, while he believes that it is his actions and not their differences which made them grow apart. At the end of the story, Sartaq is ready to abandon his chance to become Khagan if it means he can be with Nesryn. However, for this exact reason, he is chosen as Heir to the Khaganate. Nesryn will, therefore, become a way less stereotypical empress than the one pictured through the current Khagan's wife. She is not as feminine as Aelin, she does not come from a rich family (daughter of a baker) and she is a warrior. Nonetheless, Sartaq does not try to change her and never forbids her from taking part in battle.

7. Secondary characters

Hasra is the Khagan's daughter and in the competition to become Heir before Sartaq is chosen. She is one of the most unique characters in the series: she is not beautiful, she is very calculating, she has no mercy and is hungry for power. Nevertheless, she is pictured as a protagonist and not an antagonist. She is also the most developed lesbian character in the series. Maas never portrays her sexuality as an obstacle to the throne and proves that homosexual couples can have heirs. Therefore, they are capable of continuing the lineage, essential element to become Khagan. Her character evolves throughout the books as she chooses her siblings over power by accepting her brother's nomination without duelling him in order to become Khagan. However, on the contrary to Aelin or Lysandra who have lost an important part of their flawed personality throughout the series, hers does not soften, but, at the same time, she is not turned into a villain. Hasra also contributes in convincing her father to send their troops to Erilea after Aelin had sent her a letter, asking for help "from one princess to another" (*ToD* 592), formulation giving a sense of equality between the two women which was appreciated by the vain princess.

Duva only appears in a very limited number of scenes in *ToD*, but she has a great importance to the plot. She is the youngest of the Khagan's children, she is also the most loved as she is very gentle and kind. When she is infected by a Valg spirit, no one suspects her to be the reason behind all the tragedies in the castle, as she is just a petite pregnant woman. It is explicitly said in the book that the Valg princess has chosen her because no one would even consider her a threat as she is pregnant. After Yrene cures her, Duva becomes the connection between all the siblings as they decide not to kill each other to get the title of Heir, not wanting to see another one of them gets hurt. She is therefore the reason behind the end of a century-long tradition of fratricide.

8. Main topics

a) *Prostitution*

The southern continent discovered in *ToD* seems more respectful of women than Adarlan. As it is explained in the novel, there is less sexualisation around the female body as they are not prudish as Adarlan's people,

normalising nudity especially during receptions. Moreover, another perspective of prostitution is given. Indeed, in Antica, the palace's servants are also the courtesan of the court and their guests; however, the decision of doing such practices is theirs while in Rifthold they are controlled by masters and unable to flee from this life. The Khagan's servants see in this role a way to rise in status and not as an obligation of any sort. While in Adarlan all leaders are male, in the southern continent many are females, for example, the Rukhin's Hearth-mother, their leader, or the Healer on High of the Torre.

b) The military system

Other subjects more general from these two novels need to be discussed. One, which takes more importance in this section of the series, is the military system. In *HoF* and *QoS*, the witches' military system is developed and is more complex than a simple group of female warriors. Markasović compares it to “real-life American Special Forces units”, similar in its “elitism” and functioning (Markasović 17). Indeed, as it was previously mentioned, the witch clans have a strict hierarchy with different functions within the coven. Taking the Thirteen as an example, Manon is the leader followed by Asterin and Sorrel, Edda and Briar are the spies, Faline and Fallon the torturers, Ghislane the intellectual and the five others form the infantry. Their competence is not limited to the use of their iron nails and teeth, but also “swordplay, archery, knife-work, tracking” (17).

While the military organisation of Aelin's soldiers is similar to the one presented by Tolkien, the main difference is the camaraderie. This aspect of war “allows [soldiers] to hold out against the physically and emotionally taxing perils” (Markasović 19). Indeed, it is, throughout the series, stressed by Maas that Aelin would be incapable of fulfilling her destiny without the help of her friends. There is a very strong bond between Lysandra, Aelin and Manon, but also with the male characters, which reveals itself essential in times of battle. However, Tolkien dismissed most of this camaraderie with Éowyn. She has no relationship with the other soldiers with the exception of Merry, and she receives no emotional or physical support from fellow brothers in arms after the battle. She is mostly acting on her own with only one friend to help and protect her. Another great difference with Tolkien and

Lewis is the reversed stereotypes of leadership. While in both *Narnia* and *LOTR*, no woman is pictured as a leader during the different wars (Galadriel only arriving at the end of the War of the Ring), *ToG*'s men are mostly ignorant of the women's strategies. Indeed, Lysandra and Aelin are the ones preparing most of the schemes regarding battle, letting the male to be simple spectators once they unfold. This reversal of stereotypical views is highlighted by Aedion when he says: "I know [Aelin and Lysandra] are of the opinion that we males are here to provide you with pretty view and meals, but I am a general of Terrasen" (*EoS* 127).

c) *Sexuality and menstruation*

Another subject which is denied in most high fantasy novels but explored in *EoS* and *ToD* is women's sexuality and menstruation. Sexuality is completely absent in *Narnia* for the numerous reasons previously exposed and the subject is not addressed in *LOTR*, while there is romance between several adult characters, because the story is mostly centred on the war aspect. In the first five novels of the series, any sexual scenes were rather evasive or only mentioned, this changes in the following instalments. The most surprising aspect being that the focus is always put on women's pleasure rather than men's, talking about masturbation and female orgasm. However, there is still a difference between the characters. While Aelin and Manon completely embrace their sexuality, Yrene is ashamed of her desire and "needed to confess" (*ToD* 267). Arranged marriage is usually associated with a negative vision of sexuality as it is mandatory to consummate it, which is well represented in *Narnia* through Aravis. However, in *ToD*, it is highly romanticised through Borte and Duva who were betrothed in order to gain allies. While it was arranged by their mothers or fathers, they seem to have a say in the final decision and to be happy with the person chosen.

Through sexuality, another topic is discussed: the mating system. It is a bond between two faes, regardless of their gender, which is unbreakable until death and is unique during the fae's lifespan. In fantasy novels, it is usually pictured in a very strict heterosexual manner, the mating bond usually used to know when the female is in distress. With Maas's version, there is no focus on the gender of the partner and both of them feel the need of helping

of one another. Another type of connection between two individuals in the *ToG* series reverses stereotypes regarding sexual abuse. Indeed, Maeve, through the blood oath, forced Fenrys to have sexual intercourse with her, while usually rape is mostly pictured with men as the abusers. It is clearly stated in different scenes of the novel: “For over a century, Fenrys had served in the queen’s bedroom” (*EoS* 215), “‘She orders, we submit. For whatever she wishes’ [...] Maeve felt the need to force [them] into her bed” (281).

Menstruation is usually taboo in books, Ursula K. Le Guin is known to have broken it in her novel *Tehanu* while, in Tolkien and Lewis’s novels, the women’s cycle is absent. However, Maas not only mentions it, she explains the different adjustments which are needed during training or a quest for women. Its impact on the characters is already present in *ToG* when Aelin, after months of starvation in Endovier, has her first cycle. There is already a clear acknowledgement of menstrual pains as she is feeling so sick that she wonders how she could be capable of training with the duels approaching. Men’s reaction to it is pictured in two different ways as Chaol is so perturbed by her “condition” that he leaves the room as soon as he understands what kind of sickness she is suffering from, while Dorian does not seem to be affected by it and tries to distract her from the pain (*ToG* 256). In *EoS*, the precautions necessary during an adventure or a quest for a woman is developed through Elide. While she travels with Lorcan, they need to stop regularly to get supply and she has difficulty to follow the male as the pain slows her down. In *KoA*, another vision of men’s uneasiness around that subject is given when Elide travels with Rowan, Gavriel, Fenrys and Lorcan, nonetheless they never make any comments on it. Lorcan has a very similar reaction to Dorian and even cuts his shirt into strips for the woman to use as protection, contrary to Chaol who was incapable of dealing with the situation. Elide’s malnourishment, just as Aelin’s, is also exposed as one of the reasons why her cycle is not regular. A new perspective is provided in *KoA* about the women’s cycle. Indeed, in the previous instalments, it was seen as an inconvenience which women had to endure; however, in the witch’s system, the first menstruation is accompanied by a surge of power which makes witches capable of acquiring their skills.

d) *Damsel in distress*

Another great difference in Maas's novels is how she reversed the damsel in distress stereotype. Indeed, while most women are helped by men in several scenes in order to set themselves free in difficult situations, they are usually the ones ultimately saving themselves. Moreover, it is not in the logic of the series for the reader to expect a man to arrive and save them. However, there is a clear tendency of the contrary. As it was already mentioned, the first time a woman saved a man occurred when Chaol is kidnapped in *CoM* and that trend is reinforced in *EoS* and *ToD*. At the beginning of the novel, Manon saves Dorian when Rifthold is invaded by the witches, having to kill some of her kin in the process. Elide saves Lorcan by throwing herself over him during an attack, being hurt in the process, and later from an execution through Elide's status and place within Aelin's court. In *ToD*, Yrene saves Chaol when he is about to die by bidding her life to his and Nesryn saves Sartaq from being killed by the Valg spiders. In a more general way, it could be said that the Thirteen also saves all the male protagonists and Aelin's army when they join them during the attack against Maeve. While men are not posed as saviours, the case of women saving women is present in the novels. Aelin saves Evangeline and Lysandra from their mistress by paying their debts, Yrene from a life as a bartender, Hasra saves her lover from an abusive relationship, the Thirteen saves Manon from being killed by her grandmother, among other examples.

Therefore, one could argue that *EoS* and *ToD* are the books most centred on women's empowerment in the series. While Aelin loses her status of Queen who was Promised to the people of Terrasen, she proves her capacity as a Queen and leader of her army: she chooses her kingdom over her pride when she is refused her crown and she finds allies in preparation for the war against the Valg. Manon confirms that witches are not born monsters through the loyalty and love between all the members of the Thirteen. Lysandra becomes a warrior and needs to learn how to overcome her sexual trauma while saving her friends. Elide demonstrates that no handicap would keep her from fulfilling her quest and finding Aelin. Yrene is the proof that healers are similar to warriors as they are essential to the outcome of the final

battle. Nesryn transcends gender-based restrictions in the army and will become a female warrior empress. Furthermore, Maas creates a military system mostly based on women, she turns men into damsels in distress and breaks taboos on women's sexuality and cycle.

D. Finale

Kingdom of Ash follows five different storylines: Aelin's; Elide, Lorcan, Fenrys, Gavriel and Rowan's; Manon and Dorian's; Yrene, Nesryn and Chaol's; and Aedion and Lysandra's. The story begins with Aelin being imprisoned in an iron coffin and tortured by Maeve, in the hope of getting the Wyrdkeys. Elide, Lorcan, Gavriel and Rowan are trying to find their queen to eventually help her escaping, the two storylines then merging. Manon and Dorian, for their part, are on a quest to find the Crochan witches to make them join Aelin's cause and they also have to go to Morath to retrieve the third Wyrdkey. Yrene, Nesryn and Chaol finally arrive in Erilea to discover that Anielle, Chaol's lands, are about to be sacked by Erawan's army, they therefore decide to offer their help before heading to Terrasen. Aelin on her way to her kingdom crosses Anielle and helps them vanquish the Valg army. During those events, Aedion and Lysandra are in Orynth, Terrasen's capital, fighting the army of demons trying to take control over the land. Lysandra, in the skin of Aelin, will try to lead the soldiers, but her true identity is discovered and soldiers are losing hope regarding the outcome of the battle. As Erawan's soldiers were about to take the castle, Aelin, accompanied by the four fae males and the Khagan's army, arrives to save them, the entire group reuniting. Yrene kills Erawan and Aelin destroys Maeve thanks to a magical ring. Aelin Ashryver Galathynius is finally crowned Queen of Terrasen.

The plot of this last instalment is very similar to the end of the *LOTR* series. The first comparison being the separation of Aelin's court at the end of *EoS*, as the fellowship divided itself to create different points of view (Starink 78). The peak of the battle being for both books when Aelin and Aragorn take dangerous and hidden passages to arrive on time to save the army from the opposite forces. The entire group is then reunited and

vanquishes the evil which plagued the land. The novel finishes in a eucatastrophe, as Tolkien named it, as directly after battle, a coronation and wedding is organised. Aelin will be once more separated from her friends as each of them have to help their respective lands to create the better world Aelin promised.

1. Aelin

Aelin's role in the plot of this last book is centred on three main subjects: sacrifice, power and recognition. While being tortured by one of Maeve's cadre, she does not break and never reveals where the wyrdkeys are. She manages to escape on her own, but would have most likely never left Doranelle alive without her friends, including Rowan, who came to rescue her. While she has to live with that trauma, her only drive is that she needs to be able to give her life to save her friends. Sacrifice holds a lot of power in Maas's series as it was proven through Nehemia or Marion, Elide's mother. Once more, Aelin proves that she has changed as she gives the power which was supposed to be Maeve's deathblow to save her friends, while Celaena would have put her revenge before anything else. Her friends being her priority, she refuses that Dorian gives his life by sealing the gate between the worlds with the keys which should have eradicated Erawan's threat. However, it is very perceptible that this decision is not only altruistic. Indeed, Aelin showed signs of mental health issues throughout the books, with a suicidal or self-harm tendency already prominent in *HoF*, and it may have been one of the main reasons why she decides to be the one to die. "I held on for this. For *this* purpose. So I can put the keys back in the gate. [...] it was only remembering that this task relied on my survival that kept me from breaking" (*KoA* 768). Furthermore, she still believes herself to be the reason behind Nehemia's death and she would not be capable of bearing the death of another companion. However, Aelin does not die. Once she has sealed the gate with the keys, she faces the gods and asks for Elena's life to be saved. The gods refuse, destroy the late queen's spirit and do not take Erawan away from Erilea. However, kindness is once more "repaid" (*Starink* 86), as Mala, Elena's mother, offers enough power to Aelin for her to survive. The scene of Aelin's presumed sacrifice is also the first one where Rowan actually saves

her, excluding him saving her from herself in *HoF*. Indeed, as she has power to survive the Wyrdkeys, she still needs to find Erilea between all the different worlds which can be accessed through the keys. Rowan, a few days before, had tattooed on her back magic inscriptions for her to find her way. “A map home, to him” (*KoA* 795).

While Aelin gained a lot of respect and allies through her power, she comes back with only a small fraction of it. This has immediate consequences with the Khagan’s army as they now believe her less capable of leading the battle. This most certainly is a stratagem used by Maas to demonstrate that Aelin’s strength is not connected to her power, as long as she has her friends and skills, she can save her kingdom (Starink 17). She faces Erawan and Maeve with almost no power, not because she believes that she can defeat them alone, but to give time to her friends to plan the attack. Indeed, this last battle relies heavily on Barbara Starink’s idea of cooperative heroism. While there is still the idea that Aelin is stronger with her friends around her, Aelin has no part in the defeat of Erawan (Starink 82). It highlights the fact that Terrasen’s queen is solely one hero among so many others. Yrene is the true saviour of Erilea’s people as she is the one to kill the Valg king. Aelin is also not the main cause to Maeve’s fall, her downfall mostly caused by Fenrys who wounded her and Elide who gave Aelin the ring which annihilates Valg spirits. The former assassin solely puts the ring on the Fae Queen’s finger once she is incapable of fighting back. While she is not essential to Erawan and Maeve’s death, she is the only one capable of rallying soldiers (Markasović 21). Indeed, as it was mentioned numerous times, symbols have sometimes more importance than actions, and Aelin is the main symbol of hope in Terrasen. Therefore, when soldiers were about to surrender or flee, Aelin appears and they regain hope because “the queen has come at last” (*KoA* 875).

Aelin is considered Queen of Terrasen since *EoS*; however, she is only recognised as such at the end of *KoA*. Darrow takes all the power over Terrasen, even dismissing Aedion from his status of general, taking full control over the army and the kingdom. However, the great difference between Aelin and him is that people are loyal to their queen, foreign armies have come responding to her plea for help, not his. This lack of control over

the soldiers is stressed as the Queen of Terrasen demonstrates her combat skills fighting alongside them, a true army leader, rallying them behind her as they were ready to surrender. Once she claims her throne, mainly thanks to Evangeline, she also proves the contrast between her and Maeve as she does not become an almighty queen, preferring to give her people a voice in important decisions.

2. Manon

Manon in *KoA* has to go through similar challenges as Aelin in *EoS*, she has to prove herself worthy of the title of Crochan Queen. She uses the same stratagems, leading the enemy to the witches in order to demonstrate her skills, picturing similar vanity which was refuted from Tolkien and Lewis's protagonists. However, her quest in this book is not limited to the Crochans, she also desires to open the Ironteeth clan's eyes concerning their upbringing. As it was already argued in the previous sections, Mass desires, through her novels, to prove that monsters are not born, but made. However, most witches are incapable of grasping that concept as they never knew anything else. While Manon tries to reunite the two clans and show them that love is a strength and not a weakness, few seem to want to join the Thirteen. "“They don't understand, what we offered them.’ Freedom - freedom from the Matrons who had forged them into tools of destruction” (*KoA* 697). An important question is also raised regarding power, most precisely the power the Matrons have over the different covens. Indeed, contrary to Manon or Aelin, their only control over the witches is the fear they ignite in them as the consequence for disregarding the hierarchy is public punishment. If the witches were ever to take control over their own lives, the Matrons would lose all the power they have accumulated. Therefore, Manon is a menace to the tyrannical system, but the Matrons will not be capable of killing her. “You came, because you have no true power beyond what *we* give you. And you are scared to death that we're about to take it away” (471). There will finally be a group of Ironteeth witches which will join Manon during the final battle, for a “better world” (740).

Her growing similarity to Aelin also reflects on the queen she is becoming. While she was a symbol of hope for the Thirteen in the previous

instalments, she becomes the witches' hope for the better world Aelin is promising. She proves herself as a leader and Crochan as much as Ironteeth covens desire to follow her into battle to fight for this common future. Manon and her legion are going to save Terrasen numerous times during the war against Erawan, especially when she arrives with the Crochans and Petrah Blueblood with the Ironteeth; however it is, once more, a sacrifice that determines the course of the battle. It is highlighted in the books that witches have no power comparable to the fae's, except by doing what Maas called the "yielding". It is a sacrifice which releases the power which the witches cannot access while they are alive. *KoA* is very focused on sacrifice; however, one could have expected it to be Aelin's when actually it will be the Thirteen's. As Manon is incapable of flying because Abraxos has been wounded, all the rest of the coven decide to save their queen and their people by destroying the army's deadliest weapon, themselves and their mounts dying in the process. "Bring our people home, Manon" (*KoA* 748).

Romance, which was mostly absent from this character before *EoS*, becomes central to her evolution. Indeed, has she asserted that she has a heart, she still has difficulties to understand her feelings and care about people. Abraxos is actually the first one to demonstrate its capacity to love. "These beasts, despite their dark master, are capable of love" (*KoA* 225). It has already been mentioned that Manon and Abraxos are very similar and most of the time, when one has a feeling, usually the other has a similar one. Therefore, seeing that this "beast" dictated by a "dark master", which corresponds to Manon's description of herself, is capable of finding its mate, the witch is faced with the reality that she, too, is capable of loving but that she has always refused to feel any attachment for people outside the Thirteen. Dorian also stresses this characteristic of hers as they have a relationship mostly based on sexual relations. As one could have believed that Manon's separation from the Ironteeth would undo her entire upbringing and way of thinking, Maas proves that this process is more complex. This leads to reactions completely opposite as this character never had anyone she cared for except her coven and her wyvern. The first time Dorian announces he is leaving to retrieve the final key, she refuses to ask him to stay, "you're afraid of admitting to yourself that you want it" (466). To the contrary, later in the

book, in a desperate action to get him to stay with her, she asks Dorian to marry her. He refuses, because he knows that she “would never want to be shackled to any man like that” (536). Manon manages this aspect by the end of the book as she decides to still be the Witch Queen, while being with Dorian and possibly becoming one day Adarlan’s Queen.

3. Yrene

Yrene, which only became a main character in *ToD*, is the most important character of *KoA*. Indeed, in addition to all the lives she is saving through her powers, she becomes the greatest weapon against Erawan as she believes herself capable of killing the Valg King’s spirit inside its human body.

However, Yrene is pregnant, fact which in the previous instalments was a synonym of weakness, making Aelin hesitant to accept her help as it could endanger the healer, Chaol and the child. This aspect of the novel truly empowers expecting women as Yrene faces Erawan. She is not afraid of him because she only has hope. The importance of mothers is stressed as the healer’s strength is described as being fuelled by the memory of two mothers, Marion Lochan and Josefin Towers, who sacrificed themselves in order saved two little girls, Aelin and Yrene, with the hope that they will build a better world. “Two mothers, whose love for their daughters and hope for a better world was greater than any power Erawan might wield” (*KoA* 908). Furthermore, pregnancy is not seen as an inconvenience, but as a source of power, Yrene becomes a “Life-Giver” and a “World-Maker” (*KoA* 905), making her even more redoubtable. At the end of the battle, Aelin chants the healer’s name and is followed by all the other soldiers, proclaiming her as Terrasen’s true saviour.

4. Lysandra and Evangeline

Lysandra’s evolution in *KoA* is deeply tainted by her need to take Aelin’s place. Indeed, while the two women’s personalities are similar, Lysandra does not have Aelin’s skills or diplomacy. She, once more, puts her life in danger when she engages in combat with only Aelin’s human form in order to rally soldiers, which happened, and she is gravely injured in the

process, leading the army to comprehend the scheme. Moreover, this situation taints her relationship with Aedion as he believes her responsible for his cousin's abduction. However, she does not seek Aedion's forgiveness as she "was once forced to crawl before men" (*KoA* 443) and will not reiterate such humiliation. At the end of *KoA*, she is recognised as Lady of Caraverre and leaves to her lands with Aedion and Evangeline.

Evangeline, quite absent in the past few books, becomes a key character in this instalment, even though she has a very restricted number of scenes. Indeed, her resemblance to Lucy from the *Chronicles* is quite unequivocal. While Evangeline is older than Lucy, twelve years old and eight years old, their part in the plot is at the same time similar and different. They both have very interesting relationships with power figures, Lucy is the closest to Aslan and his favourite, Evangeline is under Darrow's care and he becomes very fond of the young girl. They are both known to show great bravery during battle even if they do not take part in it, depicted in *ToG* through Evangeline's position as Darrow's messenger, from which she takes a lot of pride as she is the only one the witches accept to give messages to. However, it must be noted that Lucy appears in five novels while Evangeline only in a few scenes in three different novels, her impact on the plot being more related to her relationship with Lysandra before *KoA*. The girl's true purpose in this last book is discovered at the end of the battle. When she is separated from Lysandra and Aelin in *EoS*, the Queen gives her a task: "Win me back my kingdom, Evangeline" (935). While Darrow does not seem inclined to let Aelin rule during the major part of the novel, once the battle has been won, he changes his mind. It is stressed that it is through Evangeline's advice that he decided to recognise the queen. He later appoints the little girl as his heir.

5. Elide

Elide once more proves that her handicap does not keep her from fighting for the ones she loves. For example, she is sent alone into Doranelle to retrieve information about Aelin's location, knowing Maeve's men could have captured her and torture her as they were doing to the queen. Later in the book, she is the one to save Lorcan as she risks her life to save the male,

deeply wounded during battle, from drowning due to the rupture of Anielle's dam. She displays immense determination comparable to any of the faes in the series when their mate is in danger, while she is only human. As none of her friends were going to risk their lives or had any hope for Lorcan's survival, even himself asking Elide to leave him, she goes alone, not expecting anyone to rescue her, and forces the adult fae male into a horse before ridding back to the castle.

While she shows physical strength, she asserts her place as heroine, comparable to Aelin and Lysandra, through her scheming capacities. She is the one to plan Erawan's death and to hurt him in order to let Yrene kill the Valg King's spirit. The end of her story is very similar to Arwen and Aragorn's, except that, once more, Maas reverses the situation: it is Lorcan who gives up his immortality in order to live with Elide, taking her name once they are married, becoming Lord Lorcan Lochan.

6. Maeve

Maas's desire to give a backstory to her antagonists is stressed in *KoA* through Maeve. "Not all Valg are evil" (*KoA* 650). She is pictured as an abandoned wife whose potential was not recognised, she then decided to escape and find a more fulfilling life. However, these pieces of information do not redeem her of her actions, such as torturing Aelin, abusing Fenrys and manipulating all her cadres. This backstory mainly makes Maeve being Valg more plausible, moreover it introduces the subject of female Valgs. Before *ToD*, when Yrene discovers that the spirit in Duva's body is a princess, there had been no mention of female Valgs as there were only princes and kings mentioned. Maeve explains that she was sought-after by the three kings for her extraordinary power (most certainly surpassing theirs) but, before her rebellion, was then left in the castle awaiting her husband to come back from his quests, her potential forgotten. In Erilea, she got "the opportunity to command her own armies" and "to rule the new world she has inhabited" (Markasović 19). This topic of powerful queen being underestimated is also present in Elena who, while being a soldier, is remembered as a damsel in distress.

It is never explained in the novels why there were a very restricted number of female Valgs in the story, or why Erawan did not use their deadlier abilities to his advantage, other than the fact they were more powerful, but, therefore, harder to contain in a human body. Maeve's spiders are going to be the host of such spirits, but there is little information on their achievements during the final battle or on their capacities once the Valg princesses were implanted in them.

7. The power of friendship

While there is not an important character development in *KoA*, the focus is on the strength of this group of female heroines. During most of the final battle, men and women are separated, highlighting the capacities of female characters in *ToG*. The first main event being the Thirteen, uniting to save Terrasen's people and Manon, merging their forces to destroy the witch towers. Eleven witches of the Thirteen give their life for Asterin to kill the acolyte about to release the magic from the tower and to kill Manon's grandmother, Matron of the Blackbeak clan. They then all do the yielding in order to destroy these war machines. Once Aelin arrives on the battle site, she unites with Ansel, Queen of the Western Wastes, and Lysandra to destroy the siege towers and her friend in the leopard form fights alongside her during the remaining of the war. Then, Elide is the one to plan Erawan's destruction, which will be brought about by Yrene, with the help of Lysandra.

Aelin does not believe herself stronger than Maeve, but she has something the Fae-Queen will never have "that gift and power: friendship" (*KoA* 924). Aelin's court is "marked by the affection between the characters and the trust they put in each other" while the Queen of Doranelle's "seems to be ruled by Maeve's iron fist" (Starink 83). This idea of the importance of female friendship during battle is mostly absent in *LOTR*, as previously mentioned, because Éowyn is the only female soldier in the army and it is not exploited in *Narnia* before *LB* as the girls were not fighting.

In conclusion, *KoA* is very similar, in terms of plot structure, to *LOTR* and the story is mostly focused on the war with little character development. Nonetheless, Aelin is finally acknowledged as Queen of Terrasen; Manon

frees herself from the Matron's control; Yrene, while pregnant, becomes their saviour; and Lysandra overcomes, for the most part, her sexual trauma which kept her from happiness. Once again, in *ToG*, Maas pictures characters which would never be believed to be heroines, such as Elide who, regardless of her physical disability, saves Lorcan, or even Evangeline who convinces Darrow of Aelin's worth. The principal topic of this last instalment is the strength of all Maas's female characters as a group and the importance of friendship which was already stressed by Eccleshare as one of the characteristics of young adult literature.

IV. Conclusion

Female characters in high fantasy literature have evolved since the 1950s. Through Sarah J. Maas's series, it has been observed that female protagonists are more abundant, they are flawed, they grow up and change throughout the series; they have the possibility to have several partners and to live their sexuality. Female antagonists are now given a deeper explanation for their wickedness, showing how social pressure can transform a person, but that it is not a fatality and that they are capable of choosing their own fate and break from such control. A large panel of women are present and given a voice: assassins, prostitutes, disabled people, healers, queens, ladies, children, soldiers, warriors, and each of them through their actions, words or sacrifices have helped in the resolution of the plot. Nonetheless, it has also been stressed that female characters already had a significant impact in the story of the first series of the genre. In Tolkien, Éowyn embodies women's desire during the first feminist wave to get their freedom and to be active in society, making this character a great female warrior who managed to vanquish her assailant through her femininity; Galadriel is a wife, but she is also a woman who is more powerful, while being openly feminine, than her husband. Lewis created a more realistic and empowering woman at the end of the series with Jill, but earlier characters, such as Lucy and Aravis, already had crucial parts in the plot.

While Sarah J. Maas creates a unique world and set of characters, numerous similarities can be found with the founders of the high fantasy genre. In terms of plot structure, Maas follows the main characteristics established by Tolkien (James 64): Erilea goes from a continent rich in various lands and kingdoms where people gifted with magic could live in peace to finally become an empire (thinning) with a tyrannical king at its head and an even bigger threat that is Erawan, the Valg King (wrongness). Elena asks for Aelin's help to vanquish those two men in order to create a "better world" for Erilea (quest), during her adventures the protagonist is going to change and evolve, from an assassin to a queen (recognition). Thanks to her friends and allies, Erawan and Maeve are killed, the Valgs have disappeared

and the continent can start rebuilding. The series ends with Aelin's coronation and the different couples either marry or live happily ever after (eucatastrophe). The last instalment of the *ToG* series is very similar to the "Breaking of the Fellowship" with the separation of Aelin's court creating different points of view and storylines (Starink 78).

Regarding character development, in *LOTR* and *ToG*, women use their femininity as an advantage in battle, both series are centred on cooperative heroism and the plot structure is rather similar, most particularly regarding *KoA* and *RK*. Both Maas and Lewis have displayed the strength of young girls, such as Lucy and Evangeline, and they have created antagonists quite similar, female characters using their sexuality in order to control men. Jill in *LB* and Celaena in *ToG* are very alike as they both love clothes, food and luxury while being extraordinary warriors. Nonetheless, Maas with *ToG*, in terms of women's representation, surpasses the two fathers of high fantasy. Éowyn and Aelin are two very flawed characters; however, while McCrory Hatcher sees the White Lady of Rohan's vanity as an "evil shadow" (51), Maas pictures the Queen of Terrasen's "bitch side" as positive and as, sometimes, an asset (Markasović 23). Numerous situations are also reversed as it is, in most cases, women saving men, but it can also be acknowledged with Tolkien's "Choice of Luthien", Arwen having to choose between her immortal life and her husband, which is very resembling to Lorcan's decision to live a human life with Elide, the male character being the one making the sacrifice. Nonetheless, sometimes Maas's vision is overly romanticised, as with arranged marriage which is seen as mostly positive, Lewis giving a more accurate representation through Aravis.

Sarah J. Maas's series clearly has the same characteristics as the ones implemented into children's literature with women's rights and the ones from the development of young adult literature. The author does not simply reverse the gender of the different protagonists as it was done in the 1970s (Paul 146), women are the heroines of the story, they save the male characters numerous times, but they embrace their femininity at the same time. She centres her series on friendships and relationships without separating them from the battle setting, showing how those relations are beneficial when the different characters face the Valg army. The different protagonists are given the

opportunity to evolve and change in the series. Romance is also prominent in the different books, but without restricting women to a unique partner in the entire storyline. Sexuality and menstruation is also discussed, picturing women's pleasure and the difficulties of being a woman during a quest, but also the power which comes from this evidence of womanhood. The most important message from the *ToG* series is the strength of women as a power group and that each of them, through their singularity, has helped in the resolution of the plot. Maas has also discussed topics which are stressed by contemporary feminist activists such as sexual abuse, men's control over women and the access to all positions within the army for women. While Sarah J. Maas is only one among numerous female authors in the high fantasy genre, due to her success, the development of her female characters and the numerous subjects she approaches, she might one day become the reference, just as Tolkien is, for future high fantasy authors.

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