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## **Analysis of Fantasy Fiction Series of Sarah J. Maas: A Court of Thorns and Roses**

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ANALYSIS OF FANTASY FICTION SERIES OF SARAH J. MAAS: A COURT OF THORNS  
AND ROSES

A Thesis

by

RAELYNN D. PEÑA

Submitted to the Graduate College of  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2020

Major Subject: English



ANALYSIS OF FANTASY FICTION SERIES OF SARAH J. MAAS: A COURT OF THORNS  
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August 2020



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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis offers a feminist interpretation of *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, a series by Sarah J. Maas. The fantasy fiction series began publication in 2015 and released its companion book in 2018. Protagonist Feyre navigates values about femininity and masculinity, breaking standards, as she develops throughout the series to change the fae and human worlds. Feyre stands up to inequality and helps others, both human and fae, to make peace instead of war. This analysis uncovers the gender roles, literary elements, and fairy tale influences on the series *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. Prominent symbolism involves masks, hands, and wounds. Feyre's new powers as High Fae have parallels with gender issues, such as how the ability to shapeshift is like her ability to shift between and to combine the masculine and feminine spheres. Through Feyre's experiences and transformation from human to fae, Maas shows a heightened version of social issues that many young adults face, thus providing readers with assurance that their responses to trauma are valid. Filling a gap in literary scholarship about contemporary young adult literature, this thesis demonstrates the value of analyzing popular literature such as the works of Sarah J. Maas.





## DEDICATION

The completion of my Master of Arts in English studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. My mother, Michelle Garcia-Peña, my father, Amador Peña, my fiancé, Jacob Cantú, and my siblings motivated me to continue forward and supported me by all means to accomplish this degree. To my parents, you both have always pushed me to become better and to do better. You have inspired me to continue on through the most difficult times that I have faced during my academic career. Y'all are my shoulder to cry on when things became too rough for me to handle, y'all are my helping hand when I need to get back up, and y'all are always my cheerleaders when I accomplish anything big or small. To my fiancé, you always motivate me to continue forward no matter what I have to face. You are the listening ear when I need to vent, you are the watchful eyes when I cannot see myself clearly through the haze of school and work, and you are my shelter when I need comfort. To my siblings, Samantha, Bettina, Adam, and Anthony, you are my inspirations to continue forward especially when I get stuck in a rut. Y'all are my supporters when I want to stop, y'all are my rally team when I get past a hurdle, and y'all are my rocks when I need something strong to hold on to. Thank you all for everything you have done for me especially during this difficult, but exciting journey. To my whole family, thank you for being there for me through this journey and continuing to give me kind words and luck when I need it most. And finally, thank you to God for putting all these wonderful people in my life.



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## CHAPTER I

### TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY YOUNG ADULT FANTASY FICTION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SARAH J. MAAS

Young adult (YA) fantasy fiction literature is a doorway that opens to a world that mirrors ours and, more often than not, highlights our problems within our society. The definition of young adult literature (YAL) has changed over time. In 1904, Dr. G. Stanley Hall coins the term young adult or “adolescence” for the stage between childhood and adulthood. Before he coins the term, there is no such thing as a young adult life stage. They are either an infant, child, or an adult. The idea of a teenager is not part of United States culture because childhood just turns into adulthood. Michael Cart, author of *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, who studies what is YA and why is it important, states,

For a while it was acknowledged that there were human beings who occupied an ill-defined developmental space somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the idea, the concept, the notion that this space comprised a separate and distinct part of the evolution from childhood to adulthood was still foreign in a society accustomed to seeing children become adults virtually overnight as a result of their entering full-time work force, often as early as age ten. (Cart 3-4)

Children do not get to enjoy their time as a child nor as a teenager until the society starts to encourage education. After the United States make elementary education compulsory in 1918, more literature begins to target younger readers which begin to be published for school and



family use. Children's literature has been around for centuries, but young adult literature targeted to teens develops later. Cart writes,

This influx of students into high school was an important step in advancing universal education, but what was even more important—in terms of the later emergence of young adult literature—is that putting young people into each other's company every day led to the emergence of young culture centered on high-school social life[...] (Cart 5)

More young adults being educated leads to the need for more literature for this age group so the demographic can have mirrors in literature. While YAL includes many genres and is itself not just one genre, it is sometimes referred to as a genre.

Although there is some progress in the fact that now there is a demographic category for those that are 13 to 18-years-old, it does not do much progress from the literature standpoint. The literature that is set aside for them falls under the umbrella of children's literature. Not only that but books are gendered, with books presumably for girls separate from books presumably for boys. It is thought in the past that girls are looking for more romantic, gushy, mushy books while boys are looking for rough, tough, adventure books. "Boys loved adventure. Girls sentiment" (Cart 8). If a person is a young adult, not only do they have to go to the children's section of the bookstore or library, but they also must pick out books that are within their gender. A young adult wanting books has not had a designated section of the library or bookstore for teenagers until recently. The young adult also gets many messages about gender binary and expectations for who reads what types of books.

In 1930, the American Library Association, ALA, created or founded a special community for literature targeted to children and adolescents. It is known as the *Young People's Reading Roundtable* where they post or publish a list of books that young people would be interested in reading. Within that list is a mixture of books that are published under Children's

Literature and Adult Literature genres. In June 1957, ALA changed the official title of that roundtable and the content within that list because of how fluid and changeable the term for young adults is as time went on. The roundtable is now called *Young Adult Library Services Association* (YALSA). The change is mainly influenced because of the librarians. They start to notice that these young people, young adults, are no longer interested in literature categorized under the title of Children's Literature. Librarians are not the only ones that notice the change of taste or interests that the young people start to develop. Publishers notice and start to cater towards the interests of them and start to relabel their books. Cart states, "Meanwhile, prescient publishers, taking notice of the emerging youth culture of the 1930s, began cautiously publishing—or at least remarketing—what they regarded as a new type of book" (Cart 9). These changes begin to breathe new life into the new genre of YA and help get the ball rolling with getting the proper genre to the young adult population. As YA begins gaining traction within the publishing world and the libraries, the publishing world starts to capitalize on this market for new books. The first author to ever become the first YA literature author is still up for debate. It takes a long time for publishers and authors to develop their voices and awareness for young adults. This leads to some repetition in early young adult books because publishers are businesses needing to make profit.. "As for the fledgling young adult literature, imitation was definitely the sincerest form of flattery" (Cart 14). This new publishing craze is also what helps YA get the attention it needs to continue to move forward.

One might think that because there are major differences between the young adults of the 1900s to the 2000s that YAL would as well change to attract the newest of generations. Young adult literature succeeds with teen readers when it has themes and problems that are realistic and that resonate for the readers' own lives. There is a belief by some that YA should be safe because

the readers are not yet adults, while others recognize that young people are dealing with serious issues and hardships. Twenty-first century young adults experience many issues and hardships at a young age. The importance for YA is to mirror the youth and their experiences. Rudine Sims Bishop is the first person who established literature as “*mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors*” (ix). She writes, “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books” (Sims Bishop ix). The main importance of YA literature is so that young adults have that mirror to show them or help them discover their own identity. Young adults need to feel validated no matter how grown they feel or think they are. The demand to have literature become a mirror towards one’s self is much more than just juvenile concerns. Many early YA books only dealt with the typical angst young adults experience such as finding a partner, attire concerns, not fitting in, and dealing with parents or guardians. Today’s youth often deal with much more adult situations and issues such as taking care of one’s family due to unforeseen situations, having to grow up way too soon, and mental health issues.

Among the many genres of YAL, YA fantasy fiction is ever popular and growing. YA fantasy fiction first begins in the 1980s with works being created that involve imaginary worlds. Within these imaginary worlds, anything is possible, and nothing is impossible. Leah Phillips studies mythopoeic literature and how it is fundamental to YA literature. Phillips writes while discussing two fantasy fiction worlds, “Both (imaginary) worlds give space to resistance and themselves resist, in big and small ways, dominant, hegemonic norms and standards” (Phillips 123). These imaginary worlds deal with young adults resisting the traditions that the world holds for them. Many young adults feel they are continually trying to resist traditions as they are born

in a modern world with old guidelines holding back their individualism. Fantasy fiction series show characters battling to change their societies and their own choices for living, in bigger, more fantastic versions of what teens face in the realistic world. Fantasy fiction series create worlds in which becoming a hero with powers is not seen as an impossibility. Resisting or untying the expectations or traditions that hold them seem to be much more of an issue within the world's society. It is perfectly acceptable to hold powers, but at the same time the hero or heroine must not use those powers to dismantle the problematic gears that work the world. Many teens and young adults feel as though this is how their own society feels about them.

The key to success for the YA genre or mixture of genres is to have pieces of literature having mirrors and updated representation. It is necessary to show that representation for teen and young adult readership is constantly and rapidly changing in the course of a few years. YA needs to incorporate adult themes and situations in order to resonate with the new young adult and teen readership. As stated earlier, twenty-first century teens and young adults now deal with more than just juvenile issues which also creates a need for a new mirror of representation. By giving mirrors and representation to the teen and young adult readership, they are able to feel as though they have a space just for their own. A space in which they can fight against the resistance not only that they feel inside but also around them. It is important as many from the readership want to visualize themselves in a world where they can fight whether it be emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Being able to see themselves within the characters' shoes is important as that is a space where they can escape their own realities.

In the beginning YA is becoming liberated more and more and includes mirrors for the youth, but it is restricted through gender. Many works of literature are restricted because it is male authors that write male heroes. The publishing industry has historically been limiting in

what books are released, with an emphasis on Anglo men's stories, especially in the fantasy worlds. Two major early fantasy writers for youth are Madeleine L'Engle, the United States author of the Time Quintet, and Diana Wynne Jones, a British author of series such as Chrestomanci, Dalemark Quartet, and Howl's Moving Castle. A few to name are *The Secret Window* (1987) by Betty Ren Wright, *The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen* (1993) by Mitali Perkins, and *Shadowland* (2000) by Meg Cabot. As the demand and popularity of a woman protagonist became bigger so did the margin of women who begin to write them. One woman author who made it big within the YA world and media is Cassandra Clare author of *The Mortal Instruments* (2007) (TMI). TMI is the fantasy fiction series whose main protagonist is a heroine who saves the world. The woman protagonist later learns that she has the blood of angels which makes her a part of the paranormal world. A YA fantasy fiction series published from 2007 to 2017, TMI is also classified as paranormal romance like ACOTAR. TMI is a valuable precursor to ACOTAR by showing that popular fantasy fiction for young adults can include not only paranormal romance and a world saving heroine but also adult concepts and themes.

Sarah Janet (J.) Maas achieves recognition for her series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (ACOTAR), which began in 2015, and *Throne of Glass* (TOG), published 2012-2018. Her multiple-bestselling author status demonstrates popular reception, yet scholars have thus far neglected her books and not explored the themes of her series. The biography of Maas merits mention for context of my close analysis of the ACOTAR series. Maas was born in New York, New York on March 5th, 1986 and now resides in Pennsylvania with her husband, their dog, and son who was born in June of 2018 (Webbiography.com). Maas first starting writing when she was only sixteen years old. She graduated with a degree in Creative Writing and minored in Religious Studies from Hamilton College in 2008 (Sarahjmaas.com). Demonstrating her

successful career in publishing for teen readership, Maas was selected by DC Comics to write the YA book about Catwoman (2018) for a series in which popular authors write novels about the most important DC universe characters. TOG film rights have been purchased to create a TV series by Hulu, and ACOTAR film rights were purchased by German producer Constantin Film.

The *Throne of Glass* series makes Maas famous and opens doors in publishing of her future work. Her debut series TOG appears on shelves in August 2012 and sustains great popularity through and beyond the end of the series in October 2018. From 2015-2018, Maas creates another series at the same time she is continuing TOG. ACOTAR series is only supposed to have three books but has changed recently in 2020 to incorporate more. The first three books follow Feyre's—the main woman protagonist—and then in May of 2017 is the mark of the Feyre's story end with the publication of *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (ACOWAR). The series has a companion novella, *A Court of Frost and Starlight* (ACOFAS) which finishes off Feyre's journey. The series has not concluded, but the additional books will be about other characters within the world of ACOTAR and will not focus on Feyre, the protagonist of the original trilogy and companion novella.

The writing process and literary inspirations on Sarah J. Maas are crucial to her creation in the ACOTAR.

A Court of Thorns and Roses was actually a Magic Book for me. I wrote it in about five weeks, while waiting to see if Throne of Glass would ever sell to a publisher (spoiler: it did.). I woke up every morning excited to write, and then wrote all day, all night, the story unfolding bit by bit, as if the characters and plot had always existed. No book since then has ever been as easy to write.  
(swoonsblog)

The excitement that Maas feels when writing the book is analogous to the engagement her readers feel when reading the immersive series. ACOTAR is written as a spin off or twisted tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Ballad of Tam Lin*, and *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*. The

series of TOG and ACOTAR are inspired by Disney characters and their stories they have to tell, but Maas flips them. She turns the meek little princesses into powerful and strong women that do not wait for the prince to save them. In actuality, the Princess saves the Prince from the doom that is waiting on the horizon. All three of the stories that Maas draws inspiration from have powerful women that break the standard. All three Princesses have to save the Prince from a curse placed upon him, from another woman. When the curse is placed upon him, one of the conditions that had to be met is that the Prince must seek out a woman to break the curse.

Women place their insecurities onto other women which is why the woman who places the curse on the man believes it will be his demise. It is as if the scorned woman cannot fathom another woman being strong enough to risk her own life to break the curse on the man. On that note, all three women after finding out the curse actively risk their lives by wanting to break the curse and chasing the man to do so. Also, all three women have a hatred towards the man either because of what he is, what he has done, or the species that he is. In *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, the daughter has this hatred towards the man, who is in the form of a white bear, because he took her from her home. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle has a hatred towards the beast because of what he does towards her father and how he acts. In *The Ballad of Tam Lin*, Janet has hatred towards Tam Lin because he is a faerie that comes, gets her pregnant, then leaves. Left alone she does not want to raise his child on her own, so she plans to do something about it, which Tam Lin races to stop. In later chapters, we will be discussing these three folktales in comparison with Maas' series *A Court of Thorns and Roses*.

What makes Sarah J. Maas' literature relatable to young adults is her unique style as an author to create worlds that the readers can become immersed in. Her primary genre is fantasy fiction with a world that is inhabited with Fae and humans. One stated inspiration for the mood

of ACOTAR is the song “The Demon God” from Joe Hisaishi’s musical score for Hayao Miyazaki’s movie Princess Mononoke. While listening she hears the main woman protagonist in ACOTAR, Feyre, narrating her story. Maas describes the song as if she is describing the scene she first sees or hears Feyre narrating, “that is really like dark and intense and awesome” (Maas, “Sarah J. Maas on the Inspiration”). The first narration Maas hears is chapter 1 of ACOTAR Feyre vs. the doe and the wolf in the dead of winter in a forest. Maas wants to see who this huntress, Feyre, is and how she has reached where she is.

As soon as I just heard this music and just heard this heroine’s voice in my head, I kinda wanted to know who this huntress was, what was her world like, um, why would she ever risk taking on this wolf for one deer. From that one little moment of music, the entire world sprang up. (Maas, “Sarah J. Maas on the Inspiration”)

What makes ACOTAR series different or set apart from other fae or faerie literature is that she takes inspiration from multiple cultures rather than just one tradition. Maas builds her world using all kinds of cultures and religions that have various different types of the things that go bump in the night. She is able to take those monsters and disfigure them into her own creations. Each creature she creates has a purpose for being in the world; she does not just pick up a monster, mash it, and throw it in with no purpose.

Within Maas’ world, she uses class and gender hierarchy from our old traditions as a background for the world that Feyre lives in. By demonstrating those hierarchies, Maas shows how her creatures and characters reside and work within those dimensions. Class hierarchy is not only used within the human world that Feyre is in, but also used in the faerie courts. There are high fae and just fae, but the ones who truly rule over the fae are the High Lords. Each court—seven total: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Day, Night and Dawn—has their own separate High Lord that rules over them. Each High Lord has their own unique powers that are not bestowed onto their courts, and because High Lords hold tremendous power, they are the top of



the class hierarchy. When the human species encounters the Fae species, the one species that always comes out unscathed is usually the Fae species. As the other species—the human—becomes scarred, death is also possible. Theresa Bane studies the mythical species and wrote an entire encyclopedia about each species, how they differ, what they are, what can they do, and how humans fit within the equation to them. Bane writes,

When interaction between our kind and their kind occurs one side always seems to come out on top, forever changing the other, scarring them in some way, be it emotionally if not physically. In a world with fairies, Man does not sit nicely atop the food chain. (Bane 15)

Within Maas' world for her trilogy of ACOTAR, the human species submit to the faerie species. The words fae and faerie are interchangeable throughout this thesis. Within ACOTAR, humans and fae have mutual agreement—the Treaty—that governs the two worlds. This shows that the class and gender hierarchy does not only influence the human characters but also the fae characters which is shown through the fae, high fae, and High Lords' relationship. By highlighting the powers figuratively in terms of class status and literally in terms of physical nature powers that the High Lords have within their courts, I am able to explore how Maas plays with the idea and concept of power.

Maas' faeries are different by contrast of these folktales or mythologies in small ways because their power is limited to their rank or status in their world. As mentioned earlier, the lower fae or just fae have either little to no power, and their power depends on what court they are associated with. The High Fae have an unlimited power, but the power depends on what court they are within, while the High Lords—likened to a King of their own territory—have tremendous power that is beyond comprehension and their power is linked to their land. For the seasonal courts, they are kept within that state of season. Summer court is always in summer, Spring court is always in spring. While the solar courts follow the rules of nature, they still go

through the seasons and the sun and moon rise and fall. Depending on the solar court it is different for each; Night Courts nights are far more beautiful than any other court, Days in the Day Court are far more than any other court. High Lords can give powers to their subjects as well, for example: Tamlin has the powers to transform into an animalistic beast that has characteristics of other animals.

The beast had to be as large as a horse, and while his body was somewhat feline, his head was distinctly wolfish. I didn't know what to make of the curled elk-like horns that protruded from his head. But lion or hound or elk, there was no doubting the damage his black, daggerlike claws and yellow fangs could inflict. (ACOTAR 33)

Here is where ACOTAR draws similarities from *Beauty and the Beast*, Tamlin's beast-like state is likened to the Beast. He is also able to share that power with his court; for example, he is able to transform his subjects into wolves. Not all High Lords are willing to give their powers to their subjects even if it is but for a moment. Losing one's power equates to weakness, and a High Lord must not be weak for the sake of himself and his court.

Another Faerie species within the trilogy of ACOTAR is the Illyrian and the Seraphim which are warrior races of faeries. Although both are warrior races, the Illyrian have a bad, violent reputation, and most fae consider them as an army to be used; fae do not care how many Illyrians die as they are an expendable force. The weapons Illyrian use exude darkness and are quite ancient in comparison to the advances that are available. While the Seraphim are the counterpart to the Illyrian, there are major differences between the two. Whereas the Illyrian are looked down upon, the Seraphim are looked up to. Within the world, there is not much known about the Seraphim other than they are a warrior type of fae, they use weapons that glow, and they live on an island that is sealed off from the rest of the world.

Maas first creates a dynamic character who seeks to change a world that has turned stagnant from old traditions continuing to be implemented. This thesis analyzes the female protagonist, Feyre, as she makes her journey through the human world and later the fae world. Feyre is a progressive feminist character who seeks to change her world, the people—both fae and human— within the world, and herself. It will also analyze the symbolism that is used within the literature such as metaphorical masks that one wears, how hands define the character, and emotional and mental wounds can change a character. Maas uses a great deal of symbolism in order to enhance the readers' experience with interacting with her characters. She uses these subtle hints to define not only her characters but also the experiences they are having presently or had in the past. Maas adapts themes and situations in the real world for use in her fantasy world, creating mirrors for her readership. She also exemplifies that Feyre is a strong and independent woman, but because this a paranormal romance Feyre seeks out a romantic interest. Feyre's openness to love makes her stronger, not weaker. Maas uses Feyre to show how one can untie old traditions from society.

The fae world is essential to Feyre and her character development because fae worlds are known for their wish fulfillment attributes. Within the fae world, the characters' wishes are given but always more than likely are given to teach an important lesson. More often than not, the characters' wish is something that they after some time realize is not what they truly needed or wanted. For Feyre, her internal wish is to be protected and coddled which Prythian at first grants with Tamlin's arrival and entrapment. As time passes, Feyre begins to realize that while she did wish for this at first and had a desire for it, it is something that she does not truly want or need. Without Feyre's wish fulfillment met, she would not have progressed as a character within her human world. The fae world offers lessons even if it is something ugly or bad because that is

necessary in order for the truth to come to light. When Feyre or other characters are within the fae world, the consequences from the wish fulfillment are immediate. Such as when Feyre frees Tamlin, she is able to get him to protect and coddle her like she wished but as she quickly realizes this is something she truly did not need or want. While within the human world, the consequences from the very same wish fulfillment are time released capsules, and by the time one realizes it is often too late to react to. The human world holds law and order which restrain the character in a reasonable act while the fae world holds magic and lessons which release the character in an unlawful and magic sense. Feyre needs Prythian so that she can become more as a dynamic character and learn who she truly is.

This thesis aspires to explore Sarah J. Maas' ACOTAR series as a progressive feminist work. The second chapter will follow Feyre's journey within the first two books ACOTAR and ACOMAF. It will focus on Feyre overcoming gender identity stereotypes by analyzing Feyre's formation of her progressive gender identity within ACOTAR. It also follows how Feyre is starting to veer off the path by showing remaking the boundaries of Feyre's identity. This thesis uses the words female and male, not only the words women and men, because these are characters in a multi-species world and because traditional fae gender bear a lot of similarities to human gender roles. This thesis will argue how Feyre has become who she is because the environment she is forced to endure. It will show the gradual transformation that Feyre goes through from the pressure to follow traditions that are set within the world. The third chapter will follow Feyre's struggle to follow those traditions while dealing with mental and emotional trauma. This chapter will focus on the figurative wound that Feyre has and how it changes her outlook not only on the world and others around her, but also on herself. Having changed significantly from who she was at the beginning of the series, Feyre reshapes her own gender

identity and future, and the series demonstrates how gender roles can be reformed. Feyre's developing identity is analyzed through the many trials and self-healing and reflecting she faces throughout ACOMAF and ACOWAR. High Lady Feyre of the Night Court shows how she is changing the world that is stagnant from traditions into a dynamic world filled with new age ideas. Chapter III shows how the journey of reshaping of one's identity is a long process especially if one is dealing with trauma. The fourth and final chapter is the conclusion which focuses on the completion of Feyre's journey and the insight of other themes within the series.

The theoretical approach for this thesis is based on how the stereotypical woman and the unruly woman work within the gears of a world filled with old traditions that wants or needs change towards the modern and new world. Scholars such as Katherine Cruger, Kjersi Ericsson and Nina Jon, Monika Karpinska, Leah Phillips and Jean Lipman-Blumen are influential towards this thesis as they have studied how society and environment around a woman changes not only who she is but how she thinks, acts, and speaks. Gender studies and the feminist thinking have influenced the analysis of Feyre as a character because of the course she was set upon. Another influence towards the thesis are how mirrors or representations within literature is important towards the audience in which the literature seeks. It shows that representation for teen and young adult readership is constantly and rapidly changing. These scholars and approaches have informed my analysis of Feyre as a character and of the world that she inhabits. By closely examining the world and its influences I am able to explore how Maas shows the gears of the world and how they work within themselves.

## CHAPTER II

### FEYRE OVERCOMING GENDER IDENTITY STEREOTYPES

Feyre is a strong progressive feminist character who reforms gender identity by showcasing her strengths against opposing forces. Feyre's character shows the strength of a woman through the many trials that she faces throughout her life. Feyre not only has to take care of the house that her family now resides in, but she must take care of her elder sisters and her father while dismissing her own body's caretaking. She must change her identity to become the main breadwinner and caretaker within the household by adopting characteristics from the male sphere. Feyre's world follows the dynamics of gender and class hierarchy, but Feyre is the one who changes those dynamics. Feyre's journey showcases how positive and toxic masculinity and internalized sexism affect one's own gender identity. In this chapter, I analyze Feyre's character and the journey she takes in overcoming and reforming her own gender identity against the laws of the world. Maas uses this series and her characters to show gender roles and equality within a fantasy world. Maas uses gender dynamics from human history as a background within the fantasy world she has created for Feyre. Maas dismantles gender roles and the hierarchy they follow through Feyre's journey throughout the series. I will be following Feyre's gender identity journey from the formation of it and the transformation of it. Feyre uses all the experiences that she gains through this journey as a way to begin untying oppressing traditions from the society and world.

## **Feyre's Formation of Her Gender Identity**

Feyre's world follows the dynamics of high-class vs. low-class and male vs. female.

Within those two constraints, the low-class are kept in check by the high-class, and the women are kept in check by the men and the women around them. Men in both classes hold power and respect, while women hold nothing but their husbands' or fathers' power. Whatever the women do reflects upon the men in their lives, and because of that, women have to be silent, docile, and submissive. We see two different types of women: the woman who obeys her father as a daughter and her husband as a wife, and then the unruly woman, who obeys only herself. This traditional way of regarding women leaves them constrained and often feeling imprisoned by the society in which they live. Kjersti Ericsson & Nina Jon are psychologists who write about how the social control of women is deeply gendered by the need to have girls and women conform to tradition. They first look at prisons/institutions and how those two components seek to control their women inmates. How the prison/institutions seek to control their women is a reflection on how society tries to control their women. Ericsson and Jon write,

The model of femininity that the institution tries to socialize its inmates into, has two main components: domesticity and sexual modesty. There is also a strong tendency to regard the women as fragile, vulnerable, childlike, and simultaneously as dangerous and disruptive. (Ericsson and Jon 127)

Unruly women are assertive instead of silent, bold instead of docile, and dominating instead of submissive. Feyre exhibits the characteristics of being assertive, bold, and dominating because she enters the male sphere of action by taking on the responsibility for her father and sisters.

There are very few women within the world that Maas created who are able to find themselves out of the predestined gender roles they are born into. Women within her world followed the same trajectory as those within the real world: they marry, give birth, take care of their children, and then plan their children's marriages. Even if it makes no sense for women to

be kept defenseless because of the dangers that inhabit the world, they are still subjected to following traditions. Traditions are so deeply engrained that it is hard for women to overcome traditions, and it is even harder for the men to let go of the traditions that secure their power. Maas demonstrates this through the Illyrian war camps. When Feyre arrives, she witnesses this first-hand. Illyrian male fae and female fae have wings, but it is tradition that the male faes have the female fae's wings clipped so they cannot fly which strips them of their freedom. However, within the war camps, Rhysand bans the clipping of the female fae's wings so they could have freedom and fight. "I banned wing-clipping a long, long time ago, but...at the more zealous camps, deep within the mountains, they do it" [...] "To keep their women safe, they claimed" (ACOMAF 443). Maas uses this ideology as a way to show that men clip the women's abilities to be able to do what they want just like how men subject women to their gender hierarchy. The fact that some war camps still did this despite the new and more "modern" times shows some of the masculine inability to let go of traditions. A mirror representation of this from society is when men clip the figurative wings of a woman within a professional workspace. For example, a woman who has the same educational background as a man working as a mechanic is highly less respected than the man. Her opinions, facts, and knowledge are stripped from her because of her gender.

Subjecting women to unwanted traditions is a man's way of saying that that is the only way a woman can be safe and cared for. Maas goes on to explain that within the camp even if Rhysand's friend, Cassian, is able to train the female faes, the female faes end up leaving because the male faes make life so miserable. She uses this to explain that even if women are to break free from their gender roles, the men make it hard for them to continue to do so. It is also shown that the male faes give the excuse that the female faes must do their chores first which



often leaves them with no time to train. When Cassian tells the male faes that the female faes can do the chores afterwards, another excuse is given to stop the female faes from training. It is one excuse after another to inhibit the female faes from learning how to fight. Authors use their works to comment on the society they reside in; Maas is using this point to comment that society is still having that issue even if gender roles have been liberated.

Maas has sought to show these masculine characteristics through Feyre taking the job her father should have been handling and emphasizing that Feyre, the youngest of the three sisters, is the only sister who could have done it. So her family can survive, Feyre must hunt animals for their food and her sisters Nesta and Elain even expect her to clean the meat as well.

Her brown eyes—my father’s eyes—remained pinned on the doe. “Will it take you long to clean it?” Me. Not her, not the others. I’d never once seen their hands sticky with blood and fur. (ACOTAR 10)

Feyre adopts masculinity because she is the only one willing to do so and because of that Feyre could not be silent, docile, or submissive. Those characteristics are not applicable to having to provide for a family. Not only are those characteristics not needed of Feyre, but she is unable to learn those mannerisms from her mother before her. Because she is left untrained in the arts of femininity, she is left malleable to the society around her. When it becomes clear to her that she is the only one willing and able to take care of the family, she switches places with her father. Her malleability gives her the means to learn the art of masculinity, and she is able to adopt the characteristics from the masculine sphere. Feyre points out that Elain’s eyes are a resemblance of their father’s eyes like it is the male gaze that watches Feyre. It is male eyes watching and questioning Feyre whether she is going to continue to occupy the male’s sphere of providing for the family. The male gaze it only makes Feyre want to strengthen that part of her that makes her other or makes her want to fight harder to show that she does belong, even if she truly doesn’t.

Maas uses a clever way of showing that switch through the means of hands and how they resemble the characters. The father's hands are now soft and un-calloused like a woman's hands while Feyre's hands are hard and calloused like a man. Nesta asks Feyre to do manual labor because "you're so much better at it! It takes you half the time it takes me. Your hands are suited for it—they're already so rough" (ACOTAR 14). Nesta uses this job to show how unladylike Feyre has become. Feyre resents the criticism, and her "jaw clenche[s]" at Nesta's words (ACOTAR 14), but she is used to hearing it. Later, Tamlin, her future captor, also uses Feyre and her father's hands as a way to show the subtle change of gender dynamics within their household. Tamlin assumes Feyre likes to hunt because there was a bow and arrow and noted aloud to her and Lucien that her hands fit more to the hunting than her father's hands did. Later in the book, Tamlin sends Feyre back home, and she has to deal with interacting with her family now that they rose the social ladder from Tamlin's fortunes. When Feyre decides to go garden with a tunic and pants, the gardeners rush away to get her a big frilly lady's hat. Feyre looks at her hands and how manly they are and Nesta again comments on them. Nesta knew that Feyre was taken away like in a fairy tale, but she also knew that no amount of fairy tale can change Feyre from who she is.

"Even if you washed them, there'd be no hiding it." Nesta said behind me, coming over from the tree she liked to sit by. "To fit in, you'd have to wear gloves and never take them off." (ACOTAR 263)

There is that reinforcement that Feyre does not belong to the sphere which Nesta and other women inhabit. Maas uses the hands to show the characteristic of her characters like the dress makes the person, but for Maas, it is the hands that make the person. No matter how much Feyre tried to change herself, she would have to fake her femininity to pass within that sphere.

Maas also uses other physical features to show the difference between Nesta and Feyre. The lips are commonly commented on when referring to Nesta or Feyre. Nesta has their mother's lips while Feyre has her father's lips. When Nesta is berating Feyre for not being feminine enough, it is through her mother's lips that Feyre sees the insults. She sees it as the woman before her unapproving of her and her identity. Maas uses this to show that Feyre is critiqued by the women around her for not being able to be the woman she was supposed to be. The symbolism of lips is used to suggest that not only is Nesta commenting on Feyre's gender identity, but so is their mother. Because Nesta has her mother's lips and Nesta herself is a silent, docile, and dignified woman, everything she says disapprovingly about Feyre is from the woman's sphere. Because Feyre's lips look like her father's, Feyre is masculinized and "othered" so that what she says and how she says it come from the masculine sphere. Before her mom died of typhus, she made Feyre promise to take care of the family. She did not make Feyre's father, Nesta, or Elain promise to take care of the family, but she sought Feyre out to make that promise. Feyre's mother knew that Feyre was the one that could keep the family alive. "Or maybe impending death had given her some clarity about the true nature of her children, her husband" (ACOTAR 16). Feyre's mother knew that Nesta, Elain, and even the father could not do what is needed to keep the family alive. Their father often sits by the fire most days, and only some days does he make wooden figures in order to sell to make money. Nesta and Elain refuse to change their gender identity roles.

Present-day within the ACOTAR world, Feyre has made the outer shell of herself hard to survive the weight of caring for a family in a man's position. Deep down buried within herself, she harbors mixed feelings about how being immersed in a man's world has made her relinquish the comforts of femininity. Nesta flings this insult at Feyre because she too knows this.

“What do you know?” Nesta breathed. “You’re just a half-wild beast with the nerve to bark orders at all hours of the day and night. Keep it up, and someday—someday, Feyre, you’ll have no one left to remember you, or to care you ever existed.” (ACOTAR 19)

Nesta calls Feyre a half-wild beast because Feyre is within an in-between state. She is a woman, but she acts like a man. Instead of being the submissive daughter, she is the dominating figure within the household. Feyre realizes she does not have the same social graces as her sisters, but she also knows that she must disregard those to care for her family.

The women in this society have to deal with oppressive sexism not only from the men but also from the other women around them. They tear each other down with disapproving words and stares especially if one woman, Feyre, stands apart from the sphere they are supposed to inhabit. It is a way that women, represented by Nesta, used to remind, Feyre, that they did not belong. “I’d been too young to learn more than the basics of manners and reading and writing when our family had fallen into misfortune and she’d never let me forget it” (ACOTAR 14). This led the heroines to feel threatened by other women and vice versa the other women feel threatened by the heroines because the heroines must reject what makes them a woman. One woman’s rejection of the feminine sphere affects not just herself but the women around her.

Katherine Cruger states,

The message is painfully clear: there is only room in the story for one amazing girl, there is only one way to be a girl or woman, and perhaps most troublingly, it’s impossible for girls to have meaningful friendships with one another. These characters often display internalized sexism, the involuntarily believe of the worst existing stereotypes about one’s own gender identity group. (Cruger 117)

Women are the worst critics of themselves and even worse towards the other women around them. Feyre is threatened by Nesta because she is a woman that she wishes herself to be which is refined, sophisticated, and mannered. While Nesta is threatened by Feyre because she has the freedom to be wild, in control of herself, and dominant. They cannot exist within the same space

without a fight brewing. The stereotypical woman and the unruly woman offer two, contrasting versions of what a woman should be.

Feyre is threatened not only by her sister but also by the males that surround her. In ACOTAR, whenever Tamlin speaks to Feyre, she constantly picks apart his words and repeats the insults back towards herself. Whether she is doing so to remind herself of what she thinks she is, or to remind herself of how the world views her, Feyre picks up on Tamlin's messages that women should be passive and compliant. On the other hand, it could be that she believes that is how males view her because she is a woman. Not only does Feyre pick out the insults and repeat them back towards herself, but she often comments on how she is supposed to act during certain moments of conversations or interactions she has with Tamlin and his subjects. Within her inner mind, she knows that is how a woman should act which is why she continues to speak the mantra of how she is supposed to act "Pleasant, civilized...Docile, unthreatening, tame" (ACOTAR 79). She is using that as a reminder of something that she is not. She has learned and often heard the bad of women and their characteristics, so whenever she finds herself within those parameters, she rejects them. Feyre sees her gender as a weakness because that is how males and the world view gender. She has internalized that to continue as a woman in a male's sphere she must either reject those characteristics that are unfeminine or change the expectations by defying the expectations of gender roles. Feyre's internalized sexism shows subtly through those actions.

Maas showcases this by Feyre clenching the knife to herself almost as Feyre needs to remind herself that she does not fit those markers of being a proper woman. Feyre does not have any friends who are women until she leaves to the Night Court with Rhysand in ACOMAF. Feyre is only to find true friendship with Morrigan (Mor)—Rhysand's cousin—because they both share the experience of being a man that dominated their identities. Katherine Cruger,

discussing YA fantasy literature, states, “Even when there are brief examples of female friendship present in these series, it seems that female relationships are still tied up in men” (Cruger 118). Feyre and Mor’s friendship starts only because of a man in their lives that hurt them. They did not share the same opinions or tastes. They only shared experience because of a man. Although Feyre and Mor’s friendship started because of a shared experience, they later grow closer because of the trials that Feyre faces internally and externally. Mor shares her strength as a woman living within a masculine sphere with Feyre; they both draw from each other in different ways which helps both of them progress.

In ACOTAR, Feyre stands her ground even against the beast when he comes to demand retribution of the life that Feyre took. “I snatched another dinner knife off the table, the best I could do unless I found a way to get to the quiver. ‘Get out,’ I snapped at the creature, brandishing the knives before me” (ACOTAR 34). She took the risk of standing against the most powerful creature that walked their world and the creature that once ruled over them—a fae. She did not cower like her father behind her, who was using Feyre as his shield. “I dared a glance over my shoulder. My sisters screamed, kneeling against the wall of the hearth, my father crouched in front of them. Another body for me to defend” (ACOTAR 34). At that moment, Feyre looked towards them to see who would help her defend the house and family, and of course she was not expecting her sisters. She feels disdain for her father as someone she must protect. Her hope is that he could stand up alongside of her, and then when he fails to do so she is left disappointed.

Since Feyre killed a fae, another fae beast comes plundering through her living room and demands to know who killed that fae. Feyre admits that it was she who killed the fae as that is the only way that she can see her family being protected. Feyre is bold and prideful which makes

her unable to cower which is what the fae beast expects of her. Feyre defiantly thinks, “Better to die with my chin held high than groveling like a cowering worm” (ACOTAR 36). Feyre did not back down from the beast fully knowing that he could kill her, and she would not know it until too late. She demands that she be killed elsewhere, which impresses him even more.

The faerie huffed a vicious laugh. “Willing to accept your fate so easily?” When I just stared at him, he said, “For having the nerve to request where I slaughter you, I’ll let you in on a secret, human: Prythian must claim your life in some way, for the life you took from it. So as a representative of the immortal realm, I can either gut you like a swine, or . . . you can cross the wall and live out the remainder of your days in Prythian.” (ACOTAR 37)

For having the gall and strength to stand up to him, he offers her a plea bargain, and, in the back, her father whispers her to go. As stated earlier, Prythian must claim Feyre in some way in order give her the wish fulfillment that she seeks or desires. The words of her father are not needed because Feyre makes the decision to go live with the fae across the wall by herself. She sees this opportunity as a way to save her family from any trouble or consequences, and so she sacrifices herself to aid them even further.

This is where ACOTAR draws similarity to one of the stories mentioned earlier *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*. In *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, the woman protagonist’s father pleads with a beast (white bear) to take his daughter to his homeland. Like Feyre, the daughter is willing to stand up to the beast at first and say she will not do as he says. The father pleads for the white bear to come back later, and then the white bear will be able to have his daughter. When the white bear comes back, the daughter is willing to go with no fear or hesitation. The daughter and Feyre are both willing to sacrifice their own lives for the family that they have even if their family are not kind to them. The two heroines within the story must be strong to save their families, but also to save the beast-like men that take them.

Unlike the daughter in *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, who accepts her fate, once Feyre is across the wall, and the beast turns back to his true form, Feyre still thinks of escape. She sits and watches as her captor, Tamlin, talks with one other fae there about the death of their comrade. Tamlin tells his friend, Lucien, that Feyre is the one who killed their friend, Andras, with an ash arrow. Lucien is astounded that a mortal girl did it. Even when Tamlin confirms it and validates the claim, Lucien still cannot believe that Feyre is the one that took down Andras without help. Even in the face of real danger with her captor being a high fae, being surrounded, and almost gets away with the murder of one fae, she is willing to commit another just to prove herself as strong. Lucien judges Feyre's character because of looks, as shown by his first statement of unbelief that a mortal girl did it. He judges her unfit to kill Andras because of her figure. She is bone thin because of the months of starvation from the winter. Even though Tamlin confirms it not once but twice, he still cannot believe that a mortal girl with a scrawny figure did it.

The female body is always under scrutiny especially in Feyre's case because not only is she a woman, but she is also mortal which always equals out to the weaker species against the immortal. Beth Younger states, "In these Young Adult texts, the authors rarely describe male bodies, but female bodies are continually looked at in what becomes a powerful enactment of the male gaze" (Younger 47). Feyre is primarily judged because of the state of her body is in, and her body is the first thing that the fae comment on. Considering the fact that Feyre has given up so much for her family, it is no wonder that her body does not match the strength of her inner self. Feyre has to deal with rationing her food, hunting, preparing the animal, chopping wood, and enduring the harshness of winter. She has lost the feminine body and is gaining the body of a male even though struggle for survival has meant limited rations, which kept her lean to be a



fighter. Often when Feyre is referring to her own body it is more predatory or male-like than when she refers to the other female bodies. The words of her sister “Half wild beast” rings loudly for Feyre and the way that she thinks, speaks, and acts. She has no reason to keep sentiments when she has to concentrate on providing. Cruger writes, “To prove their strength and individuality, heroines often reject conventional expressions of femininity” (Cruger 117). Some women heroes have to relinquish femininity because it does not help them achieve what must be done. This contrasts to a stereotypical woman, who has to retain manners and polite behavior, despite internal thoughts, and to speak in a way that is polite and submissive, even if she feels angry. It is always a surprise for others when Feyre speaks her mind and does not use polite ways to express her anger or her disapproval.

### **Remaking The Boundaries of Feyre’s Identities**

From the beginning Tamlin sets out to remove that brashness of Feyre’s identity. What he wants and what he is given are two very different people. Tamlin believes that males are entitled to females, so Tamlin does not see Feyre as a person but more so as an object to get what he wants. The first instance is to have her bathe and dress accordingly. Her handmaid, Alis, that is assigned to her from Tamlin first offers Feyre a dress. She rejects the dresses until she is brought trousers and a tunic which she obliges to wear. Lucien instantly comments on the fact that she would rather wear pants and tunic than a dress when she is back in their presence in proper shape. An important note is that Maas shows within her world that her characters dress as they see themselves. Feyre dresses more boyish/man-like because she is up until that point the male figure in the household. She sees herself more masculine than feminine, and Maas chooses to showcase Feyre’s outlook about herself in the way she dresses. The second instance is to have her eat with them in the dining room instead of up in the room that is prepared for her. Tamlin

uses his magic to make her sit and eat with them and converse in some small talk before she can leave. When he is ready for her to stop eating, he takes away the food with the note that she would throw up if she ate too much which is fair. The issue is that he takes it away from her rather than ask her to stop and then explain why. These instances stick because those are the first signs of Tamlin grooming Feyre to become what he wants. “He gave a distant nod and motioned for me to leave. Dismissed” (ACOTAR 66). This is the first moment that Feyre has to ask for permission to do something rather than just do it as she has done with her family. She stands up from the dining table and waits for Tamlin to give the order. The fae world is already influencing Feyre’s character through this subtle change of waiting for permission. Although Feyre is given enough freedom to roam the halls and outside the innermost property of the manor that she is now subjected to live in, she now must follow Tamlin’s laws. She has now become his subject in his court.

Noticing my stare, he tucked his hands behind his back. He said sharply, “I’ll see you at dinner.” It wasn’t a request, but I still gave him a nod as I strode off between the hedges, not caring where I was going—only that he stayed far behind. (ACOTAR 74)

Feyre notices that this is not something being asked from her but rather that she is being told where and what she will be doing for dinner. Tamlin is showing there is a schedule to be followed, and whether she likes it or not, she will have to do so.

The symbolism of a creature known as the Bogge contributes to Feyre’s developing characterization. The Bogge is invisible until it is seen and acknowledged, and then it violates a person horribly. “*I will grind your bones between my claws; I will drink your marrows; I will feast on your flesh. I am what you fear; I am what you dread...Look at me. Look at me*” (ACOTAR 90). It can be said that the Bogge can be seen as a physical embodiment of vulnerability. The words of the Bogge explain what happens if someone relinquishes control of

identity to the Bogge. If Feyre acknowledges that she is a weak and vulnerable woman and cannot do the same things as male. The identity she cultivated will be shattered, and henceforth she would die not physically but spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. The only ones that can face it are the most powerful or the ones doing the oppression. Being vulnerable and weak is how women are seen within their society which is also something Feyre struggles and fears. Feyre's inner self wants to be vulnerable, she wants someone to come to coddle and protect her because it is something she lacks. A person no matter who always has the inner desires of something they lack even if it destroys the person or the people around them. From a very young age, Feyre is not shown being protected or coddled. When she is shown this by Tamlin, it is something that she does not recognize, and her comfort with it begins to scare her. She does not want to be vulnerable, nor does she want to be weak because then that would be the end of the family. The Bogge becomes what the person fears, and in this case, Feyre fears becoming vulnerable.

Prythian, like other faerie lands, has many creatures that show a person what they fear, dread, or even want. The Bogge shows that while yes, she fears and even dreads being weak, vulnerable, and oppressed, but the truth behind it is that she fears in giving in to that weakness, vulnerability, and oppression. She resents her sisters because they have what she wants but could never have. They do not have to worry about being cared for, and they do not have to worry about their protection because they have someone doing that for them. She resents her father because he is supposed to be the one protecting and providing for her while she is supposed to be the one behind that shield. After the situation with the Bogge, she thinks she sees her father come to save her and races to go with him. Feyre encounters a creature, Puca, that night that shows her what she wants and desires. First, it is her desire to have her father come and rescue her. Second, her desire to escape is shown as bow and ash arrows and then a pack with supplies. Third, her

sisters crying, and her desire to go, comfort, and protect them from the horrors around them. Again, her father is shown, which is the need to go protect him or get saved by him. The Puca is showing Feyre her innermost desires to lure her out where the creature is where she would be vulnerable. Although the interaction with the Puca does not necessarily free her from the manor, it does free her from vulnerabilities.

The turning point is when Feyre realizes the common issues connecting faeries and humans and becomes emotionally able to voice her vulnerability and desires. The common issue that connect fae and humans is that they each have a class and gender hierarchy. They also have characters that have a range of emotions that can be emphasized by another. A winged faerie comes in with wings plucked off and on the verge of death. Feyre holds the dying faerie's hand and comforts him until he dies. When asked why she shows such caring, Feyre tells Tamlin:

“Because I wouldn't want to die alone,” I said, and my voice wobbled as I looked at Tamlin again, forcing myself to meet his stare. “Because I'd want someone to hold my hand until the end, and a while after that. That's something everyone deserves, human or faerie.” (ACOTAR 153)

Feyre allows Tamlin to see that bit of her that is vulnerable and weak. She has given him the key to her heart which ultimately is the key to her womanly weakness, vulnerability, and essence. Through the coaxing of Tamlin, she allows herself to be what she is supposed to be seen as, apologetic, submissive, and weak. An important signal of her shift in identity is that earlier, she is able to meet him in eye to eye, which symbolizes being equal, but here is the first time Feyre is unable to meet his gaze. Women did not and could not meet the male gaze eye to eye, and here is where Maas displays that subtle shift with Feyre unable to meet Tamlin's gaze. Feyre is realizing that fae are a lot more complicated than what she previously thought. Fae are not always the enemies, and there can be coexistence between the two if they both work for it. She is starting to feel more comfortable in their world and sees that her humanity does not mean she cannot be a

part of their world. Another key moment is moments before this admittance Feyre is demanding to go with Tamlin and bury this faerie. Before this new Feyre, the old Feyre would have demanded and ultimately gone anyway, but now this new changing Feyre asks only but once before she gives up.

The identity that she cultivated is no longer needed in Tamlin's house and control; she no longer needs to be dominant, strong, and outspoken. Because that is all she knows, Tamlin still struggles to control her and erase that identity of her. The characteristics she has adopted have become the very identity of who Feyre is and those could not be erased so easily. She now is able to enjoy painting, she is able to be creative, if she is in danger Tamlin is there to protect her. She is slowly opening up herself as now she does not have to worry about what she will be doing in the next moment. All Feyre's life she is chained by the vow to her mother to protect her family. She has to give up everything about herself to protect her family. She never had anyone care for her because she must be the one that cared for them. After that interaction with the Puca, she realizes that she is set free from that vow because now Tamlin cares for her family while she is with him. "My life was now owned by the Treaty, but...perhaps I'd been freed in another way" (ACOTAR 98). Since Tamlin has the control of the Treaty over her, it can be read as now her life is owned by Tamlin because she now sees him as her key to freedom. She can do whatever she wants, yet without the strength that is needed to keep the vow, she is now left empty. One of the biggest acts that Tamlin uses as a way to take away Feyre's identity is to take care of her family for her and become that breadwinner/caretaker of the family. Now he holds the reins of providing for the family which will leave Feyre empty and easier to manage and mold into who he wants her to be. Tamlin is using one tactic of gaslighting to control Feyre. He will use what is near and dear to her to get what he wants. Feyre struggles with the mixed feelings of wanting

nothing more than to go back to her family and protect them. Tamlin tells Feyre by staying there with him she is fulfilling her mother's vow better than she could've alone. He took that aspect of identity from Feyre. Now she is left to wonder what she can and should do with herself.

As time moves forward, Feyre is starting to perform the femininity Tamlin wants her to see. She allows herself to become tame, submissive, docile, and all the things she fears. The family who she would have died for no longer occupies her mind and the person she used to be is becoming a ghost of someone she once knew.

My family, glamoured, cared for, safe, still had no idea where I was. The mortal world...it had moved on without me, as if I had never existed. A whisper of a miserable life—gone, unremembered by anyone whom I'd known or cared for.  
(ACOTAR 170)

It is at this moment of realization of her family no longer occupying her mind that Feyre notices the change within herself and starts rebuking this new self. She starts to hate herself because she is becoming someone she resented. She did not want to become a woman who cares nothing but the man in front of her and who is nothing until the man commands her to be something. Once this realization hit Feyre she starts to try and reclaim herself and her old identity. Fire Night is when the High Lord of the court must mate with a virgin female fae(maiden) as a way to start whatever season the court inhabits in Prythian and mortal world. Tamlin demands Feyre to stay within her chamber although she fights him for answers on what is happening and why she should stay in her chamber. Ultimately, he closes the door on her without any answers which signals that he is closing the door on his side of communication. She finally decides to exit her chamber despite what Tamlin told her. "But a wild, wicked voice weaving between the drumbeats whispered otherwise. *Go*, that voice said, tugging at me. *Go see*" (ACOTAR 184). This voice is the inner voice of that unruly woman urging her to break that command of Tamlin. After an encounter with some bad faes, Lucien finds Feyre and races her home away from Fire

Night. Once Feyre is home safely, Lucien lectures her as if she were a child without common sense. Instead of backing down which is something she would have done if she were still within the trance of the docile woman, she fights back. She does not like the fact that she is now being treated as a child.

Feyre's inner worry is that she will never be good enough because in the man's sphere she did not quite belong nor in the woman's sphere. She is much too female to occupy a space in a man's world, but she is much too manly to occupy a space in the woman's world. Moreover, she is a human mortal within the court of immortal fae and still defies unsettles things within the court. She defies logic within that world, and she is deemed as other by all those around her which makes her inner self fragile. "Well, he'd certainly taken his time with the ritual, which meant the girl was probably beautiful and charming and appealed to his instincts" (ACOTAR 195). She lists out characteristics that she believes do not apply to her. When Feyre is confronted by Tamlin after his escapade, Tamlin bites her to show his dominance over Feyre, and he tells her not to disobey him again. Feyre takes his words and throws them back at him with a slap to the face and a demand to not tell her what to do. Faes are more animalistic and in all animal species, a bite to the neck means dominance. A bite to the neck tells the other, "I have your life in my hands. I am the dominant one here" and Tamlin's bite means no less. The next day, Feyre does not try to conceal the bruise on her neck, and she wants to show Tamlin and the court that she does not fear him. When Lucien questions Tamlin, he states he is not accountable for the consequence because Feyre did not listen to him. While Feyre is still trying to maintain that identity, she claimed as a young child, Tamlin fans the flames of the new woman he is cultivating within Feyre. Young Feyre made the promise to keep the family safe, she picked up the bow and arrow to go provide food, she learned how to hunt from the other male hunters, and

she is the one that brought back the food and money. At a young age, she willingly got her hands dirty so that her family's hands can stay clean. Feyre has to learn what it means to take care of the family at the sacrifice of her childhood.

Feyre's taking pleasure in femininity and even in wearing dresses demonstrates that she is rethinking the image of herself. Feyre has now taken the suggestions of wearing a dress to become more of a woman for Tamlin. "I had looked pretty. Feminine" (ACOTAR 202-203). Now Feyre is thinking more feminine, she is thinking of ways to make Tamlin happy, and unknowingly she is stroking his ego while letting him diminish hers. Another point is that in the beginning, Feyre is constantly making sure she keeps her room locked which is symbolic of keeping herself locked up away. By keeping herself and room locked up, she is keeping herself safe from any threats outside of herself. Now at this new point, she decides to no longer keep her bedroom locked which is a clever way Maas is showing the unique shift that is happening within Feyre. By doing this Feyre is showing that she is not scared of Tamlin or the faerie world that she is now living in. This shows that her desire for Tamlin is growing, and she is allowing him into her personal self. Tamlin's actions are a double-edged sword for Feyre's development. His presence asks Feyre the hard questions of who she wants to be and who she is going to be without her family. He is forcing Feyre to change because the identity she created is only a ghost of who she could be. We are now at a point where Maas begins to unveil how Feyre is being seen not only from her outlook but from those around her. Tamlin decides to strip away his glamour that he placed on everything and everyone in the manor now that Feyre is who he wants her to be. She is now allowed to view his world, and instead of being angry at Tamlin for keeping the world a secret from her, she accepts it. Tamlin has put it in her mind that everything he has done is for her, better or worse. This shows that Feyre is starting to fall for Tamlin



because she is giving his opinions more thought than she previously has. The bite is her punishment for not listening and the glamour of his world is for her safety. He is able to withhold information for her, and she accepts this because she is becoming more of his pet.

Feyre has gone through an interesting shift in character. At first, she is strong because she has to be. She has entered the man's world and thrown away femininity before even knowing what it is, yet she still holds the secret wish for being protected because she has never been protected since her mother's death. Tamlin steps in and strips away that strength and left her vulnerable so that he can feed his weakness with her strength. As their relationship begins to blossom, Feyre opens up more and more to Tamlin. When he sees her vulnerability, he does not scrape it away from her; rather, he solidifies it within her. When Feyre puts herself down, he does not try to strengthen her. Instead he allows her to think of herself negatively.

“I suppose it'll be easier if I'm gone,” I said, looking away from him. “Who wants someone around who's so covered in thorns?” “Thorns?” “Thorny. Prickly. Sour. Contrary.” He leaned forward and kissed me lightly. (ACOTAR 245)

The kiss is his approval of her mindset on herself. He does not try to persuade her otherwise. Earlier Rhysand comments that Feyre would be the one for Tamlin, but he is too late, and she is too stubborn. Rhysand and Tamlin grew up together and became High Lords at the same time, which would mean that Rhysand knows that Tamlin wants a female that is docile, soft-spoken, submissive. Rhysand could tell by a glimpse of Feyre's mind that she is anything but that. He knows that Tamlin could dress her up and scrub her of those characteristics, but they would never truly be gone because these Trials are still a part of her.

Tamlin makes Feyre become codependent on him. He took away her need to be independent and care for her family by having himself do it. That is one way that males found was a great way to control the female body. To reduce her to a child, a child depends on their

caretakers to keep them alive and healthy. Making the female body depend on the male for caretaking is a way to control her. Tamlin is denying Feyre's right to make decisions for herself. She is sent home for her safety, she is glamoured for her safety, and she is hidden from Rhysand for her safety. Tamlin made the choices for Feyre regarding her own safety, and when she insisted that she could do it herself, he told her to do it for him. When he is sending her home and she is begging to stay, he tells her that if she did love him, then she would leave for him. Tamlin knows that Feyre will do whatever it takes to him and save him, so when he reduces a request to her doing something on his behalf, the love Feyre has for Tamlin becomes his weapon. It is through that love that she eventually loses her mortal life. At the end of ACOTAR, the villainous Amarantha kills Feyre due to her love for Tamlin. Fortunately, the seven High Lords have the power to remake Feyre, but Rhysand is the one who keeps her tethered to the world a bit longer. After a task, she is left dying in a cell so Rhysand comes and bargains with her for his healing services. She gives him a bargain that in exchange she will spend one week in the Night Court with him every month for all her life.

That bargain with Rhysand acts as a life saver that Feyre attaches her spirit onto when she dies. This agreement helps her find her way back home to her body when the High Lords help her get remade. They each give her an ounce of their life which revives Feyre, but she is woken up with a new fae body. Not just any fae body though, Feyre is remade with a high fae body which is stronger and faster than a lesser fae and much more than a human. Because Feyre saves them from the curse of Amarantha, she is gifted a new name by the fae, Feyre Cursebreaker.

In ACOMAF, Feyre is struggling to find where she belongs in this new world and who she is now. Tamlin no longer lets Feyre have the freedom she so desperately wants, and when she fights back or argues all Tamlin has to say is do it for him, and Feyre relents. Her new

identity that Tamlin is creating is a submissive wife that allows him to protect her the way he sees fit. Feyre is only allowed the activities that are designed for women. Maas opens *ACOMAF* by showing that Feyre is now liberated to only two choices of how she is to live her day. She must either paint or wedding plan, and if she goes out to either activity, she has to have guards follow her for own safety. “There was nothing but wedding planning waiting for me in the house, since Alis refused to let me lift a finger to do anything. Not because of who I was to Tamlin, what I was about to become to Tamlin” (*ACOMAF* 12). She is now seen as Tamlin’s property, she is no longer Feyre Cursebreaker. The name that she is now given is Tamlin’s wife. Even though she has this new stronger body and even if she is the one that saved Tamlin, she is seen as someone fragile and easy to break. Everything Feyre does now reflects to Tamlin, and she is constantly reminded of that.

This is a reflection of how women are seen, the man’s property, and once married the woman no longer has an identity. Women stay home and care for what is the husband’s property: the home and children. Alva Myrdal and Viloa Klein, authors who study pre-modern women’s roles are like back before women have rights, state, “In the old days, women knew where they stood and their lives were spend in the care of their families. Their world was bounded by the walls of their homes” (Myrdal and Kien xii). In the old days, class and gender hierarchy matter, and women are more restricted than they are now. Being a woman, within that society, meant by birth she is going to be married and the family’s caretaker nothing more. At birth, she is bound to her father, and from a young age, a woman is expected to care for the house and younger siblings alongside her mother. At marriage, she is bound to her husband, producing children to further his lineage, and the caretaking of his home and children. Within that old society, women stay home

so that the men in their lives are able to go out and provide for them which was the natural gender role that was followed.

Feyre knows that it is not enough to have the honor of standing at the side of the High Lord as his wife, because the marriage means being subjected to be bound to his house and his estate. Her freedom is now limited, she no longer could go wherever she wants like she has in ACOTAR. Now in ACOMAF, she has to ask permission and even then, she has to have guards accompany her. Feyre would never be Tamlin's equal, "High Lords only take wives. Consorts. There has never been a High Lady" (ACOMAF 24). At first, Feyre is worried of becoming High Lady because Tamlin has asserted that she does not have the power to do so. However, there is still a portion of Feyre that wants to be High Lady and knows that she deserves it. Because she is trying to give Tamlin what she wants, she tries to nail that part of herself inside the coffin of who she used to be. Again, Feyre is sacrificing who she is to give others what they wish no matter if it is killing her to do it. Feyre that has become quiet and docile merely watches as her old self and Tamlin both try to take over her body. It is like watching two wolves fight over a carcass that they are both wanting for themselves. It is not until later in ACOMAF that Feyre begins to feed her wolf more strength in order to seize that body back from Tamlin. Tamlin follows the hierarchy of all those before him. His female stays home, stays docile, quiet, safe, and at his disposal. When Feyre tries rebuking the traditions, those around her press harder to make her understand. They are slowly working because Feyre begins to accept and be glad that she is not going to be Tamlin's equal. Through Tamlin and his court, Feyre begins to believe that she is too weak and too fragile to be his equal. She let that weakness Tamlin fought to grow consume her wholly.

A few days before the wedding ceremony, guests began arriving, and I was grateful that I'd never be High Lady, never be Tamlin's equal in responsibility

and power. A small, forgotten part of me roared and screamed at that, but....  
(ACOMAF 33)

Although Feyre is allowing herself, her true identity, to be forgotten, the fact that she is questioning herself at the same time shows that she is still thinking about it. Maas brings up how a part of Feyre is rebelling still and shouting at her to break free from this. This is the true Feyre, who is desperately trying to claw back out of this shell that Tamlin gives her. If Feyre were to continue to allow herself to be forgotten by nailing herself in that coffin, in time, the name she is born with, Feyre, would only be the name of what is Tamlin; it would always connect to Tamlin.

In the old days, when women married, they took the male's last name because they are his now. When the couple is introduced in a traditional way, the woman's name is not used because she takes on the husband's name. There is no need to keep her own name because she no longer exists as an individual. Monika Karpinska, who studies how modern women are controlled by males, writes, "Within the bonds of the marriage covenant and the walls the family home, early modern man seeks to contain his bride" (Karpinska 427). Marriage is one way the man in charge could keep his woman from straying, and it is also a way to ensure paternity of children. Marriage is a bargain in that women are willingly giving up their identity to the other party. Women give up their names to be branded and chained to the new name they are given by their male counterparts. After some back and forth, Feyre uneasily relents to Tamlin and his control. It is easier for Feyre to accept that she belongs to Tamlin and does not have to deal with any other hardships after everything she went through to become Feyre Cursebreaker left her traumatized. It is easier to become the weak after having to endure being the strong for so long. It is easier to become what Tamlin wants when Feyre is left so broken.

Rhysand takes Feyre away to his court, as agreed upon in their previous bargain, after she almost denies Tamlin in front of his court during the ceremony. Rhysand looks at Feyre and comments on her state of being, and this is a first instance where Rhysand helps Feyre see something that she is struggling to accept. ““You look exactly like the doe-eyed damsel he and that simpering priestess want you to be”” (ACOMAF 47). She is becoming what Tamlin wants and she allows it to happen. Consciously she accepts this image and identity of self while unconsciously she fights against it which only makes the figurative wound that she has within her psyche fester further. Feyre constantly reminds herself that she is broken, torn, and empty beyond repair, and with that, she does not know who she is any longer. She is not Feyre the mortal strong and brave the woman who broke the curse and hurled a bone shard at the dangerous Amarantha. She is Feyre an immortal with a mortal bleeding and broken heart with no old identity left to cling to. With her old identity fractured and not knowing how to fix the pieces, Feyre has desperately latched onto the identity Tamlin held in front of her.

Through the constant reinforcement that she is weak and bad things happen to those that disobey, Feyre turns meek. She allows Tamlin to cage the part of herself that is wild and hides the key away. She has learned that she cannot force her way and win without repercussions. When Rhysand takes her to his court in ACOMAF and points out this behavior, she shuts down instead of fighting back. When Rhysand returns Feyre from the week with him, she tries to convince Tamlin to let her train in order to become stronger Tamlin shuts her down instantly.

End of discussion. No room for debate. We stared each other down for a moment, and my stomach twisted. He was the High Lord—my High Lord. He was the shield and defender of his people. Of me. (ACOMAF 87)

Feyre has adopted the mindset that Tamlin is the ruler and absolute power because that is how it is presented over the three months leading up the cancelled wedding. Men are the rulers of the

house as that is their natural role within the relationship of men and women. While women are the caretakers, there is no need for them to learn how to defend themselves because they have men to do that. The aftermath of Amarantha left all courts weakened, and each High Lord must figure out a way to bring their courts back to strength. It is rebuilding parts of cities that are destroyed or going back to traditions to present a unified force. Feyre wants to help out her court and the fae that reside in it which only makes her more desperate to clutch onto anything or anyone that will do so. By recognizing the power that Tamlin holds not only over the court and its fae but also herself as now she is one of those fae within the court, she readily relents when he pushes back. By Feyre relenting Maas shows how Feyre is changing because of the environment she is residing in.

Feyre struggling to bend to the traditions makes the Spring court look weak which makes Tamlin look weak. There is the thought process on women within that society. Unruly women not bending to the social conformities of womanhood make the men look weak. Feyre is upsetting by becoming unyielding to conform to the old traditions that Tamlin's court expects of her. She wants to go out and help the townspeople when she should be at home wedding planning, and she wants to learn to fight when peace is now here. Feyre wants to help her people even if she is struggling to help herself out of her own trauma. Feyre undermines Tamlin once in public when she gives one of his subjects jewelry in order to pay for their—the water wraith's kingdom—taxes. Undermining Tamlin means that their court is weak even if Feyre did it to help the people of his court.

Tamlin's lips thinned. "Because you undermine the laws of this court when you behave like that. Because this is how things are done here, and when you hand that gluttonous faerie the money she needs, it makes me—it makes this entire court—look weak." (ACOTAR 94)

When Feyre acts in the best interest of the people that reside within court territory, Tamlin views it as overruling his authority. This is a big difference in how each male—Rhysand later and Tamlin—treats their relationship with Feyre. With Tamlin, she is always inferior and does not rule equally beside him. Instead, she is just another subject within the Spring Court. With Rhysand, she is equal to him and is able to rule his court equally with him. Tamlin’s marriage to Feyre is a way for him to contain this unruly woman and all the powers she has possessed. Karpinska says, “Through the institution of marriage, the natural virginal power of maidens is seemingly captured and contained: a woman is defined and positioned relative to her husband” (Karpinska 438). Without the marriage, Feyre is still free and not entirely contained to Tamlin. Strong female characters are often a headache for the men within their stories, and usually after the evil is dealt with, they bow to their roles. Feyre’s character is different in that she does not bow to her role nor the traditions that expect her to. To Feyre evil is never vanquished because she wants to deal with the root of the evil.

Within the inspirations of *The Ballad of Tam Lin*, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, we have strong feminine characters. These women go through trials and tribulations to save their Princes from the curse, but once the curse is done, they marry, and it is happily ever after. Despite the red flags each Prince give off as being manipulative, his anger equals love, and his woman needing to fall back into traditions, the women ignored them because of love. This teaches young women that these red flags are a sign of his love. She should accept his love and bend to his needs. If he buys her pretty things after he gets angry for defying him, then she needs to accept that gift because he is sorry. The women within these tales love their Princes despite their flaws and even accept their flaws, but the Princes want to change the women into who they want them to be. After these women fought and lifted the curse for the



Prince, they are expected to settle down and conform to the traditions now that the Prince is free. Maas flips these stories to show that you should not accept the red flags and that the abuse—whether mental, verbal, emotional, or physical—is not love. Within these stories, the women need the men to be complete, but Feyre has an identity outside of Tamlin. Feyre did not need Tamlin; she wants him by her side because even without him she is a complete individual outside of him. With Rhysand, her individuality is accepted and often praised because it helps further their progression in whatever situation they are in. Maas wants to show that ignoring the red flags within a relationship despite your love for him is not healthy for you.

But maybe those things had blinded me, too. Maybe they'd been a blanket over my eyes about the temper. The need for control, the need to protect that ran so deep he'd locked me up. Like a prisoner. (ACOMAF 296)

Tamlin ignores or refuses to acknowledge that Feyre is broken and needed help. He used her love for him as a weapon to blind Feyre. It is not that he could not see her wound/brokenness, it is because he did not want to see it. An emotional, mental, or spiritual wound is a lot like a physical wound; if it is left untreated it festers until it kills the host. Rhysand is a better partner for Feyre because he does not try to hide Feyre away from the rest of the world. He shows Feyre that she should be proud of herself even the broken bits. Rhysand works with Feyre to build herself up even if it is just listening to her vent about her internal or external issues. He does not control Feyre or do things for her because he knows that Feyre must deal with her issues by herself. Rhysand does not lock Feyre away alone to deal with them, though; he stands beside her and guides her but ultimately leaves everything up to her. Rhysand does not want to hinder Feyre by doing everything for her. Instead, he strengthens her by letting her do it herself.

It is known that knowledge equals powers, so, therefore, the lack of knowledge equals weakness. Feyre did not get taught the niceties and mannerisms of femininity. Feyre knows how

to read, enough to make her functional at least, but she does not know how to write. Her mother neglected that education to Feyre, and she did not hire a governess. Then when poverty struck, her sisters consider village school beneath them. The sisters knew how to read and write but left little Feyre with only the basic knowledge of reading. In the beginning of ACOTAR, Feyre takes the initiative to teach herself how to write. Tamlin is indifferent to her learning, more actively obstructing her intellectual growth. In ACOMAF, Rhysand encourages Feyre to learn to read better and write. The key differences are that Tamlin is already trying to diminish Feyre to the gender role he wants her to fill. While Rhysand is giving Feyre bricks to help her build herself up, he does not do it himself because who she wants to be should be ultimately up to Feyre herself.

Feyre is already in a higher position in which she does not need Tamlin to survive—she is brave, she is dominant, and she is outspoken—although she does not know this herself. If she were to gain the knowledge of reading very well and how to write, then that would leave no more room for him. Tamlin is trying to position her below him by scrubbing away the strength she does not know that she possesses. The more Tamlin got to know Feyre in ACOTAR, he realizes that Feyre did not know that she is strong, nor did she think very well of herself. Tamlin uses the time that he spends with Feyre trying to find her weaknesses and exploit them while Rhysand uses the limited time he has to strengthen her. Feyre possesses the lack of knowledge about herself which makes her weak in spirit which left it all the easier for Tamlin to diminish who she is. Adding Feyre's lack of knowledge of femininity and of herself, it becomes easy for Tamlin to worm his way in and tell her how she is supposed to act as a lady and wife to the court. Feyre is still malleable especially after the trauma she endures Under the Mountain which makes it easy for outside influences to make a difference in the person that Feyre is becoming.

At the beginning of ACOMAF, Feyre struggles with nightmares of her torment and traumatization with waking up in a panic and throwing up. She spent all those times alone and comforting herself by repeating the word real until the panic left her. Tamlin never wakes up when Feyre wakes up with panic from her nightmare and scrambling to make it to the toilet. It would be ignorant to think that Tamlin did not hear Feyre get up with his insane need to protect and fae senses. Tamlin takes the approach as Feyre and Lucien did with the Bogge as long as you refuse to acknowledge it then it cannot harm you. Acknowledging Feyre's emotional and mental wounds and brokenness to Tamlin would be as close to a death sentence during his rebuilding process after Under the Mountain. He wants to present a unified, obedient, and strong front to the other High Lords. Tamlin seems to think that if he acknowledges that Feyre is broken, then he is still weak. They both resort to playing make-believe, they pretended that Feyre was still, mentally, healthy and they were happy in love. The venom of Tamlin's word started to spread through Feyre's mind believing that anything she did outside of his approval would send a bad message. "Not when his words weren't far from the truth. The day I put on my pants and tunics, the day I strapped weapons to myself like fine jewelry, it would send a message far and clear across the lands" (ACOMAF 12). If Feyre continues to be strong and embody Feyre, the Cursebreaker, instead of Feyre, Tamlin's wife, that would send a message undermining Tamlin's authority in his court and among all the fae.

In ACOMAF when Feyre makes the choice to run away from Tamlin and his control, she is still seen as Tamlin's property. When Rhysand and Feyre visit the Summer Court, Tarquin's sister voices this, "To know we are not harboring a stolen bride—and that we need not bother returning her to her master, as the law demands" (ACOMAF 315). To everyone besides part of the Night Court, Feyre has become Tamlin's property/subject and he is her master/keeper. Her

runaway is seen as a little temper tantrum instead of being a solution to a problem. All of her rebellious tendencies are no longer seen as great attributes like they were when she was completing tasks to save them from the curse. Feyre Cursebreaker is now a hindrance to their traditions, and they can tolerate it no longer. Her strength is now a weakness or a break in the link within their traditions. When she is within the Spring Court, Tamlin seeks to remove that weakness through any means necessary. Even if it means killing her identity along the way, that is why Alis refuses to allow Feyre to lift a finger. It is through Tamlin's command that Lucien allowed Feyre to waste away and refused to help Feyre even though she desperately is crying out for it. The guards that follow Feyre around are not only for Feyre's protection but to make sure that Feyre does not do anything out of line, violating what Tamlin allows. The guards became the bars while the estate became the cage, and Tamlin holds the key.

## CHAPTER III

### FEYRE REDEFINES GENDER IDENTITY

Feyre has sacrificed everything for those that she cares for even at the expense of her own spirit. She has died and been remade for Tamlin and all of Prythian to get back their rightful powers. Tamlin, then, uses those powers to try and shove her back in the box of her gender role. Tamlin and his court are herding Feyre back into her place as a wife and woman at all costs in sake of tradition even if it means he has to break her spirit and tame her. Rhysand's intervention is the only element that keeps Tamlin from succeeding further. Rhysand whisks Feyre away and helps guide her back to finding out who exactly she is and where she fits. Maas explores the ambiguity of how Feyre is strong in her gender identity but still has males help to reform her. In this chapter, I will analyze how even a flawed male can have an impact in a positive way and how a positive male can help guide one to finding oneself. I will now be following the rest of Feyre's journey from the reshaping of her gender identity to how she becomes the first ever High Lady. The progress Feyre makes on reshaping her identity helps her become confident that she is able to help and lead others in her role as High Lady.

#### **The Redefining of Feyre's Gender Identity**

In ACOTAR, Feyre is sent home by Tamlin following the threat of Amarantha finding out about Feyre. Nesta reminds Feyre who she really is; she is not who Tamlin dresses her up to be; she is so much more. It is through Nesta that Feyre realizes that she does not want to be a part

of the social circles that everyone is in. This is the first instance before her death that Feyre voices that she does not want to follow the gender traditions, nor does she want to follow the social traditions. Feyre goes back to Prythian to face whatever danger lies ahead not only for herself, but also for the world she now calls her own. Once she makes it to Tamlin's estate, she finds it empty but for the handmaiden, Alis, who once cared for her. Feyre learns that Tamlin was called away by Amarantha for failing to break the curse that she put on him. Feyre resolves herself and sets forward to finding Tamlin and breaking his curse.

This is also another point where ACOTAR draws from *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*. Within the story the Lassie did not break the curse for the White Bear. He has to go off to marry a Princess in a faraway land. The Lassie follows the Prince to go break his curse so that she and he can marry. In the other inspiration, *The Ballad of Tam-Lin*, a mortal girl, Janet, falls in love with a knight named Tam-Lin who then gets her pregnant. Then in order to keep Tam-Lin with her and the unborn babe, Janet must do a task to break his curse. ACOTAR takes a bit of each inspiration and warps them to fit the world built by Maas. From *Beauty and The Beast*, Feyre must tell Tamlin she loves him and mean it to break the curse like Belle must do with the Beast. From *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*, and *The Ballad of Tam-Lin*, Feyre must attempt tasks set forth by Amarantha who curses Tamlin and successfully win them to break the curse and have Tamlin as her own. Feyre has to prove to Amarantha that although she once hated fae-kind, she grew from that, saw past the masks of the fae, and loves Tamlin. In proving that love for him, Feyre tore herself apart body and mind while Tamlin sat next to Amarantha watching. While Rhysand, constrained as he is from Amarantha, continues to try and help Feyre out even at the end he decides to take action and kill Amarantha while Feyre is getting beaten. He heals her wounds, keeps her mentality from breaking, and tries to save her from being destroyed. Even

once Feyre is dead, Rhysand pulls on the thread of his bargain with her in order to keep her soul holding on a bit longer to this world. He then goes to each and every High Lord's mind convincing each to give a shard of their life to remake Feyre for the sacrifice that she has endured on their behalf.

Throughout ACOMAF, Feyre struggles to heal herself and reshape the person she wants to be. As time progresses, there comes a point where Tamlin locks Feyre inside the manor and refuses to let her out. It is then that Rhysand sets Mor to break Feyre free and bring her back to the Night Court. As the days pass, Feyre begins to slowly heal herself even though she is led to believe from Tamlin that she needs him to survive. "Some small part of me whispered that I could survive Amarantha; I could survive leaving Tamlin; I could survive transitioning into this new, strange body..." (ACOMAF 151). Strange new body can be referenced as the new person that Feyre is becoming without the need to protect her family. Feyre's whole life was based on protecting and providing for her family. Feyre is now limited to complying with Tamlin's expectations, so she has no room for her own independence or needs. Rhysand allows her to be herself and have time for herself. With that time Feyre is learning that the person she is becoming could not be the person Tamlin wants her to be. She realizes that Tamlin knew, maybe not consciously, that she was once a lonely and hopeless person. Tamlin knew that he would be able to mold her into the doting, docile, submissive wife that he wants her to be. Feyre would have accepted this position and role if not for that fighting spirit sleeping within her and Rhysand prodding that beast awake. This new body is gifted to Feyre by the High Lords after her death in her mortal body. When she is brought back, she gets remade with a fae body which is stronger, faster, more beautiful than any mortal body. By having an immortal body, she is now granted a longer life span, and she can withstand much more damage physically than she could previously.

Although Feyre's body has a beautiful appearance to other people, when she sees herself in a reflection, she perceives internal dirtiness of her soul. Her first nightmare in *ACOMAF*, Feyre is back at task three but instead of stabbing Tamlin she has to stab herself. The version she sees in that dream is how she perceives her soul and the dirtiness that sticks to it. Recognizing herself within the nightmare, Feyre reflects on how she "knew the hollowness, the despair, the corruption that leaked from that face" (*ACOMAF* 2). Feyre only sees how tainted she has become, and with that she forgets how strong she truly is. She sees herself as corrupted and feels that corruption is leaking out from her and staining whatever she is in contact with. Maas uses Feyre's metaphorical wound as a mirror on how Feyre sees herself. If her heart is fractured and wounded, then the rest of herself is as well.

With her new body, Feyre has also inherits powers from all the seven High Lords and is struggling to master them. Tamlin fights to keep them hidden even if it is driving her insane to not know how to master those abilities. These abilities can be seen as attributes that the unruly woman obtains when she spends her time within the masculine sphere. For example, her ability to shapeshift is her ability to shift from one sphere to the other. Fire is her ambition and passion to achieve goals that she has. Tamlin equals old traditions which means that if an unruly woman is tamed then by tradition those attributes must be hidden away as if some stolen treasure. Learning to control them means that Feyre could master the attributes that she obtained within the masculine sphere and wield them at her own discretion. Mastering those abilities would put Feyre back into the sphere of an unruly woman because she would no longer need to be submissive, docile, and soft-spoken. She would be able to become strong and hold her own against those around her; she would not need protecting. The unruly female is a threat to males because women would have no use for the men if the women were now the ones in control.



Tamlin tells Feyre that she does not need to train because then it would draw too much attention. By steering Feyre away from the thought of training or even showing her powers, Tamlin is trying to leave her vulnerable. This is also a mirror to the outside real-world society as many times women are steered away from what they desire that is considered to be a man's responsibility especially within the workplace. Even when women have what they desire the men undermine their authority within that very subject. Whatever work is associated with women is devalued and underpaid. A woman usually is not accepted at the top of a hierarchy.

As discussed earlier, Feyre's lack of knowledge left her weak, and Tamlin is using that against her, but Rhysand encourages Feyre to correct that lack of knowledge. He wants her to read, to shield her mind, to learn to fight, and to master the powers she inherited from the High Lords. Rhysand did not want Feyre to be weak, and he did not like the fact that the Spring Court made Feyre believe she was. All Feyre's life she had someone telling her she was inadequate, and that often led to Feyre wandering around picking up the little pieces of who she is until Rhysand offers her a guiding hand. With the help and guiding hand of Rhysand and Tamlin's oppressive force, Maas is showing that one's strength in identity is not a journey that can be done alone. Jean Lipman-Blumen studies how ideology helps shape women and the lives they live: "These powerful systems of beliefs, which shape the destiny of women in ways never imagined by Freud, are transmitted implicitly rather than explicitly; they usually guide the behavior of women silently and without their being consciously aware of it" (Lipman-Blumen 34). While this is a dated idea, it seems to stay true through the ages. Modern women are often guided by ideologies of those around them whether they are conscious of it or not. The two opposing ideologies of each male help Feyre shape her identity and how she wants to live her life.

Everybody gains something from those around them in helping them cultivate their identity. Rhysand knows that Feyre is within a higher position and wants to help her realize that she can stand on her own. Feyre learning how to shield her mind from mental assaults can be seen as learning how not to let those around her negatively influence her. In the past, Feyre would let those around her influence her which led her to become unstable in her own judgement of self. By shielding her mind, Feyre is in charge on who affects her and how they affect her both positively and negatively. Spending time in a place like the Night Court, Feyre takes advantage of her privileges to be who she is even if she is broken, damaged, and still healing. With those moments, Feyre is taking steps in being able to find what she likes, does not like, wants, and does not want. When she arrives back in the Spring Court, she begins to assert herself slowly. During the Tithe, Feyre tells Tamlin that they did not need to have the Tithe because they have no real need for the things that they were given. She tells Tamlin that if the people did not have the payment at that moment, no amount of extra days will make a difference. Tamlin tells her it is tradition, and she will obey it, and someday their son will too which prompts Feyre to storm out. Although Feyre does not use her words to disobey his demand of silence on the matter, she does use her action of pulling her hand away and storming out of the throne room. Actions speak louder than words and, in this moment, Feyre is standing up to Tamlin through her actions. Then Feyre does it again when she gives the water wraith her jewelry in order to pay the tithe to Tamlin.

Feyre is beginning to speak her mind and tell Tamlin what she wants, likes, and does not like. Later, when Tamlin and Lucien are leaving on a secret mission without Feyre, she tells him she needs a purpose. She left begging behind after it fails her and for the first time in a long while she demands something from Tamlin. "I want to do something" (ACOMAF 122). It is

after this declaration that Feyre takes another big step and realizes that the girl she used to be, the girl that Tamlin wants died when mortal Feyre died protecting him. Maas shows this by revealing what Feyre is thinking, that the part of herself that has woken back up and transformed she would no longer, could no longer, wield that portion of herself to Tamlin. Unconsciously, Feyre accepts that she could not be able to yield to Tamlin any longer and it is the first line of identity that she shapes. “I was not the human girl who needed coddling and pampering, who wanted luxury and easiness. I didn’t know how to go back to craving those things. To being docile” (ACOMAF 122). This is a pivotal moment in Feyre reshaping her identity as this is the very first instance that she realizes in shock that Tamlin does everything for himself. He does not let her train not for her safety but his own, he does not let her heal because it will make her stronger, he does not let her do so many things because it is for his own comfort.

Spending time with Rhysand and his inner circle helps her to see through the fog that Tamlin encases around her mind. Rhysand’s inner circle comprises of Mor, Amren, Cassian, and Azriel who are crucial members that help Rhysand and eventually Feyre. Amren is Rhysand’s second in command and she, like Feyre, is someone who was Made. She once was a creature that was there before the fae and then got Made. Her body is more of a shell containing the true terrifying essence of the creature that she is. Amren helps Feyre by being blunt to her and not letting her get away with anything that Feyre tends to exhibit due to Tamlin’s brainwashing. Cassian helps Feyre deal with her issues through physical training. Cassian is an Illyrian and Rhysand’s General Commander in Rhysand’s Night Court army. It is his job to train the warriors in order to get them ready for any situations. Cassian helps Feyre learn how to fight and train her body to deal with any situation that may or may not pop up. These trainings enable Feyre to use physical work to deal with her mental and emotional wounds. Azriel is Rhysand’s spymaster and

shadowsinger, a power that grants him to be able to see and hear things others cannot and melt into shadows and control the shadows. Azriel helps Feyre learn how to fly, and by his teaching, Feyre is able to learn how to let go of the past. He teaches that the past can be a grave or a steppingstone. Rhysand and his inner circle that are able to teach Feyre how to deal with her trauma and how to work through it with various methods.

Furthermore, Feyre's realization about Tamlin's points to the truth that the things Tamlin has done protecting and controlling Feyre were more of his benefit than for hers. "I realized the stupidity of them. The stupidity of—of what had been shoved down my throat these past few months" (ACOMAF 177). This moment is important because she is constantly getting that reinforcement of Tamlin denying her her own identity. She is given no choice but to allow them to fill her with this new person that they create for her, but with Rhysand he gives her the choices in becoming who she wants to become. As the days pass by, Feyre explores her identity even if it spells trouble. Feyre is relearning that she does not need to ask permission to be herself, and she is so much stronger than Tamlin leads her to believe. When she recites "docile, unthreatening, tame," she is reminding herself that she is none of that. She is dominant, she is a threat, and she is wild; Feyre does not fit the normal category of submissive woman. When Tamlin is reshaping Feyre, she uses those same words as a reminder of what she now believes herself to be. Tamlin is attempting to reshape Feyre by showing her rewards when she does something that he wants. For example: He rewards Feyre's submissive behavior with some small freedom of being able to roam around, but not enough freedom to wander around without bodyguards. Then he punishes Feyre when she begins to assert herself by making her feel as though she is being selfish. It then reduces her back to the submissive person he wants. For example: When Feyre gives the water

wraith the jewelry to pay for the Tithe, he tells Feyre that she is making the court and him look weak. It is hours later that Feyre feels as though she is at fault and goes to apologize to Tamlin.

Now Feyre uses the characteristics that define her journey— “I was a survivor”—as a way to keep strong and to heal herself. She uses this to help her get past those barriers, not only ones she built, but also the ones that Tamlin has built for her. In the second book, she is able to master her panic of not being enough through this realization of her strength. Rhysand, Feyre, and his inner circle believe that because Feyre has the powers of all seven High Lords that she is able to find sacred objects of theirs. “Since these objects are spelled to the individual High Lords, and can only be found by them—through their power” (ACOMAF 207). Feyre can find them because the objects will mistake her for their individual High Lord because of that shared power. To test this, Rhysand has Feyre go to The Weaver who is a female witch and find his mother’s ring. The Weaver is blind, but all her other senses make up for it and if you are caught in her home, she slowly tortures you and kills you. To find the ring, Feyre has to sense an object that has Rhysand’s power attached to it. Because Feyre has a droplet of Rhysand’s power, she is able to sense the object by letting out a bit of his power within her, like calls to like. There is a point that Feyre is trapped within a chimney with The Weaver trying to kill her, and she begins to panic because she could not find a way out. Maas uses this ideology to show Feyre’s mental state turning point because Feyre’s mental state is stuck with panic and traditions that are creeping up threatening to kill her. If Feyre stayed the way she was in the past, there is no doubt that those enforcing traditions would have caught up to her. They would kill the strong Feyre and enforce her to be the person that they wanted her to be. It was Feyre’s inner voice, the same inner voice that defied Tamlin’s order, that helped her break free.

*Stop.*

The word came out of the darkness of my mind.

And the voice was my own.  
*Stop*, it said—I said. (ACOMAF 225)

The part of Feyre that is strong, dominant, and free demands Feyre to remember who she is and to stop allowing the traditions to cripple her. It is then that Feyre is able to see past the love that Tamlin is giving her and see that he uses it to keep her caged in. Feyre again reminds herself that Tamlin gives her everything so that in the end he can get what he wants. When that happens, he stops trying to present the love he gave her before she broke the curse. He now has all his powers returned to him and he has Feyre groomed to be the perfect wife for him—or so he thought—and gives up on working for Feyre. He gives up courting Feyre and showing his love through words and actions. Instead he now shows his love with materialistic aspects such as buying her feminine dresses, jewelry, painting supplies. He now rewards Feyre's submissive nature and punishes her dominant nature.

Feyre realizes she needs to be free to choose with no limitations attached. Feyre wants more than having to make that choice once, she wants to be able to make that choice for all her life. She wants power, activity, and a role to play in the fae world—the world she fights and wins for. She does not want to settle to be someone's plaything. Feyre has more abilities than that and she demands more. Through training Feyre is able to work through and with the broken parts and the figurative emotional and mental wound; she is able to confront the anger that she allows to fester. This is one of the key moments for Feyre. She sees her vulnerability and voices it aloud. When Cassian asks her when she is going to talk about the situation with Tamlin, that is when she first voices her pain and anger. She believes that the lives that she killed—the two faeries during the third Trail—are worth more than her life and in the process of killing them she was killing herself. She has to confront what is making her wound fester and deal with it on her own.

She has to take out the infection by examination and when she finds the thorn, she and only herself has to pluck it.

I had done everything—everything for that love. I had ripped myself to shreds, I had killed innocents and debased myself, and he had sat beside Amarantha on that throne. And he couldn't do anything, hadn't risked it— (ACOMAF 296)

Without Tamlin constantly blinding her and the court constant smothering she has time to reflect and realize why she is broken. She confronts the darkness that encases her and decides that that is not what she wants. She does not want to be smothered, coddled, or protected. She wants the freedom to choose, and she knows she is no longer in love with Tamlin. In the Night Court, Feyre gets her freedom and is able to heal herself. With Tamlin, Feyre is stripped of all her freedoms by having no choice not only in the dealings within the place she calls home, but also her own body. There are rare occasions that Tamlin gives her a choice almost as if he is presenting her a gift. Tamlin allows Feyre very limited choices but it is never with the big things. He allows her to plan the wedding, but she cannot rule with him with the Tithe and merely has to sit and watch. The limitation leads to be unable to heal truly from all the suffering she deals with, but in the Night Court she is able to heal because she has a choice. She is presented options of choice, not as a gift, but because it is her “own gods-given *right*” (ACOWAR 170).

Feyre's many experiences help her learn that she wants to be able to hold her own rather than being a pawn. She wants to have the freedom to be whoever she wishes and not be a pet who learns to obey commands. Feyre is slowly learning the extent of her powers and how they can be of use for her. She learns that the darkness does not always have to be painful or full of suffering. She learns how to shield her mind and the cost of being able to trespass within other people's minds. Although Feyre is taught how to harness her powers, she first needs to believe that she can harness those powers. Feyre learns in the Night Court that she must first believe in

herself before others can believe in her. Rhysand takes Feyre to a Prison, where beasts and creatures from before the fae are kept and locked up, she does not believe in her ability. Amren, Rhysand's second in command, gives Feyre an amulet of protection, and it is not until later that Armen reveals it is not magical but is a personal emblem and a way to help Feyre feel empowered. In that moment, Armen showed Feyre that she got out through her own power. It is through this constant reinforcement from others, but mostly herself that Feyre is able to grasp who she is, who she wants to be, and where she fits within her new world. Tamlin sends Lucien and some sentinels to capture Feyre and bring her back. Feyre shows Lucien and the sentinels that she is no longer the person Tamlin made her into and she will no longer be that person. "I was not the High Lord's pet any longer. And maybe the world should learn that I did indeed have fangs" (ACOMAF 459). Not only does Feyre think that internally, but she also uses Tamlin's title rather than his name, thus saying she will not accept being like a pet when she is an equal. She will stand on her own and now bow to anyone.

Feyre continues to learn how to fight, control her powers, and figure out her place within the Prythian courts. It is later revealed that Rhysand is Feyre's fated mate. Although Feyre is quite shocked by the news, she works through the issue alone in a cabin, and after some much-needed self-deliberation she accepts the mate bond. She learns that she does not have to bow to Rhysand, she is not his pet, but that she is his equal. After the fight with the King and Tamlin, it is revealed only to Rhysand's circle that Rhysand has made Feyre his High Lady. Rhysand decides to let Feyre figure out when and where she would declare herself as High Lady, but in order to stop his friends risking their lives he lets them in on that secret.

"Not consort, not wife. Feyre is High Lady of the Night Court." My equal in every way; she would wear my crown, sit on a throne beside mine. Never sidelined, never designated to breeding and parties and child-rearing. My queen. (ACOMAF 621)



Feyre does not belong to Rhysand in a way that demands she forfeit her identity for his. She belongs to herself, but also has duties to people she intends to protect. As High Lady Feyre paves a new path for herself and the women in Prythian. Maas has chosen to do this to shed light on the concept that women can have their own identity as a woman but still be able to have a romantic partner without forfeiting themselves. Feyre did not have to submit to the court; rather they have to submit to her and her own powers. Maas shows through Feyre's character transformation both that men, even toxic men, can be part of women's process of finding identity and also that the friendship of other women can strengthen women. Although Feyre is declared High Lady, she is not done healing. Nor is she done trying to figure out her placement within her circle of friends and the court as Feyre herself and High Lady. Not only does Feyre have to figure out her placement as a High Lady, since she is one of the first, but she also has to figure out how to wield her new power as a High Lady.

### **High Lady Feyre of The Night Court**

At the start of the third book, *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (ACOWAR), High Lady Feyre has tricked Tamlin into believing she was under Rhysand's spell, broken free of it, and is now back at the Spring Court like a fox in a hen house. Feyre is undercover trying to figure out Tamlin's role in this new war with the King of Hybern and how she can protect all of Prythian and the Mortal Lands from them. Feyre uses her newfound strength in her identity to work around Tamlin. Within the first few pages, Maas does a remarkable job in showcasing how smothered Feyre was in the Spring Court and how damaging it was to Feyre.

But it was the vines—the thorns—that had made it unlivable. My old bedroom had been overrun with them. They'd curved and slithered over the walls, entwined themselves amongst the debris. As if they'd crawled off the trellises beneath my window, as if a hundred years had passed and not months.

That bedroom was now a tomb. (ACOWAR 11)

Feyre unable to return to her old bedroom shows that Feyre would and could not return to the person she used to be with Tamlin. The thorns are Tamlin's oppression and old traditions that made it unlivable for Feyre to thrive as a person. Men who are unable to release traditions make life unlivable and miserable to women who will not follow the traditions.

Furthermore, Feyre uses the person Tamlin wants her to be as a weapon against Tamlin. He praised her for being dependent on him, and now she uses her old dependent self as a reward to Tamlin. Feyre is willing to play a role which is "ever the lady of the house that these people, that Tamlin, had once expected me to gladly embrace" (ACOWAR 21). She is showing Tamlin that she could be the person he wants her to be as long as he behaves the way she wants him to. Tamlin now has to become dependent on Feyre in order to keep her, and once again the roles have switched slightly. Tamlin still believes he is the male in charge, but he has to act a certain way in order to keep Feyre. He does not keep her contained any longer for fear that she will take flight again. Instead of Feyre bowing to his every whim and need, it is Tamlin who has to now bow to Feyre's whims. When she offers to show the wall with King of Hybern's lackeys with Lucien, she does it to test Tamlin. He does not object and lets them go even without guards for Feyre. Feyre uses this new strength in identity to make demands rather than ask for permission, and she does it with Lucien. When he says that the second breach in the wall is days away, Feyre simply says they will plan another excursion and does not wait for approval.

After escaping the Spring Court, again, Feyre helps Rhysand and their circle prepare for the upcoming war with the King of Hybern. Feyre hates to be used as a pawn in anybody's game, but she also hates to use anyone else in that way as well. When it comes to a point that her sisters with Feyre might have what it takes to stop the King, Feyre does not demand her sisters to help.

She gives them a choice to help only if they want to. She did not present the choice as a gift, but rather having the sisters exercise their right of choice in that matter. She gives the right of choice to everyone she encounters while advising them why they should help, but never forcing them or guilt-tripping them to help. When Feyre declares herself High Lady at the war meeting with the other courts asking them for help, she does not carry the figurative mask of a High Lady. She goes to the meeting as open and asks Rhysand to do the same. She does not wear the mask of a High Lady, she does not wear the mask of being Feyre Cursebreaker, nor does she wear the mask of being mortal Feyre. She goes as Feyre the individual, and she encourages Rhysand to take off his figurative masks and present himself as the individual that he is. She wants to create a world that is united, and the first way she sees how to do it is to take off the masks.

Once the war is won, Feyre sets it upon herself as High Lady to discuss another important topic: the renegotiating of the Treaty between the courts themselves and the human world. Feyre decides to truly show who she is without any masks by telling the whole story—the good, the bad, and the ugly—to the High Lords, allies that were made, and friends. The shared stories from Feyre and the allies show that humans and fae can indeed live peacefully. Feyre knows that if they want to continue and thrive, they have to become a world that is connected rather than divided. Even when the meeting went bad and territories were redrawn, and there is talk of a new wall, Feyre is willing to continue to fight for that peace she envisions for the world. She knows that this new peace and new world that she sees is going to be long and difficult, but she knows that it is not impossible. Feyre's impact on the world is tremendous in the fact that she helps bring about peace instead of constant war. Without her, it really could have not happened. Her internal character change is crucial to an external impact on her society and the world in which

she becomes a leader. Feyre's destiny is not to be only part of one family but of the world—while still having a family and relationship too.

Maas has created Feyre to be a dynamic character within a very static world who seeks out to make the world more dynamic. Feyre has undergone many challenges that made her question the very identity of who she is and the world around her. Maas has created Feyre to become a character who fights not only for herself but also those around her. Not only does Feyre fight for others and the world around her, but she also wins for them too. Feyre encompasses the very nature of a progressive feminist character. Feyre's character voices against the inequality of people and then showcases the breakdown of gender roles and the inequalities that exhibit within those gender roles. Maas has shown that although Feyre lives within a world that follows the class hierarchy and the gender hierarchy that it should be changed. Feyre's character breaks these walls down by first becoming the male of the house by protecting and providing for her family. Then within the fae world, she does not fully integrate into the tame and docile wife and goes to fight for Tamlin. Feyre does not stay at home like Tamlin wishes her to do. She does not cower to the power at hand, Amarantha, and instead challenges it. Through her win, she dies and comes back immortal. Although she begins to transform into the docile wife, she rebels through minor acts and talk. She lets Tamlin know of her displeasure at being kept within the household and kept quiet in times she feels as she needs to speak out to help her people.

Maas shows the effects of that fire of the strong woman being doused by old traditions and the effects it has on those around in and within it. She also shows that the strength to reform your identity can be found through the help of others even if it is a male that helps. Feyre's character also shows who can be a strong woman that is confident in her identity and struggles to

find your placement within the world. Feyre struggles how to balance the power of being High Lady amongst friends and family. Feyre breaks down the gender dynamics by becoming the first High Lady in existence in Prythian. Maas also shows that the world is not so black and white; that class lines and gender lines are at the very best blurry in relation to society. Feyre's journey through the human and fae worlds shows that humans and fae are more alike than it is believed to be. The fae world is just as class and gender complicated as the human world that lives right below them. Maas shows this through the wish that Tarquin, the High Lord of Summer Court, voices how inequality in the fae world could disappear.

“Perhaps. But mostly eliminate the inherent privileges of High Fae over the lesser faeries. Even the terms imply a level of unfairness. Maybe it is more like the human realm than you realize, not as blurred as it might seem.” (ACOMAF 323)

Tarquin does not let his wishes be known to Rhysand nor to his sisters but rather to Feyre because he knows that she is fighting for a change. He seeks her counsel because he knows that she will be able to help in some way.

Maas uses the paranormal romance genre to show that social change is compatible with romantic choices for a woman protagonist. Feyre's struggle with finding the right romantic partner is the bread and butter which furthers the gender hierarchy dynamics. Maas uses the romance within the story to show that finding the right partner is messy at times. The series also shows that the first person one falls in love with is not necessarily the one person one has to spend one's whole life with. Maybe Tamlin did have some good for her at the time but was not the one she is destined to stay with. Looking and exploring the romance does not make Feyre any less of a progressive feminist. Tamlin helps Feyre realize the boundaries she has within herself and for those around her. He also takes away Feyre's figurative bonds so that way she can find her true identity without any chains binding her to one aspect. It is then that Feyre has to ask the

hard questions of who she is and who she wants to be. She also has to face herself many times throughout the series and continue to question herself.

Furthermore, Maas has shown the readers this when Feyre had to get the Ouroboros mirror, a mirror who shows the inner self and can make one go insane. “There was one mirror—the Ouroboros, she called it. It was old even when we were young. A window to the world. All could be seen, all could be told through its dark surface” (ACOWAR 241). The mirror forces that person to look at themselves and see who they truly are, every bit of despicable and unholy person that they are. Many are terrified of the creature they see, not realizing it is themselves, and many are broken by the small weak creature they find in their place. At first Feyre sees a beast that makes her cower, rage, weep, vomit, and tremble as she has to face the creature of herself. In the end, she accepts it—accepts herself—for who she is. “‘And what I saw,’ I said quietly to him as the Carver raised a hand. ‘I think—I think I loved it. Forgave it—me. All of it’” (ACOWAR 618). She is able to learn the only person capable of breaking her is herself, and she even has to forgive herself for all the deeds she has done.

Maas uses this ideology to teach a lesson for the readers that they are only as strong as they allow themselves to be. When Feyre looks into the mirror she sees a creature which is the person she truly is. The creature is an embodiment of the self that lives within her. The order which Feyre gives the creature is the order of Feyre’s transformation as a person. She names the aspects of creature in such a way that gives an insight to how she matured over time. “the creature inside of myself, the creature full of hate and regret and love and sacrifice” (ACOFAS 185) is how she started off within the series of ACOTAR. And then she states the progression of the creature, “The creature that could be cruel and brave, sorrowful and joyous” (ACOFAS 185) and that is how her story ends joyous. Of course, Feyre is still all of those things but once she is

able to accept that raw creature of herself then she can tame it and use it for the betterment of herself and her people.

Above all, through the transformation that Feyre endures there is one thing that Feyre does not lose. Feyre from the very beginning always sought to protect the weak even at the cost of her own life. In her mortal life, she protects her sisters and father from starvation and remains beside a dying faerie so he is not alone. She also fights for Tamlin and his people's powers against the evil Amarantha. In *ACOMAF*, with her new fae life she fights Tamlin on the Tithe, and she silently urges for Lucien to stand up to Tamlin. Then she fights for her new court's people against a small battle from the King of Hybern. She again, but now within her immortal life fights for her sisters when the King of Hybern seeks to get them remade like Feyre. Finally, in *ACOWAF*, she leaves her court—the Night Court—to spy on the Spring Court and their bargain with the King of Hybern for their survival. When the two lackeys, Brannagh and Dagdan, try to convince some mortals to stay so they could eat them, Feyre protects the mortals against them. The attributes that made Feyre weak once now are her strength. Her kindness and compassion for equality make potential foes into friends. The water wraith later helps Feyre although she had asked for nothing in return when she gave the wraith the jewelry for the Tithe. The Suriel she captures time and time again helps Feyre in the end when she is almost captured by the King's followers. The Suriel wants to help Feyre because of her kindness and bravery, but mostly for the kindness that she offers it time and time again. The Suriel uses himself as bait to give Feyre more time to run away. Feyre seeks to bring equality to those that are treated with inequality and harbors a strong resentment to those that carry out the inequality.

In addition, Feyre fights for the people within Tamlin's court even though Tamlin's court traditions stifled her. She does not put Tamlin's faults towards the people he rules over because

they are, as she saw during Tithe, just as subjected to his traditions as she was. The people suffered from Amarantha just like Feyre did and then suffer under Tamlin's need to be seen as strong in expense to his people's wellbeing. "I had no quarrel with the people of these lands, who had suffered alongside the rest. None" (ACOWAR 44). When Tamlin seeks to punish a guard, Feyre rises up to hear his side of the story and try to spare him the consequences. Tamlin's need for control wins, and the guard is punished with 21 lashes. After the lashes, Feyre stays behind and helps tend to the wounds and apologizes for them. The guards begin to feel awful for not protecting Feyre when Tamlin was stifling her and they begin to protect her. They protect her as Feyre the individual and no longer protect her for the sake of Tamlin. Feyre did not cast her hatred of Tamlin towards his people unlike Tamlin did with Rhysand. Feyre shows that fighting to fix the inequality within the world is not easy. She stands up against Tamlin when he yells at Lucien for his disobedience, she stands up for the guard, and eventually his people begin to look at Feyre with genuine love. Feyre knows that she is only going to be there temporarily, but that does not mean she is going to allow Tamlin's people to suffer. She is going to use that time to not only help her court but to also help the Spring court.

Furthermore, Feyre has a genuine need to help out her people with any emotional and mental trauma that they have. For a long time, Feyre paints to help process the emotional wounds. As a mortal, Feyre paints as a way to heal herself from any stress or anxiety that may be going on. She paints at her old house, she paints in the beginning with Tamlin, but after Amarantha she could not paint anymore. Feyre attributes her lack of ability to paint to the death of her mortal body, but it is actually caused by the constant smothering by Tamlin and his restrictive traditions. The lack of freedom and the lack of chance of healing blocks her from being able to paint. The time she spends with Rhysand in the beginning and self-healing is able



to open up that part of herself again. Feyre still struggles to paint in ACOFAS until she is in town, shopping for Winter Solstice, and comes across another artist. Feyre learns from that artist what it means to create and why she must create something in order to feel better. ““I *have* to create, or it was all for nothing. I *have* to create, or I will crumple up with despair and never leave my bed. I *have* to create because I have no other way of voicing *this*”” (ACOFAS 134). Once Feyre realizes why she paints, she does not withhold, but she wants to create a place for others like her. She wants to create a studio where traumatized people or even children like her will find comfort in expressing whatever it is they are dealing with.

If there were children in this city who might need a place to express the horrors that had happened during the war. If there were children who might not be able to talk about what they’d endured, but could possibly paint or draw or sculpt it. Perhaps they wouldn’t do any of those things, but the act of creating something...it could be a balm to them.

As it was for me. (ACOFAS 225)

Feyre uses her power as High Lady not to oppress her court and its people but to find comfort and peace. Feyre wants to use her own journey to help others find a way through their experiences that may leave them helpless.

In ACOFAS, Feyre becomes an advocate to all those that are broken and wounded. Feyre helps her city and her people through various efforts such as rebuild shops during the winter. She finds homes for those in need when there is nothing left for them to go home to. She volunteers to give out coats and supplies to those that had none to prepare for winter. She constantly seeks out others in need of some assistance and is worried for them. She worries that she is not doing enough for them and often works herself even harder for them. It is her people who remind her that she needs to take a break and enjoy her time. Numerous times, fae tell Feyre that she has provided enough, but that they want her to enjoy the winter.

This territory, its people—they were as much my heart as my mate. Until yesterday, nearly every waking hour had been packed with helping them. Until I'd been politely, graciously, told to go home and enjoy the holiday. (ACOFAS 8)

Feyre has joined multiple societies that help people and volunteered her time and effort to help them. Feyre does not even begin to think herself too high to lend a hand to her people. High Lady Feyre again undermines traditions by putting away her crown and supporting those in need even if it is hard and laborious work.

Feyre is teaching the High Lords what it means to have a High Lady who is among them as a powerful leader. The first instance that Maas shows this is when Feyre and Rhysand are having that war meeting, in chapter 43, trying to get the other courts to rally together against the King (ACOWAR 403-445). As stated earlier, Feyre speaks against the inequality against everyone, no matter the species. When one of the High Lords says that the humans are not their concern, Feyre uses her voice as High Lady to raise awareness of humanity. Feyre states why humanity is the concern for the fae and why they should help the humans below the wall. Feyre gains the confidence to help others no matter the cost it has towards herself and exercises fairness. It is through Feyre's words as High Lady and the display of her powers that Feyre is able to rally six out seven courts against the King. Feyre stands her ground against six High Lords and challenges their priorities within the war. Feyre has to show the High Lords that her title as a High Lady makes her just as equal and powerful as they are within their own titles. Feyre shows them that she is not weak, and she will do everything within her own power to fight against the King. It is not enough that she had the title of High Lady; she has to prove to the other High Lords that she is equal to them. Walkerdine writes about femininity within school performance, writes,

Thus, women, taken also to possess the capacity to reason, were allowed to enter the competition. If they had enough ability. But this means that the terms of the

debate are never changed; it is still up to the women to prove themselves equal to men. (Walkerdine 270)

Women constantly have to prove themselves even if they do become accepted in whatever circumstance they put themselves in. It is not enough that they become accepted into that situation, but they have to prove their ability to stay within there. Even though Feyre has the title of High Lady and gradually becomes accepted, she still has to prove herself equal to the High Lords. Feyre does not struggle to prove herself to the High Lords as she does just that with her brief spat with the High Lord of Autumn. Feyre is able to succeed in proving herself to all seven High Lords. Before the war meeting, Feyre fights for the Summer Court against a small army from the King and wins. She has proven to Tarquin that she is capable, and at the end of ACOWAR she again proves herself when she, along with her sisters, is able to take down the King.

Feyre has grown confident with her sense of self, her powers, and the mastery of those powers. Instead of feeling as though they are stolen goods that are not hers, she now claims them. Feyre tells the High Lords, “I did not take your power. You gave it to me, along with the gift of immortal life. I am grateful for both. But they are mine now. And I will do with them what I will” (ACOWAR 445). Feyre asserts that the powers were given by the males themselves and she did not steal them. Maas is showing that a woman that occupies the masculine sphere is given certain attributes by the men whether it is consciously given or not. Feyre is a former human as well as female who was given these attributes way before her immortal life. As mortal woman Feyre felt as though she did not have the right to possess them. She often felt as though everything about her did not belong to her because she took them from the men around her. Now as a high fae she is able to realize that she did not take anything from the men. She received the powers as a gift, and while she is grateful for them she is now unapologetic about having them

within her. Later in ACOWAR, Feyre is draining the cauldron of its destructive powers in order to help stop the King from rampaging any further. Rhysand comes to help Feyre and is able to successfully stop the cauldron, but the cost is Rhysand's life. Feyre begs the other six High Lords to give him a drop of their power, like they did with her, and they all agree. Feyre is able to give a drop of her power because she is High Lady. Rhysand comes back and tells the High Lords that he came back without their powers. Maas made it a point to tell the readers that Rhysand did come back with only his powers and not the others like Feyre did. "You lot will be pleased to know...My power remains my own. No thieving here" (ACOWAR 671). Rhysand teases the other High Lords with the thieving comment because of their belief that Feyre stole what is theirs. This is because Rhysand already has all the attributes of the masculine sphere. Feyre comes back with their powers because she has and continues to move around within the masculine sphere and has adopted these attributes.

The seven High Lords powers that Feyre is gifted are: Shapeshifting from Tamlin (Spring Court), Water manipulation from Summer Court, Fire manipulation from Autumn Court, Ice manipulation from Winter Court, Healing abilities by Dawn Court, Air manipulation, Light Generation, and Cursebreaking (to ability to sense people and break spells) by Day Court, and finally Darkness manipulation from the Night Court. I argue that this can be interpreted as a gender parallel for the fae abilities Feyre gains. Shapeshifting is Feyre's ability to shift between both spheres of masculinity and femininity. Water manipulation is the ability to stay flexible between the person she has to be and wants to be. Fire manipulation is the passion and compassion of people and ideologies she stands by. Ice manipulation is her control on herself and her emotions. Healing abilities to heal herself from the inside out and those around her. Air manipulation is the ability to stay open minded, light generation is to show that happiness comes

from within first and foremost, and Cursebreaking is her ability to see and break away from negativity. Darkness manipulation shows that darkness is not only consuming and bad sometimes it is needed and can be of comfort. By being able to control these attributes collectively Feyre is able to truly be whole as an individual. She is not separated on what should she do as a female, but rather what should she do as an individual.

Feyre's struggle of accepting them as her own and mastery of them is shown as a natural process that everyone goes through. The process of struggling is accepting one's self and the powers one has. Feyre finally being able to accept those powers as hers and gain control of them is shows the acceptance of one's self the good, the bad, and the ugly. Feyre's journey is a journey that deals with self-love, self-acceptance, and self-healing while also dealing with toxic relationship. It also deals with trauma, the struggle with that trauma, and struggle of finding love again after the toxic relationship. As this thesis has demonstrated, Maas uses our human world as foreground to Feyre's journey. Maas has shown through Feyre's journey that a woman that is considered unruly continues to have to prove herself within society even if she has done so already. Such as Feyre, she proves herself when she defeats Amarantha but that is not enough. She constantly has to prove herself throughout the series through small tasks or big tasks.

Whenever a High Lord comes into power, it is accepted, and he does not necessarily have to prove himself worthy of the title. His power alone proves that. On the other hand, Feyre gains that power whenever she had to take care of her family as a mortal. She proves that whenever she has to protect them from starvation and harm. She proves it again to all seven High Lords when she dies to break Amarantha's curse. When Feyre does not fit in the box they are trying to shove her into, she has to prove herself again worthy. Not only to the fae that she once died for, but also to the humans when she asks Elain's ex-fiancé to provide shelter to the people. That is

not all she has to prove her worth to, besides the people of Prythian—humans and fae alike—she has to prove it to an assortment of creatures. She has to prove to the Bone Carver that she is worthy to help by taking the Ouroboros mirror. She has to prove to a creature that resides underneath the library in the Night Court that she is true to her word by providing it guests to tell stories of life and eventually gives it a window to see outside.

Throughout the ACOTAR series, Maas showcases the constant struggle a woman with power has to deal with. A woman has to deal with gender hierarchy by both females and males and has to deal with old traditions that are still present. The reader is shown that a woman has to prove herself worthy time and time again in order to continue her way of life. Feyre's journey demonstrates that women will be under scrutiny no matter the position they have. Even though time has changed from the past; it is the old traditions that some cannot let go of that force women to continue to be oppressed. "Especially here, where change was slower than the melting glaciers scattered amongst these mountains. Traditions going back thousands of years, left mostly unchallenged. Until us" (ACOFAS 11). Feyre and Rhysand both challenge traditions together and begin to untie the knot of them within society. The root of Feyre's continued struggle are from challenging traditions that others left for the comfort of themselves.

Maas has showcased that confining to one sphere is also not as easy as it seems. Just like being woman does not always equate to being feminine and being seen as good does not always equate to being good and being a villain does not always equate to being a bad guy Feyre has changed who she is and her gender identity through the latter half of the series. With Tamlin she has come to realize that she does not want to be coddled to the point of suffocation. She wants to be able to rule and her choices for her people to be heard and counted. She learns that love should not make you sacrifice yourself in order to be in a happy relationship. Feyre's identity is

not only focused on the care of a person or a group of people. Because of Tamlin, she is able to see through her weaknesses and make them stronger. Because of Rhysand and his Inner circle, she is able to deal with her trauma and come out a better person. Feyre no longer sees her vulnerability as a weakness and is not underconfident in her own abilities. Feyre now sees her vulnerability as a strength to help others and is confident within her own abilities to help herself, those around her, and the world. It is because of others, the help, guidance, support, and troubles that they offer Feyre that she is able to heal herself. Feyre is able to wield her identity as one is able to wield a sword. She uses it to protect the weak, fight the evil within the world, and cut away the barriers in her path.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Identities are like swords; we are all given one at our birth. What we do with them, how we wield them, and how we fix them are all up to us. Feyre starts out with the bare basics of swords, and when she takes her father's place within the masculine sphere, she merely sharpens it. It works well until she enters the faerie lands. When she goes up against Amarantha, her sword breaks, and she suffers death. When she is remade, she is given the two broken bits of her sword and is not told how she could mend those pieces. Tamlin gives her a new sword that he forged, and she desperately accepts it. She has to put in the work to sharpen it, and even if she wants to sharpen it, the loss of the last one dwells within her. No one in the court she lives in is there to help her, not even the ones that she fought so hard to save. Her realization that what Tamlin offers is not what she wants in life helps her learn how to mend her own sword. Like every sword made, you have to melt down the metals first. So Tamlin's oppression becomes the fire that melts down her two pieces. It is the freedom of choice from Rhysand and constant fight for herself that become the hammer to meld the sword into place. Finally, her blade is finalized by acceptance of herself and all that has happened to her. Yet, Feyre's new sword is not done because her future will continue to have challenges that will dull the sword and chip the edges.



Because ACOTAR is in the genre of a paranormal romance series, romance is a key element in the protagonist's life. Feyre's struggle with romance and finding who she wants is another aspect that young adults face within their lives. Maas shows the effects of a toxic relationship and why emotionally it is so hard to leave the person who may have been loved. She shows the troubling aspects of being in that kind of relationship. Tamlin's love comes before Feyre's love, his sanity comes first, his well-being comes first, and he uses Feyre's love to manipulate her. In ACOMAF, when Tamlin explodes in anger against her, it is up to Feyre to soothe and comfort him. Maas shows that although Tamlin is toxic and bad for Feyre's own well-being, he has pushed her to realize who she is and what she wants. I use the terms Toxic Masculinity for old traditional characteristics and Positive Masculinity for the ever-changing modern or contemporary role. Through many trials, errors, and self-reflection, Feyre is able to make this break. She uses this experience as a way to define herself and realize what and where her boundaries are within relationships.

Her relationship with Tamlin becomes a building block in defining and stabilizing her identity. Maas shows that becoming tied to a male or even wanting to have a relationship with a male should not define who you are as an individual. Tamlin tries to define and limit who Feyre is, while Rhysand does not. Within the Night Court, Feyre is an individual because that is her right as a person as is her freedom of choice. In ACOMAF, when Feyre arrives at the Night Court she can roam wherever she wants, and it is up to her who is allowed in her presence. When she leaves Tamlin after he locks her inside the Spring Court manor and goes to the Night Court, Rhysand tells her all she has to do is tell him she wants to leave, and she could. When she finds out about the mating bond between her and Rhysand, he informs her it is up to her whether she will accept it or reject it. Tamlin makes Feyre face the very things that she has run away from

such as her vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and crack in her identity armor. Rhysand makes Feyre face the strengths she has as an individual and welcome them into who she wants to be.

With Tamlin, her sense of identity and freedom of choice are locked away with Tamlin as the key holder. She no longer is able to wander around without the need of guards constantly watching her, she is not to leave without permission, and she cannot leave Tamlin at first. When she writes a letter informing Tamlin that she left on her own free will, he goes into a contract with the King of Hybern to get Feyre back. To Tamlin, Feyre is his no matter the cost, and he treats her as he does any possession that is stolen from him. Feyre does not have her own identity with Tamlin; all he sees her as is his property. Tamlin curses and snarls at Rhysand, asserting possessively that “she is mine” (ACOMAF 613). Even here Tamlin does not see Feyre making her own choices. Instead he sees Rhysand manipulating her as Tamlin once has. Tamlin believes that males are entitled to females. That is why he believes Rhysand thinks he is entitled to Feyre. Feyre decides that to save her people, Prythian, and the Mortal Lands, she must go back to Tamlin and spy for the greater good. She uses Tamlin’s thought process as a way to manipulate him. Maas shows how much Feyre has changed as she willingly sacrifices herself in order to protect those she loves. Feyre no longer bends to Tamlin’s commands; instead, she begins to violate his commands in order to make her own choices.

Feyre’s journey within ACOTAR parallels some of the situations her twenty-first century young adult readers experience. In the beginning of ACOTAR, Feyre has to learn to provide for a family which strips Feyre of her youthful days. Feyre has to grow up rather quickly which a lot of young adults have to do nowadays. Feyre struggles with an internal conflict of having to be strong for her family but wanting to be cared for as well. She is stuck between two different worlds; she has to be grown up for her age, and she has to become a masculine model in order to

provide for her family. Feyre has gone through trauma from a very young age that is a heightened version of what many young adults nowadays are subjected to. Losing a family member at a young age, making a heavy promise, watching a family member suffer physically, and watching a family member suffer mentally from that trauma. By showing these issues and validating them, Maas provides young adults with assurance that their trauma whatever it may be and how they react to it is valid. YA scholar Cart points out how the field plays an important role in the lives of readership as well as being significant for aesthetic reasons. By voicing the needs and problems of its readership, “young adult literature is made valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers” (Cart 273). Maas gives Feyre a background that many young adults can see themselves in or see themselves in Feyre’s shoes. Having a mirror within literature is an important aspect in order for the reader to feel some kind of connection to the main character. Feyre’s beginning and background are that mirror for many young adult readers.

Furthermore, once Feyre transitions into faerie lands, she goes through many different phases within her identity. She no longer has to worry about being strong in order to provide for her family which leaves her able to explore who she truly is. Feyre only begins to start learning who she is and what she likes and dislikes. She is thrown back into her old identity of being the protector. She feels obliged through her love for Tamlin to go to Under the Mountain and save him and everyone else from the evil that is Amarantha. Feyre heroically faces trials and tribulations that bring her to a breaking point. Overcoming the trials brings Feyre closer to finding out who she truly is. Through these trials, Feyre sacrifices aspects of herself in exchange for saving Tamlin. She gives up the huntress within her through the hunt with the worm. She relinquishes the creative and artistic side of herself through the second task, and in the third task,

she destroys bits of her own soul when she kills three innocent fae. After completing the tasks, she is demanded to give up her love, but that is the one and only thing she refuses to sacrifice. Love, it is what saves everyone and Tamlin, but that very same love fails to save Feyre in that moment. Feyre's love is something she grants to those around her, and it saves them, but the refusal of loving herself is what fails her.

In *ACOMAF*, Feyre shows the struggles of finding oneself in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Feyre has lost her mortal life and gains the life of an immortal which leaves her to question who she is. Feyre's struggle with trying to maintain herself through her trauma is painstaking, and it is not healed completely by the end of the book. In fact, Feyre still struggles with her trauma throughout *ACOWAR* and *ACOFAS*. Maas is demonstrating that healing from trauma takes time and that even the smallest of events can throw a person back to where they started. Maas also shows that one cannot heal if the living conditions are either exactly or somewhat the same as the conditions that the trauma occurred in. In the beginning of *ACOMAF*, Feyre allows those around her to ignore her trauma and follows suit by trying to ignore her own trauma. By Feyre's emotional and mental state, Maas shows the negative effects of that. It is also shown that trauma does not have to be a barrier that keeps you from progressing, but rather it is something that you can build upon. Maas demonstrates perseverance after trauma throughout *ACOMAF* by showing Feyre's healing journey and how reaching out is nothing to be ashamed of. This is another key mirror in which young adults can find their lives reflective. Mental health is not easily talked about. Many young adults go through trauma and like Feyre do not know how to deal with it. Within *ACOMAF*, Feyre is learning how to let her own love become her strength and her salvation.

In ACOWAR, Feyre becomes confident in herself and slowly begins to let herself love herself and see what she has gained. Confidence in herself empowers Feyre to find ways to save those around her. She protects those that are not within her own court despite what their High Lord has done to her. She acts upon injustices that are happening around her instead of staying quiet and letting them pass by. The third book of the series shows Feyre fully coming into her own and accepting all the good and bad parts of herself. Feyre shows her progression in healing her mental and emotional state. Once the war is over and peace is upon the world of Prythian, Feyre does not stop there. She takes steps further to establish a new and equal treaty amongst the humans and fae. She wants a world that is equal between the faes within themselves and the human and fae species. The fourth book of the series, which also has been called a companion to the initial trilogy, demonstrates the extension of Feyre's lessons. In ACOFAS, Feyre still continues to work on healing herself but also wants to help others around her. She helps her town rebuild, hands out winter supplies to those that need it, and helps her sisters process and situate themselves within their new world. At the same time, Feyre realizes through an artist's words that creating something is a way that people who are broken heal themselves. "I have to create, or it was all for nothing. I have to create, or I will crumble up with despair and never leave my bed. I have to create because I have no other way of voicing this" (ACOFAS 134). Feyre finds these words to soothe her and push her to begin thinking of how to help others. In the end, Feyre opens up a studio in order to help children from the war be able to express themselves and heal themselves.

Feyre's character is a progressive feminist in all the sense of the word because she stands up to all of the inequality that is happening around her. She seeks to help those that are oppressed in one way or another. Feyre also paves a path for the future of the women and female fae within

her world by becoming the first High Lady. She shows not only the females but the males around her that females can be just as strong and hold the position of being a ruler just as the males can. Feyre shows that it takes time for peace to become established within their walls and world, healing is something that takes time, and being vulnerable and open is not a weakness. She works for the peace of everyone within her world even with those that stripped away her own peace. Feyre's first trial with Tamlin when she returns in ACOWAR shows that while revenge is satisfying, it hinders progression. Feyre's life trajectory further demonstrates that being connected with someone does not mean forfeiting oneself, and it can be compatible with feminism to seek a romantic partner with whom to go through life. In partnership with Rhysand, Feyre tackles old traditions and unties them from their society, making the Night Court a better world. Feyre seeks to empower those around her and help them in whatever situation that they are facing. Feyre not only fights for them but she also wins for them.

Areas for future scholarship include the representations of masculinity. While beyond the scope of this thesis, representation and growth among male characters correlate with the changing gender roles of women. Masculinity falls into one type with traditions and more contemporary aspects. Tamlin represents the toxic masculinity through his relationship with Feyre, Lucien, Rhysand, and his court. While Rhysand represents positive masculinity through his relationship with Feyre, his circle, and his inner court. Gender roles also limit men and expectations can oppress men as well as women, both human and fae. Old-fashioned traditional masculinity affects Tamlin's view on how he is supposed to act as a male, and this leads to his ultimate unhappiness and loneliness in life.

Maas has created a dynamic world that deals with real life situations and themes that are important to discuss. A Court of Thorns and Roses series makes complex issues concrete and

understandable to young adults. Maas discusses adult concepts such as death, mental health issues, toxic relationships, oppression, and masculinity. Young adults are Feyre as they are expected at a very young age to deal with very adult situations. Like Feyre they are forced to grow up too soon and are not shown how to deal with their emotions and traumas. Maas voices that our society is very much like Prythian where our world is stagnant because of old traditions and we expect our young adults—like it is expected of Feyre—to fix it with no advice on how to proceed forward with that. Maas’ series has so many different themes and situations through the analysis of Feyre and her journey.

Writing this thesis has taught me that mental health is an important aspect to talk about because of the devastating effects it has on oneself and the others around. It is not a sign of weakness to have others help sort out and work through the issues at hand instead of ignoring it when others ignore it. Being in a relationship with someone should be on equal footing, and one does not have to relinquish identity within that relationship. Relationships should be about helping people fix themselves, building them up when they tear themselves down, and there needs to be equality within. Feyre has taught me that the person in charge of oneself is solely that person. That power should not be granted to those that are around. They can help but they cannot be in charge of it. She has taught me that the key to accepting oneself is to accept what is done in the past and to accept the ugly, good, and bad aspects of one’s identity. Furthermore, healing takes time and patience and how one does so depends solely on that person. This analysis taught me that the masculine and feminine sphere are not separate but can be combined. They cannot define one’s gender identity because of the fluid nature within gender identity. In the series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015-2018), Sarah J. Maas shows through the journey of protagonist Feyre Archeron that gender roles can be reformed as part of shaping a better world.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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