Urban Fantasy

Theorising an emergent literary subgenre

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

Fantasy literature in the 1980s underwent a revisionist change, which resulted in the emergence of a number of subgenres that challenged the dominant Tolkien model of fantasy writing. One such subgenre, which continues in popularity today, is urban fantasy (UF). UF is distinguished by real-world urban settings unsettled by the presence of the supernatural and the non-rational. The exemplary writers in this genre are Emma Bull (War for the Oaks, 1987), China Mieville (King Rat, 1998) as well as Laurell K. Hamilton (in her prolific series: Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter), Patricia Briggs (Mercy Thompson Series) and Suzanne McLeod (Spellcrackers.com Series), among others. The classification of UF has predominantly been commercial or industry-based, with little critical or theoretical evaluation undertaken to define or establish its parameters. Within a limited frame of reference this thesis aims to fulfil a twofold purpose: first, to explore the evolution of UF from its roots in fantasy, urban realism and other antecedent genres so as to better establish its inherited characteristics; and, second, to offer a classificatory framework that identifies the distinctive elements of UF's thematic concerns and protagonists. An exploration of UF highlights that it is a unique subgenre that comments on our inherent fears and anxieties of contemporary urban life. Furthermore, UF draws attention to culture's disturbing fascination with the brutal, monstrous, facets of human life and, as a female-centric subgenre, challenges us to rethink our received perceptions of the female hero.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

This thesis explores the emerging subgenre of Urban Fantasy (UF) and examines how it is differentiated from other forms of fantasy literature. Engaging in a discussion of genre is a problematic endeavour because, as John Frow (2015) indicated in his seminal text *Genre*, it is 'important to stress the open-endedness of genres and the irreducibility of texts to a single interpretive framework' (p. 30). Further, as Heather Dubrow (1982) stated, '[t]he very question of whether one should accept the notion of generic classification or challenge its validity involves one of the broadest theoretical issues' (p. 45). The debate concerning the validity of generic classification has a long history. For example, Frow (2015) highlighted that 'just the same lack of internal coherence characterises almost all attempts at a systematic scholarly analysis of literary genres' (p. 14). If discussing the broad category of genre is difficult, engaging in a discussion concerning a subgenre of fantasy literature is even more problematic. Fantasy as a genre (or subgenre) remains a highly contentious field. This issue was noted by Kathryn Hume (1984), who observed that too often theorists 'assume that fantasy is a pure phenomenon, that a few clear rules will delimit it, and that the result will be a genre of form which can be called fantasy' (p. 8). This point is emphasised by Gary Wolfe (1990), who claimed that '[t]here is no agreed-upon canon of fantasy works to discuss, and no agreed-upon definition of what fantasy is, exactly' (p. 373). However, regardless of theoretical unease, categorisation based on genre, and especially subgenres, is one of the most effective avenues to examine literature that shares common characteristics. As noted by Dubrow (1982), the difficulty is that generic definitions are often circular in nature. Like biological categorisation, establishing a definition based on selected examples 'from the multitude of possible ones implies a prior decision about the characteristics of the genre' (Dubrow, 1982, p. 46). Frow (2015) was more forthright in observing that, 'Genre is, amongst other things, a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognisable classes' (p. 56). Dubrow and Frow's arguments are strong and indisputable, yet the fact remains that any form of codification will always be influenced by the user's own assumptions. This is because '[e]ven when a text disrupts all the expectations we may have of it, these expectations nevertheless form the ways in which we can read it and the ways in which we can change our minds' (Frow, 2015,

p. 31). In addition, language itself imposes constraints because the terminology we use is already arbitrary. Regardless, the value of generic classification cannot be overstated because genre categorisation is the primary entry point for interpretation. Thus, I return to Frow's (2015) contention that genre 'is central to human meaning-making and to the social struggle over meanings' (p. 10).

Jacques Derrida (1980) most forcefully made the case in favour of genre as a transcendental category for literary analysis, while simultaneously causing possible subversion in a literary work of art, by offering the following hypothesis: 'a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging' (p. 65). Derrida is correct—it is impossible to deny the existence of genre; however, one must also accept that participation in a genre does not imply slavish imitation or uncritical belonging to a set of absolutely fixed conventions. Even the literature of the modernists would not exist without genre—much of the experimental work of this period was a direct reaction to genre; thus, it still necessarily participated with genre. As Dubrow (1982) stated, 'in studying genre, like many other literary issues, we should also anticipate a significant degree of inconsistency' (p. 110). The danger with classificatory genre theory is the assumption of a concrete set of laws that restrict the way texts can be categorised. Alastair Fowler (1982) suggested that 'genres have to do with identifying and communicating rather than defining and classifying' (p. 38). Thus, the recommendation is to use genre as an approachable framework to understand changing literature because it can be said that '[t]here has never been literature without genres; it is a system in continual transformation' (Todorov, 1976, p. 161). Genre is used to communicate transforming ideas about literature. Frow (2015) argued that:

> 'Genre' is a classifying term, but genre are not well-defined and stable classes governing objects in a closed set; genres are not like law, and texts don't *realise* genres or exemplify them or belong to them; they have a reflective reaction to one or more genres. (p. 31)

Genres are unstable, connotative and adaptive. Interpretation of literature and genres is an ever-shifting landscape. As new texts appear and new theoretical models emerge, genres can change in definition, characteristics and even name. It is necessary to

remember that 'works of literature come to us from literary communities' (Fowler, 1982, p. 278) that inform the contemporary understanding of genre.

Tzvetan Todorov (1976) informed us that a 'new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination' (p. 161). Frow (2015) agreed with this concept, adding to Todorov's view that 'for every genre there is one or more antecedent genres which are transformed as new occasions and purposes (new framing conditions) arise' (p. 150). It is unsurprising that new literature often responds to established genres by deliberately subverting, inverting or challenging traditional characteristics. Human nature seems to drive us to push against boundaries. New literature can be perceived as reacting to established genres because they 'carry with them a whole series of prescriptions and restrictions, some codified in the pronouncements of rhetoricians and others less officially but no less forcefully established' (Dubrow, 1982, pp. 8–9). Todorov (1976) reasoned that the act of creation and establishment of genres is a social one—that 'a society chooses and codifies the acts that most closely correspond to its ideology' (p. 164).

Rosemary Jackson (1991) offered a similar view specific to fantasy literature: 'a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context' (p. 3). The concept that society affects literature is not unique and is well established in much of fantasy literature's history. Fantasy draws on the myths and legends of the times when these tales served as moral guides and oral histories; thus, it is unsurprising that fantasy as a genre tends to twist and change in reaction to different social and cultural contexts. Jackson (1991) suggested that fantasy literature 'might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it' (p. 3). This reaction to context in fantasy literature makes analysis of its generic structure interesting to theorists. Genres, 'like any other institution, reveal the constitutive traits of the society to which they belong' (Todorov, 1976, p. 163). Dubrow (1982) also believed that 'a well-established genre transmits certain cultural attitudes, attitudes which it is shaped by and in its turn helps to shape' (p. 4). Fantasy is an enormous genre with myriad facets, of which the oldest (fairy tales, folk tales and mythology) are often redeveloped and reinterpreted to fit their new social, cultural or historical context. Even modern fantasy has significant weight to it, derived from the accepted masters who are often understood as personifying fantasy: J. R. R.

Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Ursula Le Guin and (more recently) J. K. Rowling. This extensive weight and the restrictions of genre offer opportunities for the birth of new subgenres within the behemoth labelled the 'fantasy genre'. Dubrow (1982) indicated that 'writing in genre can be a highly polemic gesture, a way of attempting to initiate a new chapter of literary history through the act of creating a single work of art' (p. 30).

UF, the subject of this thesis, is one such polemic gesture that emerged in response to the perceived prescriptive nature of fantasy literature in the post-Tolkien era. The development of UF is not unique, as Brian Attebery (1992) outlined: 'Within a genre like fantasy, subgenres regularly emerge, merge or disintegrate' (p. 126). The aim of this thesis is to theorise UF as a subgenre of fantasy; however, UF is a 'Frankenstein' subgenre with a plethora of baggage and fuzzy edges. Attebery (1992) indicated that the difficulty in dealing with subgenres of fantasy is that 'like the larger set of which they are a part, are fuzzy sets. They radiate from a few well-known and influential texts' (p. 126). The difficulty lies in the very nature of genres because, as Dubrow (1982, p. 106) suggested, generic codes can function closer to a tone of voice, rather than a clear cut signal. Therefore, genres 'provide one interpretation of the meaning of the text, they direct our attention to the parts of it that are especially significant, but they do not and they cannot offer an infallible key to its meaning' (Dubrow, 1982, p. 106). It is important to consider Dubrow's statement in regard to this thesis, as the thesis focus is the significant aspects that help delineate UF, yet cannot offer a comprehensive key to the meaning of individual texts. Having emerged in the late 1980s, UF is a new subgenre that has received little critical evaluation. As a label, 'urban fantasy' has been used arbitrarily to categorise a range of literature currently produced that does not fit on the same shelves as Tolkien and Rowling. To an extent, the need to identify and label this subgenre emerged from a commercial necessity. As Frow (2015) indicated, often 'classification is an industrial method' (p. 13). However, I believe there are a number of common generic codes present in this new literature that differentiates it from mainstream fantasy. In this thesis, my aim is to create an expanded framework for UF as a subgenre to encourage further communication. I take comfort from Tymn, Zahorski, and Boyer's (1979) observation that:

> the best definitions come after the fact and are a way of organising a body of
> knowledge [or, in this case, a particular branch of literature] that enables readers to

more fully appreciate it, discuss it, and make discriminating judgements about it.

(p. 3)

By engaging in the process of theorising UF as a subgenre of fantasy, I hope to appreciate it, discuss it and encourage new discussions.

UF did not emerge as a fully formed genre. It was part of a distinct movement of change, known as 'revisionist fantasy', which arose in the twentieth century. This development of new fantasy subgenres 'was a consequence of the counterculture of the 1960s' (Kaveney, 1997, p. 810), which was an antithetical reaction to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien changed the face of modern fantasy and his success spawned a milieu of mimicry. The elaborate second-world or high fantasy became known as 'quintessential fantasy' and revisionist fantasies arose 'from a conscientious attempt to make standard genre tropes over, to make the condition of fantasy new' (Kaveney, 1997, p. 810). UF was one of a number of subgenres born from authors rejecting the Tolkienian landscape, and the appeal of the low fantasy, real-world elements of UF has not faded. In fact, as Jessica Tiffin (2008) stated, 'urban fantasy is currently a thriving and popular subgenre within fantastic fiction, its growing market share reflecting the progressively more urban experience of readers to whom nostalgic landscapes in the Tolkien mould, while attractive, are increasingly alien' (p. 34). As Derrida (1980) stated, UF can be definitively split away from Tolkienian fantasy by the presence of 'the identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognises, or should recognise, a membership in a class' (p. 63). The recognisable trait of UF is its use of a real-world urban setting. This is a seemingly simplistic factor; however, unlike other low fantasy, the 'urban' in UF is a defining and significant element that influences all other generic characteristics of the subgenre. Tiffin (2008) suggested that a 'city's tensions and oppositions [that] are ideally suited to fantastic depiction' and UF's 'classic provision of clear-cut moral and magical oppositions has the power to externalise issues as symbol' (p. 34). UF's urban setting and supernatural incursions are '[c]o-existing with reality, the city's fantastic double problematises both the real and the unreal, and thus the idea of the city itself' (Tiffin, 2008, p. 34). The role of the urban is central to any theorising of UF. In making it 'an identifiable recurrence of a common trait' (Derrida, 1980, p. 63), the urban becomes the defining feature of this emergent subgenre.

Urban Fantasy's Generic Heritage

UF has a rich heritage of antecedent genres that are explored in detail throughout this thesis. Foremost of these are fantasy, which UF is categorised within, and urban realism, which informs the recognisable urban elements. This thesis discusses in detail both of these predecessor genres and their influential texts in Chapters 1 and 2, respectively. However, UF also owes a number of its generic signifiers to the genres of gothic and horror literature. Similar to fantasy, horror underwent a transformation in the mid-twentieth century. This is also the point of departure of UF from these established genres.

There exist a number of important gothic theorists who have explored the genre's myriad dark corridors, expanded on the genre's etymology and traced the genre's historical influences. Frederick Frank's (1990) extensive and informative introductory summation of the early gothic period may be used as a useful point of entry:

> Denounced by reviewers and devoured by readers when it spewed from the presses in enormous quantities at the end of the eighteenth century, the Gothic novel established itself as the most dominant force in English fiction between Horace Walpole's first Gothic, *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 and Charles Robert Maturin's novel of terror, *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820. These six decades in literary history are the Gothic years when hordes of authors gratified the supernatural and irrational cravings of thousands of readers in a profusion of Gothic horror and terror. From its beginnings Gothic fiction subverted the norms of polite and rational literature and appealed directly to the timeless human need of inhuman things, a need not well served by the sane and decorous literature of the Age of Reason. The inventor of the Gothic, Horace Walpole, was responding to such a deprivation of the imagination when he informed his readers in the preface to his Gothic novel that 'the great resources of fancy have been damned up by a strict adherence to common life'. In the very midst of the Age of Reason with its emphasis in the arts on symmetry, control, aesthetic order and classical restraint, Walpole proposed a literary countergenre designed to gratify the darker and ignored yearnings of the human mind. Horror, terror, psychic and social disorder and the very existence of a universe controlled by supernatural law had been unconditionally denied to the imagination by the neoclassic value system. Pleasure in ruins, admiration for decay, disorder and spectacular death, and the enjoyment of fear were all symptoms of the

emotional starvation which provoked the Gothic eruption. The Gothic was a well-defined literary genre, but it was also from its beginning a mode of perception or way of seeing the other universe which had lain buried for far too long beneath the rationalism of the age. (p. 3)

As Frank indicated, the gothic literary movement emerged as a reaction to the confining moralism of the Age of Reason. Walpole's counter-genre was formed on a yearning for the darker features of humankind. This counter-genre focused instead on 'notions of order and decorum and rational judgement' and 'the darker side of awareness, the side to which sensibility and imagination belong, together with those less categorisable areas of guilt, fear and madness' (Howell, 1978, p. 5). Walpole shaped early gothic fiction with his seminal novel *The Castle of Otranto*, from which most of the key thematic and generic concerns of the genre are drawn (Frank, 1990). Frank (1990) continued his summation by presenting 10 elements indispensable to the high gothic novel: claustrophobic confinement and threatening architecture; underground pursuit and subterranean sexual peril; supernatural encounters and encroachments; sentience of architecture and organicity of art; extraordinary positions and lethal predicaments; suspension of rationality and morality; spectral and demonic machinery; atmospheric superiority of evil; psychopathic and destructive emotions; and genealogical complications, jeopardy and mysteries. Interestingly, included in the official definition of UF provided by *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* is a note that, '[t]he headings under which Frederick S. Frank anatomises the form in *The First Gothics* (1987) also work to describe the early forms of UF' (Clute, 1997b, p. 921). As the gothic genre emerged, 'it defined itself along two lines of development, one conservative, domestic and didactic, and the other an extension of the spirit of Walpole's outrageous, amoral fantasy' (Frank, 1990, p. 6). The heritage of Walpole continues to inspire the generic codes of UF, which is unsurprising since the 'motives which called the Gothic into existence in the eighteenth century remain active today and explain the enduring popularity of the Gothic impulse' (Frank, 1990, p. 3).

As the gothic tradition continued, it underwent changes in the works of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis. Radcliffe's novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* introduced the concept of 'the explained supernatural' (supernatural traced back to natural causes, which remains present in much of horror and magical realism) and the brooding gothic villain (Howell, 1978). This figure remains present in latter proliferations of dark

fantasy and especially in modern paranormal romances. In *The Monk*, Lewis captured the symbolic and sensationalist elements of the genre (Mishra, 1994). As Vijay Mishra (1994) outlined, in gothic literature, *The Monk* represented an avenue for the reality of the period to 'be sublimated and fears about it rechannelled through the discourses of art' (p. 14). Lewis's work can be read as 'a dark metaphor of the mind or, more accurately, as the symbolisation of the repressed structures of the unconscious' (Mishra, 1994, p. 14). This interpretation is further supported by the changes that gothic underwent in the nineteenth century, where the 'moaning spectres and deformed monsters of the Gothic are gradually relocated within the psyche' (Stableford, 1990b, p. 61). During this period, the gothic 'transforms a metaphysic … into a psychology by situating it at the level of the character itself' (Mishra, 1994, p. 256). Brian Stableford (1990b) identified 1825 to 1896 as 'The Later Gothic Tradition' period, which is when 'we can see the emergence of most of the themes which were to become staple elements in twentieth-century supernatural fiction' (p. 65). Stableford was primarily referring to the immersion of the staple supernatural characters of vampire, werewolf and ghost. However, these characters' connection to human characters gradually became more intimate—a trend continued in popular-culture representations.

The gothic of the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Britain, 'was less discernible, having been dispersed among a number of other genres' (Botting, 1996, p. 123). The gothic edifice of the crumbling, country castle had been replaced by the industrial city. Fred Botting (1996) commented that '[i]n the city and the factory, where divisions of class and labour were most extreme, alienation and cultural corruption were most acute. It is no wonder that Dracula selects London as his new hunting ground' (p. 137). The emerging urban realist novels of the nineteenth century maintained gothic characteristics as readers continued to be 'fascinated by [gothic's] irruption in the shadows of the everyday world' (Botting, 1996, p. 125). Botting alluded to a number of urban novels that used gothic elements to represent issues of class and social change caused by industrialisation. Botting (1996) proffered that:

> Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) presents a grimly blackened city, while
> *Oliver Twist* (1838) shows the violence and cruelty lurking just below the surface
> … [and] gloomy descriptions of aristocratic corruption and depravity which, in the

city's labyrinth of immorality, also enmeshes the behaviour of the working class. (p. 125)

Dickens was not considered an author of the gothic, yet elements of the gothic tradition appear to shadow his work. Stableford (1990b) wrote that:

In practical terms the most dedicated opponent to narrow realism was Dickens, who felt that space must be made for the sense of wonder. He was the prime mover in attempting to institute a tradition of Christmas ghost stories—a notion which, by implication, conceded the moral superiority of realism while insisting that such acceptance was not compatible with a sense of the value of romance. All realism and no romance, according to Dickens, was a recipe for a dull mind. (pp. 64–65)

A number of UF theorists (and even author China Mieville) have drawn parallels between UF's treatment of the urban and the work of Dickens. John Clute's (1997b) definition of UF identified Dickens's work as a taproot that tended to 'imagine internal kingdoms within the city' (p. 975) and influenced UF's urban presentation. In her article 'The Labyrinthine City', Hadas Elber-Aviram (2012) proposed that 'Dickens's London novels are linked to urban fantasy diachronically as well as synchronically' (p. 272). Elber-Aviram (2012) even declared: 'I propose that what Tolkien is to epic fantasy, Dickens is to contemporary urban fantasy—the mythical literary father who inadvertently cemented the genre's foundation' (p. 273). Regardless, this period of gothic literature, where it begins to disperse into urban realism, was particularly influential to contemporary UF. The figures of Dracula and Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde stalking the darkened London streets are repeated systematically in UF. Unlike other popular-culture variants, UF uses these figures to represent the 'other' and the inherent dangers of the urban landscape, rather than reinterpreting the characters into different forms. UF avails itself of the same generic pool as gothic fiction; thus, it is easy to draw parallels between the two. Mishra (1994) suggested that, 'Gothic texts speak to us in urgent tones from across the historical divides, because in them we see the signs of our own times, in them we see images of issues and concerns central to postmodernity itself' (p. 254).

Horror fiction itself descends from gothic literature. The division between gothic and horror is not seamless or unproblematic; rather, it is a question of interpreting the inspiration of texts and styles that have moved from one to the other. Stableford

(1990b) argued that the 'beginning of the next period in the history of horror fiction is marked by Stoker's *Dracula*' (p. 65), which is also considered a quintessentially gothic text. As gothic fiction became further internally focused, the indispensable elements of the gothic noted by Frank were replaced with 'preoccupations with extraordinary extrapolations of guilt and with medically defined madness' (Stableford, 1990b, p. 61). Stableford (1990a) labelled the early modern horror period as existing from 1897 to 1949. He suggested that writers of this period 'benefitted not only from the gathering insights of psychological science (and psychological pseudoscience) but also from the literary evolution of clever methods of characterisation' (Stableford, 1990a, p. 96). Modern horror can easily be traced to this period, and its aesthetics remain similar, given that modern horror is 'mainly based in this fascinated elaboration of symptom, often coupled with a marked reluctance to reduce and demystify supramundane phenomena by too specific an account of causality' (Stableford, 1990a, p. 96). The fascination with explained supernatural or supramundane phenomena still present in the horror fiction of contemporary authors can be traced to its gothic roots.

Joseph Grixti (1989) suggested that horror fiction is 'a type of narrative which deals in messages about fear and experiences associated with fear' (p. xii). These are thematic concerns that UF uses as generic signifiers, although, for UF, they are connected to the urban landscape. Regardless of the type of horror fiction, even when it is UF, it is noteworthy that there 'is a recurring pattern of functional meanings underlying these tales', even though 'popular images of horror take on different associations according to the period of their propagation' (Grixti, 1989, p. 15). Popular images of horror—from the supernatural vampire, werewolf and ghost, to mundane murder, violence, gore and death—are present in all UF in various forms. Although UF employs older mythologies, it tends to still permeate the presence of these elements with the generic tones of horror fiction. For both UF and horror fiction, the source of these thematic tones distinguishes their genres from the gothic. Stableford (1990b) stated that the 'true project of horror fiction' is the discovery of evil—'to bring it out of hiding and to make it show its face' (p. 62). UF and horror seek out and expose evil. In UF, this is often embodied by the supernatural, which needs to be resolved by the hero (in line with the heroic tropes expected of a fantasy subgenre). In contrast, horror sometimes exposes evil not to resolve it, but to evoke 'the expression of fear, shock, and revulsion at the operation of an evil force in the world' (Levack, 2014, p. 921).

The appeal to the reader derives from a place similar to the gothic. However, both horror and UF extrapolate on the 'grotesqueness of the image and the credibility of what it represents' (Levack, 2014, p. 925). Brian Levack (2014) proposed that 'horror exists in the eye of the beholder' (p. 926). Involving the reader in the thematic concerns is an important element, as both horror and UF are evocative genres that aim to evoke the thematic emotions of fear, anxiety, dread, terror and horror in their audiences. As Stableford (1990b) indicated, a 'horror story is defined by the anxiety which is suffered by its characters, and communicated by imaginative identification to the reader' (p. 62). Grixti (1989) elaborated on this:

> Fictional horror and 'mass-media violence' perform the social ('cathartic') function of appealing to, exercising, and hence 'discharging' a set of sadistic or cowardly dispositions which allegedly form an essential component of our genetic make-up. This claim is here argued to be based on historically complex but essentially compromised conceptions of human nature. (p. xv)

UF is often accused of engaging in gratuitous violence, which it does to an extent. However, this is not for the sake of gore and deviancy alone, but an attempt to explore the most barbaric and brutal elements of human nature—nothing that occurs in UF has not already been documented in human history. What perhaps is more disturbing is the presence (and success) of UF in contemporary society because if UF texts are 'commentaries—representations which explore and evaluate (and in a sense influence) a set of cultural and cognitive experiences' (Grixti, 1989, p. 6), then they are commenting on disturbing elements present in today's society. UF may have become a subgenre of horror if the insertion of supernatural had become more pronounced. However, it was actually the shift in prototypical settings in the late 1980s that moved horror away from UF. Keith Neilson (1990) indicated that, contrary to early urban horror fiction, it was 'the more traditional demonic stamping ground, the rural small town [that] has become an even more popular landscape for contemporary dark fantasy' (p. 166). In this period, UF emerged from fantasy as a unique subgenre, and I suggest that it helped fill the breach left by horror's move to the rural and suburban. The late twentieth century saw a number of new subgenres emerge from beneath the monstrous bloated forms of fantasy and horror.

From the dispersion of gothic elements and horror fiction into fantasy-focused tales evolved a loosely labelled mode of writing. 'Mode' here is used as separate to genre because this body of work categorises a particular tone and stylistic approach alone. Known as 'dark fantasy', these works deviated from horror, but did not merge into the secondary-world fantasy genre. In her discussion of dark fiction, Dani Cavallaro (2002) outlined that:

> Dark fiction ushers in what could be termed an 'aesthetic of the unwelcome', a discourse concerned with the ways in which we react to, conceptualise and represent the murkier facets of our bodies and psyches. Relatedly, it foregrounds the inconclusiveness of any action, attitude or belief by evoking enveloping histories of pleasure and strife where no experience leads unproblematically to either reward or punishment. (p. 1)

This fascination with action/reaction and inconclusive action gave birth to a mixed collection of works that is best embodied by the works of Dennis Wheatley and H. P. Lovecraft. From the stylistic approaches of Lovecraft, the subgenre of 'weird' was born, which he defined as follows:

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft, 2004, p. 105)

Although UF shares some common characteristics with weird fiction, it is only because they share the same antecedent genres. Out of Lovecraft's weird fiction developed a subgenre titled the 'new weird'. Jeff VanderMeer (2008) identified weird fiction as that popularised by magazines, such as *Weird Tales*, and as referring to the 'supernatural or fantastical element of unease' (p. ix) present in these types of tales. The publication of China Mieville's *Perdido Street Station* in 2000 is considered to represent the first 'commercially acceptable' (VanderMeer, 2008, p. xi) text of the new weird. This novel is often used as a partial example of UF, yet it relies on a

secondary underworld beneath London. Rather, Mieville's novel *King Rat* (which is examined in this thesis) is a better extrapolation of the UF subgenre. VanderMeer (2008) offered a working definition of the new weird:

> New weird is a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticised ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science-fiction and fantasy. (p. xvi)

The notable difference is that the new weird operates as a secondary-world fiction, while UF is resolutely placed in real-world (or primary-world) settings or in mimicries of real-world urban settings.

The odd category of 'magical realism' is often mistaken as weird fiction. Not quite realism or fantasy, magical realism is comprised of the following: 'Fantastic beings move through real historical events; realistic characters undergo mysterious transformations; the foreground is starkly real but the background is obscured' (Attebery, 1992, p. 127). Magical realism is not really unprecedented. For example, Attebery (1992) discussed the Victorian writer, F. Anstey, who 'exploited the comic possibilities of the eruption of magic into middle-class London' (p. 127). Horror writers have also sourced from familiar settings to heighten the unreality of the situation—'the gulfs of irrationality and violence that their stories open up derives its effectiveness from the apparent ordinariness and security that they breach' (Attebery, 1992, p. 127). However, magical realism is again more of a mode or characteristic that appears in realist texts. It is an element that elevates or symbolically represents a concept that the realist author is attempting to highlight. For UF, the presence of the supernatural and non-rational is a generic characteristic that helps define the subgenre as a branch of fantasy fiction.

The subgenre that UF is most often entangled with (and can often be commercially categorised with casual reciprocity) is paranormal romance (PR). Loosely defined, PR is romantic fiction that features supernatural elements. An extended definition offered by Joseph Crawford (2014) is that PR is any 'work that tells the story of the development and consummation of a positive, loving, romantic relationship between a human and a vampire [or other supernatural creature], adhering to all standard romance-novel tropes' (p. 9). The emphasis is on narratives that have a strong

supernatural presence, but are still primarily narratives of romance. This distinction appears clear, but as UF also includes sub-plots within the narrative (or, in the case of Laurell K. Hamilton, novellas within a larger series) of romance, it is often mistaken for PR. However, Crawford (2014) clarified that a 'work that devotes a substantial portion of its plot (and page count) to the development of such a relationship, while also including mystery and action adventure storylines, would be a work that contained paranormal romance elements' (p. 9). UF does often contain elements of PR, yet the focus of the narrative is the hero's journey. Although relationships are a contributing factor, the resolution does not require a romantic ending.

The emergence of new subgenres, especially those highlighted here, was a result of the innovative changes that the gothic genre brought to literature. Eric Rabkin (1977) stated:

> Gothicism is a literary movement that helped create the climate for the emergence in the nineteenth century of modern science fiction, the thriller, detective fiction, and the psychological novel. This whole movement, like a genre, emerged out of a confluence of earlier literary types and spawned a series of new genres even at the same time that the mainstream of the movement continued and developed its own. (p. 182)

The gothic opened readers to a universe of dark fiction that spoke to their psyches. New genres arise to meet the new needs of the reader. For fantasy especially, the historical and cultural needs of readers will always create new discourses because 'the frustrations encountered by an individual or group will vary over time and space' (Elkins, 1985, p. 26). Maxim Jakubowski (1990) aligned the emergence of new fantasy subgenres with the 'increasing commercialisation of fantasy' (p. 224). Jakubowski (1990) credited this with stimulating 'the advent of major talents, who have possibly found a perverse and rewarding pleasure in exploring, subverting and expanding the other neglected realms of fantasy writing relegated to the sidelines by the sheer bulk of Tolkien's heritage' (p. 224). In 1992, Attebery (1992) wrote of an emerging subgenre:

> Of all the subgenres to emerge within fantasy in recent years, the one that promises to reshape the genre most significantly is as yet unnamed, or rather no name for it has proved adequate. Sometimes called 'low fantasy', sometimes 'real world

fantasy' or 'modern urban fantasy', it is characterised by the avoidance of the enclosed fantasy worlds predominant in earlier fantasies, from Lewis Carroll's Wonderland to Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea. Instead, these fantasies describe settings that seem to be real, familiar, present-day places, except that they contain the magical characters and impossible events of fantasy. (p. 126)

I believe that this low fantasy subgenre can be comfortably labelled 'urban fantasy'. This title and the generic signals commonly used by writers of UF help separate this subgenre as a unique branch of fantasy. I wish to end this section with Jakubowski's (1990) comment that highlights the importance of generic change, adaption and disintegration because, in these new forms, we see the creativity of the human spirit:

> The main hope for the future is that all these complementary streams and subgenres that make up fantasy writing continue to prosper and to cross-fertilise one another, for in diversity lies the potential for innovation and quality. From high fantasy to dark fantasy and surrealism, there is a place for all aspects of the genre. There will always be a fascination with the dark, the unreal and the imaginary, and there can be little doubt that there will always be writers, old and new, to provide the necessary skills and thrills, the parts that unleash the mysteries of imagination. (p. 236)

Theorising Urban Fantasy

This thesis aims to contribute to the theoretical framework of the loose category of UF by seeking to identify its key generic codes and define it as a subgenre belonging to the larger genre of fantasy. The thesis is structured in four chapters, and includes an appendix that provides summations of the novels identified in this thesis as UF.

Chapter 1 explores the evolution of UF from its fantasy roots. As the chapter examines the elements that define fantasy and remain present in UF, it also considers those that have remained in mainstream contemporary forms of fantasy from which UF has deviated. I examine the definitions currently existing for UF and the work of theorists in the subgenre. Fantasy comprises half of UF; thus, it is important to understand how many of UF's characteristics are a deliberate diversion from the Tolkienian heritage of modern fantasy. I end the chapter with an expanded definition of the generic characteristics that I believe offer a clear framework to evaluate whether a text can be categorised as UF.

Chapter 2 focuses on the second and equally important half of the UF name—the urban. The use of urban settings in UF is a defining characteristic of the subgenre. This chapter engages in discussing a number of urban realism characteristics drawn from nineteenth- (and some twentieth-) century urban realists that also cross over with gothic characteristics. This chapter explores the importance of the use of real-world settings and the multiplicity in the construction of urbanscapes, which play a role in shaping the narrative boundaries of UF. These characteristics are an important foregrounding to the thematic concerns explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 deals with the thematic concerns of fear, anxiety and dread. This chapter draws strongly on the antecedent genres of the gothic, horror fiction and urban realism to examine how dark emotions are imaginatively expressed to the reader through the urban landscapes in UF. I explore UF's uses of liminal spaces, terminal landscapes, the city edifice and tensions in the city between the past and present. The atmospheric themes of fear, anxiety and dread permeate all aspects of the UF narrative and remain a distinct generic signal that harkens to UF's heritage from gothic and horror fiction.

Chapter 4 returns to a core component of fantasy literature—the hero and the hero's journey. A generic characteristic of UF is its creation of an inimitable protagonist. I titled this character 'The Urban Hunter' based on an amendment Clute (2012b) made to his original UF definition. The urban hunter is a character uniquely situated to thrive and hunt in the urban landscape. I also argue that, in an urban setting, the female protagonist is best suited to being a hunter. UF is a female-centric subgenre—it is predominantly written by women, for women, about women. Thus, it is unsurprising that the central characters tend to be women and the role that the protagonist must fulfil as an urban hunter is actually better suited to a female character. As part of the discussion in this final chapter, I also explore the evolution of the female character as it pertains to UF—from her roots in medieval romance, to gothic and horror fiction and urban realism, and finally in the changes she has undergone in the fantasy literature of the twentieth century.

In the conclusion to this thesis, I argue that UF is a unique subgenre that comments on our fears and anxieties about urban life. The UF subgenre indicates a disturbing fascination with the brutal and monstrous facets of human nature. It also draws attention to the changing perception of the female hero and offers a space in a real-

world setting to explore how women's perceptions of themselves are changing. This thesis cannot offer a comprehensive review of all the generic components of UF, or even touch on all the narratives that do or could belong to UF. Rather, it focuses on presenting the main characteristics that both define and delineate UF as a new subgenre. Thus, within a limited frame of reference, this thesis aims to fulfil a twofold purpose: (i) to explore the evolution of UF from its roots in fantasy, urban realism and other antecedent genres in order to better elucidate its inherited characteristics, and (ii) to offer a classificatory framework that identifies the distinctive elements of UF's thematic concerns and protagonists.

Chapter 1: The Evolution and Definition of Urban Fantasy

> The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and as ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, least the gates should be shut and the keys lost. ('On Fairy Stories', J. R. R. Tolkien, 1988)

The debate concerning fantasy as a genre has been undertaken by many theorists, yet the central questions remain largely unanswerable: How do you define a genre as vast as fantasy? How do you justify particular inclusions and exclusions of texts labelled as fantasy? Wolfe (2004) stated that '[t]here is no agreed-upon canon of fantasy works to discuss, and no agreed-upon definition of what fantasy is, exactly' (p. 373), and there is clearly truth in his words. Even after over 100 years of critical discussion (if one includes early critical discussions on the role of fairy stories), it is still possible to begin a lively debate on the topic of what comprises fantasy. Fantasy remains enigmatic and an abundant source of discussion. The epigraph beginning this chapter can be read both as capturing the wonders of a fantasy world and reflecting the treacherous realm of fantasy theory.

This section highlights three key areas of this thesis: (i) discussing fantasy as a genre and discussing the key theorists involved, (ii) distinguishing UF as an independent subgenre and (iii) examining the definitions currently available on UF. The aim here is to provide a framework to understand the development of UF as a subgenre, rather than presenting a comprehensive examination of fantasy.

Considering the Genre of Fantasy

Genre theory classifies texts into types and groups based on their forms and formal characteristics. As Todorov (1973) stated, when 'we examine works of literature from the perspective of genre, we engage in a very peculiar enterprise: we discover a principle operative in a number of texts, rather than what is specific about each of

them' (p. 3). The generic appearance is particularly problematic in fantasy because of the breadth of texts that can be incorporated under that label.[1] Generic parameters are not overly helpful in developing criteria for this form. This is principally because:

> Fantasy, as a literary genre, is composed of works in which non-rational phenomena play a significant part. That is, they are works in which events occur, or places or creatures exist, that could not occur or exist according to rational standards or scientific explanations. (Tymn et al., 1979, p. 3)

The key generic characteristic is non-rational phenomena, yet this element is present in literature that ranges from Homeric epics and animal fables, to Chivalric romances and fairy tales, and to gothic and modern weird tales. Fantasy being so capacious is thus irreducible to a simple genre. As Diana Waggoner (1978, p. 3) suggested, fantasy deals with a range of mythopoeic[2] archetypes that are developed from classical mythology, as well as interpretations of modern allegorical myths, such as the Old West, genocide through colonialisation and the power of telepathy.

However, the difficulty in confining fantasy to a set of mythopoeic tropes is that the 'use of these symbols and images is not confined to fantasy, nor does it make a work of fantasy' (Waggoner, 1978, p. 3). Thus, we turn to Colin Manlove (2004) for a more succinct definition of fantasy. He stated that a fantasy is: 'A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms' (Manlove, 2004, p. 157). As with other definitions offered by theorists,[3] the key element is the non-rational, supernatural or otherworldly presence in the fiction. However, Manlove introduced the importance of the relationship between the reader, or the representational mortal characters, and the supernatural. Manlove (2004) asserted that it is an important distinction of fantasy that 'the reader becomes partially familiar with or at home in the marvellous worlds presented' (p. 163). He is not unique

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[1] Depending on the theorist, ancient mythology, folklore, fables, fairy tales, gothic, horror, modern fantasy, science fiction and more have been incorporated under the broad label of fantasy.

[2] Mythopoeic is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* as the 'creation of myth or myths' ("Mythopoeic," 2015).

[3] Outlined in Sandner's (2004) exceptional collection, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, are the various central theorists' views on fantasy, ranging from Joseph Addison's (1712) 'The Fairy Way of Writing' to Clute's (1997) definition of fantasy in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.

in stressing this significance. In his essay from which the epigraph above was taken, J. R. R. Tolkien (1988) wrote about the successful sub-creator as being an author who is able to create a secondary world with its own version of 'truths' that a reader's mind may enter[4]: '[y]ou therefore believe it, while you are, as it were inside' (p. 37). The belief in the existence of the non-rational while interacting with the fantasy text is central to separating fantasy from other similar genres, including the fantastic.

Fantasy requires acceptance by the reader of the world and its non-rational elements; however, Todorov (1973) identified the pivotal division between marvellous, fantastic and uncanny based on the hesitation of belief—that the 'fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event' (p. 25). According to Todorov (1973), the first requirement the fantastic should fulfil is that 'the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons' (p. 33). Against the fantastic, fantasy does not attempt to pretend that the non-rational has a rational explanation. In this respect, a reader has already accepted the events as situated in the category of the marvellous. The uncanny is closer to modern horror or weird tales, where a reader is not always forewarned of the presence of the supernatural, which allows for an experience of hesitation. Thus, it is important to understand that fantasy literature relies on two key areas: (i) the presence of non-rational or supernatural phenomena and (ii) an acceptance by the reader of these phenomena as an irreducible element of the text.

Todorov's restrictions do not solve the question and definition, as a plethora of modes can belong to fantasy. Even if ancient forms such as myths, fables, folklore and fairy tales are stripped away to be considered independent genres, there still remains a vast collection—a point made by Darko Suvin (2000):

> Indeed, one of the problems of the term 'Fantasy' is that it almost inextricably stands for three corpuses of different historical scope: first, the post-Tolkien corpus of 'heroic' plus 'horror' fantasy; second, the Morris-to-just-after-Tolkien corpus of what may be now called 'classical' fantasy, up to say the mid-1970s; and third, the

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[4] Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* influenced the style and thematic concerns of much of twentieth-century fantasy. He is responsible for outlining what has become the predominant form of fantasy: secondary world fantasy. Tolkien (1988) explained this as follows: 'What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful "sub-creator". He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world' (pp. 36–37).

tradition that can be retrospectively identified as having shaped these corpuses, beginning in Gothic novels and German Romantics and continuing in a phrase of inserting the fantastic Novum into realistic surroundings after 1830–40. (p. 209)

Suvin's division of corpuses can also be seen in other more comprehensive reference works, such as *Fantasy and Literature: A Reader's Guide* by Marshall Tymn, Kenneth Zahorski and Robert Boyer (1979) and *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, edited by David Sandner (2004). These works identify that the modern fantasy literature that has developed as post-Tolkien fantasy has notable differences to early works labelled fantasy. Jules Zanger (1982) related this fact to fantasy being 'a response to a particular combination of historical conditions' (p. 227). Suvin (2000, p. 209) supported this idea, especially in explaining the growth in the popularity of fantasy works. Zanger (1982) added that when 'we have a significant number of literary works that share as their primary characteristic similar violations of the limits of possible experience, we have a literary convention, a genre of fantasy which itself shapes subsequent fantasies' (p. 227).

This ongoing shaping may be at the heart of the difficulty in defining fantasy. It is a genre that often reflects the concerns of a particular people in a particular time. When focusing on a psychoanalytical reading of fantasy, Jackson (1991) stated that 'fantasy has altered in character over the years in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes "reality"' (p. 4), which implies a connection between meaning and context. Against Jackson's Freudian reading of fantasy, an argument can be made that, as a literature defined by its use of non-rational or unreal elements, the predominant source of its effect is as an allegorical or representational reflection of reality. Waggoner (1978) stated:

> What is important is the treatment of this mythopoeic material. Fantasy places the material in a fictional framework within which it is treated as empirical data, the common stuff of ordinary reality. A fantasy world is a secondary reality whose metaphysical premises are different from those of the real world, but whose inhabitants are men and women like ourselves, who live in their reality just as we do in ours. (pp. 3–4)

Thus, according to Waggoner (1978), the aim of fantasy is not to confute or analyse myths, but to renew them, whereby 'every successful fantasy, explicitly or implicitly,

tries to establish another universe as a mirror or a metaphor for our own world' (p. 4). Jackson (1991, p. 34) related this idea to the difficulty of identifying whether fantasy is marvellous or mimetic. Fantasy literature relies on the convention of realist fiction, but then pulls the reader into a world of improbabilities. Thus, '[b]y offering a problematic re-presentation of an empirically "real" world, the fantastic[5] raises questions of the nature of the real and the unreal' (Jackson, 1991, p. 37), causing this relationship to become a central concern. Rabkin (1977) shared a similar view:

> Fantasy is not random freedom from restraint, but the continuing diametric reversal of the ground rules within a narrative world. When escape literature is not random but is rather the establishment of a narrative world that offers a diametric reversal of the ground rules of the extra-textual world, then escape literature is to an important degree fantastic, and, for its audience, psychologically useful. If we know the world to which a reader escapes, then we know the world from which he comes. (p. 73)

Zanger (1982) supported the reading that fantasy can be construed as a critique of the real world. The 'author's private vision, when written, becomes public and socialised, contrived to embody and reinforce the private fantasies of its readers' (pp. 226–227); thus, fantasy may be interpreted allegorically or even psychoanalytically. However, this is an applied understanding of fantasy, and is not the only interpretation of the purpose that fantasy theoretically serves.

In that regard, C. S. Lewis and Tolkien perceive the role of fantasy literature as life-enriching because 'it can give us experiences we have never had and thus instead of "commenting on life", can add to it' (Lewis, 1966, p. 38). In discussing his own pleasure in stories, Tolkien (1988) stated that 'at no time can I remember that the enjoyment of a story was dependent on belief that such a thing could happen, or had happened, in "real life"' (p. 39). The power of fantasy literature is its ability to reach the reader without the requirement of physical experience. As Waggoner (1978) indicated, fantasy 'works with psychological, emotional symbols that possess great

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[5] In her text, Jackson discussed both the genre of fantastic, as outlined by Todorov, and the commercially popular genre of fantasy. At times, it is difficult to identify which particular genre she is focused on, as the distinction between the fantastic and fantasy as separate genres has been a theoretical development of more recent years. For the purpose of this thesis, I have adopted parts of her discussion where she moves between the two terms, but I am interested mainly in her ideas pertaining to the commercially popular genre of fantasy literature from which UF has evolved.

evocative power in themselves' (p. 27), which are able to embody in a rational form the experiences that encompass 'all of life: the conscious, the unconscious, the temporal and the external, the real and the ideal' (p. 27). Tolkien (1988) expressed this in his own reflections on the role of fantasy:

> I desired dragons with profound desire. Of course, I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighbourhood, intruding into my relatively safe world, in which it was, for instance, possible to read stories in peace of mind, free from fear. But the world that contained even the imagination of F'afnir was richer and more beautiful, at whatever cost of peril. The dweller in the quiet and fertile plains may hear of the tormented hills and the unharvested sea and long for them in his heart. For the heart is hard though the body be soft. (p. 40)

Fantasy offers experience and security. It challenges a reader's understandings through both the representative characters' journeys and the allegorical non-rational phenomena encountered. However, above all else, fantasy is about good storytelling, and as Lewis (1966) stated, '[g]ood stories often introduce the marvellous or supernatural, and nothing about Story has been so often misunderstood as this' (p. 13). Fantasy has a complex history and remains unresolved as a genre. Yet from this broad source a number of notable subgenres have developed.

Distinguishing Urban Fantasy

Tolkien's trilogy (*The Lord of the Rings*: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*) had a significant influence on fantasy as a genre.[6] A notable outcome was the mass of Tolkien-style literature that flooded the market (Jakubowski, 1990, p. 223). For a long period, the most common fantasy produced belonged to secondary world or high fantasy. 'High fantasy' is a term that distinguishes fantasy by its use of a secondary setting—another world that 'should possess a consistent order that is explainable in terms of the supernatural' (Zahorski & Boyer, 1982, p. 57). A measurable value often placed on authors is their ability to act as sub-creators and provide a space of pure escapism. This concept aligns with the

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[6] Jakubowski (1990) wrote that '[w]ith the British publication in October 1955 of *The Return of the King* (1956 for U. S.), completing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, fantasy underwent a profound change' (p. 223) and '[t]hereafter, the quest trilogy floodgates opened wide, with every new book contributing a Hollywood-style high concept twist to the classic Tolkien formula—*Lord of the Rings* with animals, with feminist overtones, with child protagonists' (p. 227).

views of Tolkien and Lewis, as authors also saw the primary value in fantasy literature as storytelling. In their essay 'The Secondary Worlds of High Fantasy', Zahorski and Boyer (1982) argued that the 'new worldscape should also be different from our own. So different, as a matter of fact, that we are allowed to escape for a while from the mundane existence' (p. 57). However, after the commercial popularity of fantasy post-Tolkien, there has been the advent of new talented authors who have focused on 'exploring, subverting and expanding the other neglected realms of fantasy' (Jakubowski, 1990, p. 224), rather than continuing in Tolkien's shadow.

Consequently, one particular area that experienced growth was low fantasy. While still containing non-rational phenomena, low fantasy is set in the conventional here and now. The story occurs and primarily remains focused on an ordinary (or 'mundane') real world that also happens to be populated by the supernatural. Setting alone does not signify the change, but also the treatment of the mythopoeic elements. Secondary-world (or 'high') fantasy elaborates on its differences to the primary world—'its internal laws are different from ours, and so preparation and explanation are necessary' (Waggoner, 1978, p. 10). In contrast, low fantasy 'offers no explanations for its non-rational happenings; in fact it cannot, precisely because it is set in the ordinary, primary world' (Zahorski & Boyer, 1982, p. 57). High and low fantasy began to present different thematic interests in an effort to find new and unique stories. In his review of 'Modern Fantasy for Adults, 1957–88', Jakubowski (1990) identified that his main hope for the future of fantasy was for the more unusual and varied styles to 'prosper and to cross fertilise one another, for in diversity also lies the potential for innovation and quality' (p. 236). Due to the prolific nature of secondary-world fantasy, the works of low fantasy skirted away from the more traditional heroic forms and towards darker styles, including weird tales and horror. It is from these changes that UF was born.

As such, UF exists as an important deviation from the commercially successful Tolkienian fantasy literature. Tolkien's work appeared at a time when fantasy, as a genre, had come into its own, following the success of serialised magazines. The term

'fantasy' as referring to a genre of common literary compositions[7] only appeared in 1949 as part of the title of the popular magazine, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science-Fiction*. The success of Tolkien's trilogy had both negative and positive implications for fantasy. The work of Tolkien as an author and critic, alongside other successful writers, produced a growth in critical respectability, and fantasy became 'a more academically "safe" area for scholarship' (Wolfe, 1990, p. 372). However, these masterworks also caused the quest trilogy floodgates to open wide, 'with every new book contributing a Hollywood-style high concept twist to the classic Tolkien formula' (Jakubowski, 1990, p. 227). There were two distinct branches in fantasy after writers began to tire of the endless tide of trope novels. First, there were the subversive works of authors such as Michael Moorcock and Stephen Donaldson (Jakubowski, 1990, pp. 226–227), who actively embraced anti-hero characters and brought an element of gritty realism to their secondary worlds. Second, authors turned to the counter of secondary-world fantasy and began to embrace low fantasy tales.

UF was a direct rejection of the pastoral otherworld of Tolkien, and instead focused on the complex realities of urban life. Thus, as Elber-Aviram (2012) suggested in her paper, 'The Labyrinthine City', UF developed 'in diametric opposition to epic fantasy' (p. 273). Elber-Aviram (2012) went on to argue that the subgenre 'exhibits a heightened sensibility of the current (post)-modern era, thereby belying epic fantasy's reactionary inflection and aspiration towards a unified ontology' (p. 273). This alludes to the interesting opportunities that a study of UF offers as a subgenre that can be examined as a set of literature working to reject traditional fantasy tropes. Contemporary UF appears to reach into other sources and genres for inspiration and creation, which allows for a unique reimagining of ancient mythologies in a modern setting. UF also works to reject the vast heritage of epic literature and, to a degree, the traditional hero's journey formula, thereby generating a new set of tropes and patterns to develop in contrast to secondary-world fantasy.

This emerging style of low fantasy set in an urban landscape did not begin to be distinguished from the larger genre of fantasy until the 1990s. Attebery's *Strategies of*

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[7] Outlined in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* ("Fantasy," 2015) as part of the fourth sense of the word fantasy, it appears under 'Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present,' listed as 'f. A genre of literary compositions'.

Fantasy, first published in 1992, began discussing a new subgenre. New subgenres in fantasy are not unusual because, as trends and reading preferences change, subgenres 'emerge, merge, or disintegrate' (Attebery, 1992, p. 126) to reflect this. However, Attebery (1992) noted that '[o]f all the subgenres to emerge within fantasy in recent years, the one that promises to reshape the genre most significantly is as yet unnamed' (p. 126). He acknowledged that the primary key difference of this subgenre— previously called low fantasy, modern urban fantasy or real-world fantasy—is its rejection of enclosed fantasy worlds. Instead, 'these fantasies describe settings that seem to be real, familiar, present day places, except that they contain the magical characters and impossible events of fantasy' (Attebery, 1992, p. 126). Dissatisfied with existing labels, Attebery (1992) named the subgenre 'indigenous fantasy' and referred to fantasy 'that is, like indigenous species, adapted to and reflective of its native environment' (p. 129). This is not a term that I consider overly accessible due to the denominative link that can be made to indigenous mythology, from which much fantasy draws and which is its own body of literature. Equally, the idea of a 'native environment' is problematic because writers often reach beyond what is native to them. 'Contextual' fantasy may work better to refer to authors' adaption and reflection of their own social and environmental contexts. Unsurprisingly, the term 'indigenous fantasy' has not made traction as a label.

In his work, Attebery (1992) identified a number of key aspects of indigenous fantasy that differentiate it from secondary-world fantasy and are relevant to understanding UF:

> The choice to write indigenous rather than Tolkienian fantasy involves making two simultaneous and incompatible assertions: first, that the story takes place in the ordinary world accessible to our senses, and, second, that this world contains— contrary to all sensory evidence and experience—magical beings, supernatural forces, and a balancing principle that makes fairy tale endings not only possible but obligatory. (p. 129)

Neither point appears initially to be different from the description of low fantasy in Zahorski and Boyer (1979).[8] Attebery went on to discuss the concept that indigenous

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[8] This was outlined originally in 1979 in *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*, which Zahorski and Boyer edited with Marshall Tymn.

fantasy (which he infers largely as being American) is the act of a modern-day tribal storyteller. Attebery (1992) suggested that by 'using American settings in which the mythic fusion of magic and everyday life does not linger even in memory, they have attempted to recapture the medieval or tribal storyteller's ability to feed observation into fantasy' (p. 133). Thus, the role of these fantasists is to help repopulate the modern world with the mythic. While secondary-world fantasy focuses on creating new and original mythopoeic worlds, this new subgenre is interested in the renewal or reimaging of old mythologies. Attebery (1992, p. 141) perceived the eccentric viewpoint of reconciling the familiar and magical as a form diverging from representational to authentic storytelling. He saw this view as ensuring that 'our own tribal storytellers can resume their proper function, reclaim their unique discourse, and recapture the modern world for the imagination' (Attebery, 1992, p. 141).

Attebery was interested in the new perspectives this real-world fantasy offers. This style of fantasy is 'an opportunity for self-conscious explorations of the interaction of the mapped-together yet fundamentally incompatible world views' (Bould, 2009, p. 307). The collision of the ontologies of mythical and mundane creates a different discourse to that in secondary fantasy. Thus, the aim of indigenous fantasy stories appears to dissolve 'the membrane between worlds and between ways of comprehending the world, bringing revelation and transformation' (Bould, 2009, p. 307). Mark Bould (2009) suggested that these new perceptions, to a degree, engage the reader in a more introspective evaluation because the world is so similar to their own, rather than alienating the reader by the presence of the non-rational. This may occur due to the skill of the storyteller or even a yearning in the modern reader for the return of myth.[9] However, that is a larger discussion deserving further analysis. This type of fantasy is notably different to Tolkienian fantasy because the representational allegories are more immediate. Yet the name coined by Attebery has not become commonly used; rather, the label of 'urban fantasy' has become popularised, both commercially and critically. However, even now, there continues to be a range of different terms applied to the subgenre. This is one of the difficulties associated with

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[9] In his text *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre*, John Timmerman (1993) discussed the role of myth in the modern age, suggesting that fantasy acts to fulfil this yearning because 'Myth provides a dynamic sense of fulfilling a divine will *in* a time rather than simply following the rules and regulations *of* a time' (p. 22).

writing about UF, alongside the fact that critics too often attempt to label a single author's work under one title. Most authors who write UF also write in other subgenres and genres. Unlike traditional secondary-world fantasists such as Ursula Le Guin and George R. R. Martin, whose works clearly fall into secondary-world fantasy, UF authors such as Neil Gaiman and China Mieville tend to write across a range of subgenres that include works that border UF, but do not belong to the subgenre. In her discussion of the subgenre new weird, Sheryl Vint (2009) adopted much of Mieville's works. Vint (2009) stated that Mieville 'reinvigorates fantastic writing as a blend of science-fiction, Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror that is attentive to both its pulp and its high culture influences and roots' (p. 197). The problem is the range of forms across which Mieville works, and that his writing is very 'new' in a number of his approaches. Although many of his novels use an urban rather than rural setting, not all of Mieville's novels are UF, nor are they all new weird.

New weird as presented by VanderMeer (as cited in Elber-Aviram, 2012) acts to subvert the 'romanticised ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science-fiction and fantasy' (p. 273). Although it may operate within the same critical realm as UF, new weird is constructed in a manner in which the concerns of the urban environment can become secondary. In comparison, UF must foreground the city elements as an essential component of the narrative. Another similar term associated with both Gaiman and Mieville is 'radical fantasy', which 'offers innovative strategies for representing the ever-changing capitalist totality and the emerging presence of posthuman identity' (Burling, 2009, p. 326).The problem with this statement is that it suggests that only one particular type of fantasy is capable of offering these insights. However, as Jackson (1991) revealed in her analysis of fantasy as a predominantly subversive literature, a vital role of fantasy is to question the accepted standards of society. Jackson (1991) stated that fantasy is able to open up for a brief moment 'on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside the dominant value system' (p. 4). I tend to agree with Jackson that the nature of fantasy is to question; thus, I find the terms 'new' or 'radical' not truly relevant to a literature that embodies a constant tension between the past and present in an effort to highlight social order and its counter—disorder.

Two further subgenres with which UF is often confused are dark fantasy and PR. Dark fantasy is a broad category that refers to the more fantastical forms of horror literature—or, as Wolfe (as cited in Clute, 1997a, p. 1) stated, as an interchangeable term for modern gothic fantasy. It is a term more often used to define the particular effect of a text on a reader, in much the same way that 'horror' can be used (Clute, 1997a, p. 1). In this manner, dark fantasy can be applied to most UF, but not all UFs are dark fantasies. In contrast, PR has become a distinct subgenre that often overlaps with UF. Crawford (2014) offered 'no strict set of rules for determining which works count as paranormal romances' (p. 8), yet suggested that they are simply romantic fictions that feature overtly supernatural elements. UF can be clearly differentiated from PR by the understanding that the narrative focus of romance literature must be the inevitable resolution of the lovers' journey. In contrast, UF focuses on the resolution of the incursion of non-rational or supernatural forces in the protagonist's life, which may include a romantic subplot. Although many UFs (especially in the mass-produced market) include an important supernatural romantic entanglement, it is not a primary characteristic necessary for a text to be categorised as UF.

Previous Definitions of Urban Fantasy

There is no clear etymology for UF; rather, like many other 'transitionary' terms, it has developed out of a need to identify a group of texts that share commonalities. The use and creation of labels is always transitional, and as Tymn et al. (1979) stated, '[i]t is a reminder that the best definitions come after the fact and are a way of organising a body of knowledge' (p. 3). Using the label of UF for this subgenre over other terms—such as low, real-world, indigenous or dark—is an event after the fact. The subgenre has now grown and developed sufficiently to be considered resolutely urban—a point upon which I will further elaborate. The first and primary definition of UF exists in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Clute, 1997b). However, this definition, while identifying some of the key characteristics, is not thoroughly discussed or developed.[10] John Clute's (1997b) definition begins by identifying the key element of the city as more than a setting—where a 'city is a *place*; urban fantasy is a *mode*' (p. 975). It is a style and particular form of fantasy that deals with the urban experience. The definition

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[10] This is due largely to the text's role as a reference text, rather than a critical text.

states that 'UFs are normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly *about* a real city' (Clute, 1997b, p. 975). Like Attebery (1992), Clute argued that the intersection of the ordinary with the fantastic pushes this subgenre from high to low fantasy. However, the text must also be located in a cityscape to distinguish UF further from other low fantasy. The presence and use of the urban in the fantasy story must be significant.

However, the use of the city must be as more than a background setting. The city needs to figure as the portal that allows an intermixing of the magical and ordinary (Clute, 1997b, p. 976). Clute (1997b) related the development of UF as a logical progression not only from historical fantasies, but from the tradition of city literature: 'As the 20th century has advanced, UF writers have intensified the model developed by Dickens and Sue.[11] Fantasies of history are often set in cities, and contemporary fantasies are also set more often than not within urban surrounds' (p. 976). In such texts, the urban landscape is a vital influence on the discourses in the stories. Further, he outlined three structural elements that remain common in UF due to the pivotal role of the city as a portal:

> [T]hey tend to emphasise the consanguinity not only of intersecting worlds, but peoples, times and stories as well; they tend—fairly enough—to treat the late 20th century as an essential urban drama, so that conflicts within the city resonate throughout the worlds; and like most fantasies, tend to try to achieve a sense of healing. (Clute, 1997b, p. 976)

These three requirements remain throughout most UF novels—from those in UF's inception in the late 1980s, through to the work of new millennium authors today, they are important characteristics that delineate the mode as unique.

Clute continued to identify a number of significant authors as being seminal examples of UF. However, alongside other critics, he distinguished Emma Bull's 1987 novel *War for the Oaks* as the first 'true' UF novel. Her novel, more than the experimental works of Charles de Lint, Peter Beagle and Terri Wilding, used a wholly urban locale,

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[11] In his definition, Clute (1997b) offered that the source for UF is from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, such as Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Eugene Sue's *Les Mysteres de Paris*, Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol* and Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Clute (1997b) related the work of these authors to that of UF because they 'tend to imagine internal kingdoms within the city … which operate as microcosms and parodies of the larger reality' (p. 975).

without dreamscapes or parallel secondary worlds. Bull's story occurs in the fictionalised city of Minneapolis, and the battle between good and evil is for control of the city itself. Even as early as this, the subgenre was asserting itself as more than something defined by setting alone. Nanette Wargo Donohue (2008) proposed that UF can be divided into traditional (referring to the early works of the 1980s to 1999) and contemporary (post-millennium novels). She suggested that traditional UF can be differentiated by its 'feel of a modern folk or fairy tale' and that the 'distinctions between good and evil are often subtle' (Donohue, 2008, p. 68). Although both categories are located in urban settings, contemporary UF is grittier. Donohue (2008) also recognised that, for contemporary UF, the:

> common characteristics include tough female protagonists (often with supernatural powers or superhuman strength), stronger distinctions between good and evil, grittier urban landscapes, first-person narration, and sexual tension, often between the female protagonist and a male character who toes the line between good and evil. (p. 64)

However, I disagree with the differences Donohue identified between these two categories, and suggest that Donohue was influenced by the lyrical nature of the early writers' style, which is reflective of the period, not the subgenre. Bull, de Lint and Wilding all have a particular tone to their style of writing; however, I argue that this is due to the personal preferences of the authors, since a similar tone is also used in their other fantasy and science fiction writing. This is one of the further difficulties in dealing with generic definitions. Like many subgenres, UF is not a static mode, but is mutable and changes theme and tone depending on the temporal moment in which it is produced. However, Donohue identified a number of significant characteristics that distinguish UF generally from other low fantasy subgenres.

It is important to note that the characteristics of UF cannot be separated from the urban. Although Donohue (2008) highlighted differences in protagonist, didactics, locale, narration and theme, all of these only work successfully within their individual stories because of their interaction with the urban environment. Clute (1997b) was correct in identifying the city as the portal through which the elements of the story are required to filter. UF should not be considered only an urban story with supernatural elements, but rather as developing a framework that allows a discussion of the urban experience

through the lens of the non-rational. Further, UF offers more than a retelling of city life—it acts to highlight ideas of social disruption. The female protagonists are neither gothic victim heroines nor gendered 'sheroes';[12] rather, they are flawed yet morally determined women who already operate in a minimalised role.[13] The sexualised encounters are not romance novel 'rape fantasies',[14] but power interactions that allow women to negotiate positions of equality in often non-traditional or diverse types of sex. The occurrence of this in the city is deliberate—the association between city and modernity is not new, and UF continues this tradition (Clute, 1997b, p. 976). UF questions expected ideas of power, homosexuality and rape, and also touches on more unusual concepts of necrophilia and bestiality as side-effects of sex with vampires and were-creatures, respectively. The dichotomy of good versus evil is also questioned. In UF, the violence is often extreme—usually due to the influence of horror and murder-mystery narrative, but not simply on the 'black hat' side. Instead, the 'good guys' are equally likely to perpetrate atrocity. What is more distinct is a rejection of the gothic and horror form, where evil is aligned with the non-rational. Often, UF will either relate the antagonist's crimes to human failings, or the supernatural phenomena will be equally present on both sides, causing the motivation to be the focus, rather than the crime. Due to the 'grey' area created, rather than the more traditional clear didacticism of fantasy, the novels are permeated with an atmosphere of fear and anxiety that is reflected in the description of the environment and shown emotionally by the protagonist. The senses of anxiety and fear are exacerbated by the locale. The city, built by our ancestors as a monument to safety and community (Arango, 1970, p.

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[12] In 'Heroes or Sheroes', Mains, Ricca, Hassel, and Rucker (2009) discussed the issue of defining and labelling female heroes because too often they are restricted to traditional male counterpart roles, rather than being able to establish their own identity as women and heroes. This concept developed to describe situations in which female protagonists are only able to fulfil their masculine roles if they reject any form of femininity—they become 'female analogues of male heroes' (Mains et al., 2009, p. 183).

[13] The most common example of this is protagonists being involved with some official force, whether real or created. For example, in Laurell K. Hamilton's series, her protagonist first works for a division of the police force that deals with supernatural crimes, and is one of only two women associated with the team. Later, she becomes a United States (US) Marshal, again as a minority. Kim Harrison, Kelly Gay and Jim Butcher, who have long ongoing series, have their protagonists as detectives consulting on supernatural cases.

[14] Kristina Deffenbacher's (2014) article 'Rape Myths' Twilight and Women's Paranormal Revenge in Romantic and Urban Fantasy Fiction' examines the trend of criticism by readers of older romance novels for their negative portrayal of sex, yet embrace of new novels, such as *Twilight*, that have an even more negative perception of sexualisation and power roles. Deffenbacher (2014) wrote that the new supernatural genres make possible 'the reanimation and transformation of a host of rape myths … An infusion of the paranormal thus allows otherwise unviable narratives—stalking and rape as courtship and seduction, jealous ownership and control as love' (p. 923).

17), is filled in UF by supernatural creatures who are as morally and psychologically corrupt as humans. UF suggests that we have walled ourselves in with the monsters that have always been there.

Other critics may have arguments that counter my reading, depending on the canon of literature from which they choose to draw. As Elber-Aviram (2013) stated in her article, 'The Past is Below Us', contemporary 'scholars of urban fantasy have found themselves increasingly obliged to redefine the parameters of their field' (p. 2). This is the problem of any discussion of a genre still in production. As more authors emerge with unique points of view, the categorisation shifts and evolves. In his examination of Canadian UF, Allan Weiss (2006, p. 110) argued that a distinguishing characteristic is the treatment of character. Due to their contemporary setting, UF novels develop a richer characterisation than high fantasy. The characters are expected to learn 'to extend their view of life beyond solely personal problems to much larger issues' (Weiss, 2006, p. 110). The construction of identity and emotional depth of the protagonist continue to be important elements of UF. Unlike traditional secondary-world fantasies, the hero is seldom a trope character (such as thief, warrior or princess), but is developed as multifaceted and complex. The use of first-person narration, rather than high fantasy's third-person omniscient, also adds to the psychological depth of the protagonist, and, through that, the reader's deeper connection to the character. However, these characters are only created as such in UF because they are able to fit the urban locale they occupy. Elber-Aviram (2013) stated that a 'work of urban fantasy would be defined by its predominant interest in the concrete, tangible details of the city' (p. 2). The irreducible presence of the urban is the component that separates UF from new weird or dark fantasy.

Zuzana Slusna's (2014) argument is a reminder that UF is still a mode of world-building fantasy. She stated that, although the 'narratives are taking place in familiar or everyday, routine city environment' (Slusna, 2014, p. 101), the setting is not simply the ordinary urban, but an enriched version of the real world. UF is the marriage of the mundane and non-rational. In a similar manner to science fiction, it relies on the reader's belief in both the ordinary and extraordinary in the narrative. Slusna (2014) argued that, although these stories may resemble our world, 'they bring components that our everyday experience defines as empirically unverifiable' (p. 101). This

combination of both elements holds the key to distinguishing low and high fantasy. For UF, it is more vital because the non-rational needs to be integrated into the urban—the supernatural must populate spaces that are culturally believable. Thus, UF attempts to reimagine the mythologies of our age in a setting with which we are most comfortable. In this manner, Lazette Gifford (2002) argued that UF is neither static nor new, but a return to storytelling that explains the non-rational in a manner that we are able to accept in our modern world.

A Brief Word on the Choice of Texts

Thus far, I have only touched on a few of the plethora of urban fantasists. Since UF is a continually growing subgenre, it is difficult to limit the number of UF texts for discussion; consequently, this thesis cannot acknowledge all the UF texts available. I have also only focused on literary UF, when there has also been a corresponding increase in television, film, graphic novel[15] and fan-fiction pieces that are equally part of and an influence on the subgenre of UF. As aforementioned, Bull's (2001) *War for the Oaks* is considered a seminal text for UF, yet her work did not appear in a vacuum. In fact, a number of authors had begun to experiment with the urban form. The series of UF stories called *Borderland* began in 1986. It was edited by Terri Wilding and Mark Alan Arnold, and included stories by Bellamy Bach, Charles de Lint, Emma Bull and Ellen Kushner, among others. From this experience, de Lint developed his own UF city series titled *Newford*. De Lint continued beyond the other writers to produce acclaimed UF texts that drew on a distinct mix of European and American folklore. The influence of de Lint's work on other UF authors and strong adherence to the urban locale necessitated his inclusion in my thesis. Mercedes Lackey also developed her urban alternative history series originally in conjunction with other authors. However, her *Diana Tregarde* series (spanning from 1989 to 1991) best exemplifies UF, and contemporary UF authors' protagonists share strong similarities to the work developed by Lackey.

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[15] A brief example of these is as follows: television—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Angel* (1999–2004), *Moonlight* (2007), *The Dresden Files* (2007) and *Lost Girl* (2010–2014); film—*Hellboy* (2004), *Underworld* (2003) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012); graphic novels—Hayashida's *Dorohedoro* (2014–2015), Nightow's *Blood Blockade Battlefront* (2009–2015) and *The Rise of Aurora West* (2014). Many novels and television show offshoots are also made into graphic novels.

While Bull is believed to be the marker for the first of the UF novels, the works of Laurell K. Hamilton epitomise UF today. Her two ongoing series both use European mythologies with contemporary American settings. The *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series, begun in 1993, continues today with a total of 23 novels and six novellas published. It provides a fascinating insight to the subgenre because the focus and tone of the series has changed and evolved over time, while remaining (for the most part[16]) resolutely urban. Mieville has a number of novels associated with UF, although there are often other more dominant tones that lend his novels to different subgenres. However, *King Rat* is an appropriate blend of urban realism and supernatural non-rational that is important to include. As a note to omissions, his other novel *The City & the City* falls more fully into magical realism than true fantasy, and similarly, the works of Charlaine Harris (the *Southern Vampire* series made into television's *True Blood*) are often labelled UF, yet lack the primary presence of urban, even if they share other similar characteristics. Other authors whose particular series are comfortably situated in UF include Patricia Briggs's *Mercy Thompson*, Richelle Mead's *Succubus*, Kelly Gay's *Charlie Madigan*, Suzanne McLeod's *Spellcrackers.com* and Kim Harrison's *The Hollows*[17]. There are many more authors with individual UF novels or entire UF series, and some of these will be mentioned in part in this thesis. The appendix outlines the main texts focused on throughout this thesis, and includes a basic narrative summation. These particular texts were selected because they reveal a range of urban locales and selection of different mythologies. They also tend to share other common characteristics in their world building, character ensemble and style of protagonist. It is always a difficult task to select and omit texts; however, I believe my chosen authors are best able to represent the breadth of UF from its inception to now.

A Provisional Definition for Urban Fantasy

From a generic standpoint, the choice of authors (such as Bull, Lackey and de Lint) to write in a new type of fantasy is a significant decision. Dubrow (1982) suggested that when 'an author chooses to write in a given genre, he is not merely responding to the achievements and the pronouncements of others; he himself is issuing certain

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[16] A few of Hamilton's novels have been set in rural areas when the protagonist (as either an animator or US Marshal) is called in as an expert. These include *Bloody Bones*, *Blue Moon* and *Obsidian Butterfly* and will not be a primary source of discussion in this thesis for that reason.

[17] Please see Appendix A for further details on these texts.

statements about his art and art in general' (p. 10). The authors that chose to rework the Tolkienian fantasy tropes into new UF narratives were issuing statements about the UF subgenre. The world was changing and these nostalgic high-concept fantasies were no longer satisfying the postmodern reader. UF was a reaction to a (perceived) oppressive genre and a desire to create fantasy that resonated with the urban reader. As Dubrow (1982) stated, this is unsurprising because 'concepts of genre carry with them so many general implications about literature that they regularly reflect in microcosm the poetics of their author and his age' (p. 45). Like many subgenres, UF has evolved from a combination of inversion and displacement from the taxonomy of mainstream fantasy in response to a changing social and cultural environment. Frow (2015) stated that it is not unusual to respond to changing contexts, and this:

> emphasis on the social and situational underpinnings of genre corresponds closely to the way much recent work in the field of rhetoric tended to think about [genre]: as a *structured complex* which has a *strategic character* and interacts with the *demands of an environment.* (p. 14)

UF tends to follow a particular structure depending on the narrative choices of the author; however, it maintains a number of common structural elements: protagonist-driven quests; a traditional Freytag's pyramid plot; and recognisable generic signals drawing on detective, horror and/or gothic narrative tropes. What separates UF from fantasy is the intensely urban experience of the characters. This urban focus is the recurring characteristic that defines UF.

Dubrow (1982) simply stated that 'different genres are distinguished from one another by which characteristics predominate' (p. 7). In this chapter, I have focused on how UF emerged from fantasy as a new subgenre. However, the use of real-world urban (or low fantasy urban) settings (although important) is only one of UF's characteristics that help distinguish it from other genres and subgenres. Dubrow (1982) made an interesting observation on the choice of authors regarding the sub/genre in which they write:

> He [the author] in effect agrees that he will follow at least some of the patterns and conventions we associate with the genre or genres in which he is writing, and we in turn agree that we will pay close attention to certain aspects of his work while

realising that others, because of the nature of genres, are likely to be of less important. (p. 31)

This decision to uphold generic patterns and conventions necessarily affects the writing, reading and interpretation of a genre. UF (in the texts that I believe can be definitively labelled as UF) does possess a number of generic patterns and conventions that delineate UF's theoretical framework. There need to be recognisable traits that help clearly identify a text as belonging to a particular genre, yet it is also important to acknowledge that other traits are less important and may be specific to an author's interpretation of the subgenre. The following paragraphs offer a provisional definition of UF. This framework is examined in parts in the following chapters; however, as Dubrow (1982) reminded us, 'in studying genre, like many other literary issues, we should also anticipate a significant degree of inconsistency' (p. 110). The following definition will help classify texts on a continuum from quintessentially UF to the borderlands of the subgenre, where they overlap other subgenres.

UF can be defined as a unique subgenre within fantasy. Its primary point of departure from the larger genre of fantasy is its use of the city or urban locale as a portal through which the extraordinary, magical or supernatural is able to intersect and interact with the ordinary, mundane, real world. The city must operate as more than a backdrop and should reflect the experiences of life within a real city. The following traits are primary characteristics of UF, irreducible from the urban locale, and should be considered recurring traits that help classify the subgenre. UF is told primarily in first-person narrative and includes the protagonist's emotional, psychological and metaphysical developments. The protagonist tends to be a female who is both empowered and marginalised. She tends to occupy a marginalised position in society due to her gender, employment or metaphysical inheritance,[18] and is empowered by her ability and willingness to face and defeat the antagonist/s, and also usually by her connection with the supernatural, either through personal power or knowledge. The protagonist will be empowered by her role in the city—she will be recognisable as a typical inhabitant of

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[18] The influence of the metaphysical minority for most UF protagonists is part of their role as the last, strongest or most unique member of an exclusive supernatural or magical group. For example, Anita Blake (Hamilton) is born a rare necromancer, Charlie Madigan (Gay) comes from a unique genetic lineage, and Mercy Thompson (Patricia Briggs) is a very rare coyote shifter. These characters are not accepted for their abilities in human society or the supernatural community; they remain isolated and are often prejudiced against until there is a realisation of use for their particular heritage.

the city and her role as hero will be linked to her ability to thrive in the urban environment.[19] As such, the UF protagonist can be labelled an 'urban hunter'—a new title belonging to this subgenre. The protagonist will also function as a necessary bridge between the groups introduced in the story—often as a human–supernatural liaison, but equally often acting between supernatural groups as a fellow 'monster'. Further, thematic and tonal elements tend to include fear, anxiety and dread that reflect the level of disruption or violence present in the city. This can be either due to supernatural influences or in response to the socio-political issues of gender, sexuality and identity that the novels tend to raise. However, such thematic concerns are always developed and expressed through the characters' interactions with and presence in the urban landscape.

Secondary characteristics vary between authors and novels. They are present in other subgenres, but are significant in UF because of the implication that their occurrence is due to the locale of the city. Rather than listing these in needless detail here, I will summarise the overall characteristics that will be expanded in later chapters. First, there is the important presentation and examination of changing ideas on sexuality. The protagonists of UF often engage in non-traditional forms of sexual intercourse and interaction[20] that are reflective of society's changing views on sexuality, and a response to the implied mythological heritage of the creatures included.[21] What is particularly unique in UF's treatment of sex is the positive view it offers on sexual experimentation, while equally condemning rape, power play and force[22] that are

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[19] In his definition, Clute (1997b) also suggested that the protagonist of UF offers a new perspective on the idea of the hero: 'There is an increasing sense that writers may well be conceiving the typical inhabitant of the great cities as a kind of hunter-gatherer figure, one better able than suburbanities or farmers to cope with the crack-up of the immensely rigid world system created over the previous few thousand years' (p. 976).

[20] Including, but not limited to, bondage and dominance, sadism and masochism, blood play, breath play, fetishes, homosexuality, anal sex, oral sex, swingers, orgies, polyamorous relationships, role-play, necrophilia (sex with the undead) and bestiality (sex with a were-creature in animal form).

[21] The best example of this is the continued concept that blood taking by vampires results in an unintended sexual release or response by the donor. Thus, the act becomes representative of the desire to relinquish control in sexual situations. The other most common mythological expectation is that sexual encounters with were-animals will be animalistic, barbaric, rough and intense, thus coming to represent a desire to release the animal within and engage in bestial sexual acts. There are also the modern assumptions built into such encounters with these creatures that are associated with their assumed physiology: sex with a vampire must include blood and sex with a were-animal will include animal behaviours of biting and scratching.

[22] UF has an equally predominant female readership as mainstream romances and PRs. A distinguishing aspect of UF is that, even while 'playing' a subservient role in a sexual encounter, the female characters are equally in control and responsible for the interaction as the males. To a degree, the treatment of sex

popularly associated with the forms of 'bondage and dominance' and 'sadism and masochism' that these novels discuss.

Second, and here due mainly to the adoption of horror, gothic and murder-mystery tropes, UF tends to present visceral and explicit violence and death both at the level of destruction (multiple bodies) and atrocity (children). The degree of violence creates an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, while also developing and resolving the main plot lines of the story. Such an atmosphere also helps undermine the security of the home, the city and the self in a vivid and troubling manner. It would be expected that these acts belong to the 'evil' side, as presented in the form of antagonists, yet the responses of the protagonist and her helpers are often equally violent.[23] This results in the realisation that, instead of action, it is motivation that matters when it comes to the didactic resolution of the storyline.

Third, UF novels have moved away from the traditional hero's ensemble and instead form a support network of secondary characters around the protagonist that aid in their battles—physical and metaphoric—and are irreducible from the success of the final resolution. These support characters are often representative of the 'friends as family' communities that young adults build around themselves in cities—a trope well reflected in popular culture. They are formed by a number of other outsiders who occupy marginalised positions in their society, like the protagonist, but are also uniquely powerful and can subsequently aid the hero. Finally, UF novels involve or reimagine traditional and classic mythology—non-rational or supernatural creatures and events already immersed into our cultural understandings[24] are reinvigorated to

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in UF is counter-cultural when compared to the mainstream success of *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which both reinforce traditional and negative perceptions of women and sex. UF (predominantly adult UF, as opposed to young adult UF) focuses on sex as empowering for both genders, while also not romanticising the act.

[23] This dichotomy between the expected evil of the supernatural and the actual textual ambivalence of all the characters is a vital part of UF. The subgenre continues to return to the idea of questioning the 'monster' inside—returning to the question of who was the real monster: Dr Frankenstein or his creature? UF tends to resolutely decide that the true urban monsters are the human failings already present in our societies.

[24] By 'cultural understandings', I refer to the involvement of cultural folklore, fairy tales and fables that are already part of the popular consciousness. Whether taken from indigenous myths, popular children's literature or translated original stories, many authors admit to drawing on their own memories of stories or researching such stories to populate their cities in UF.

populate the UF world. These creatures often fulfil allegorical roles that are relevant to contemporary urban life and deal with particular concerns of the here and now.[25]

Ultimately, UF is primarily concerned with the urban experience. The supernatural and non-rational phenomena can be read as representational of contemporary city life and the threats faced there daily. It is a subgenre interested in the changing ideas of sexuality, gender and fear that only the anonymity of a sprawling urbanscape can offer. UF authors, while engaging in various discourses, are primarily writing urban dramas relevant to a contemporary reader.

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[25] These concerns vary with the particular novel, but one such example would be the representation of the fae groups in *War for the Oaks*. If they won the war, the dark seelie would encourage the breakdown of the city's systems, degradation of housing and increased crime; thus, they are an allegory for urban and moral decay. In contrast, the light fae represent the creative progress and moral responsibilities associated with developing a healthy urban community.

Chapter 2: The Literary Urban

You just love this city more, that's all. Depending on your point of view it'll get better and it'll get worse again. A city London's size is everything to everyone. I've seen it all before, every dream and every nightmare. It's bound to get better. (*Mother London*, Michael Moorcock, 1988a)

This is where I live, get it? This is the city where I live. It shares all the points of yours and theirs, but none of its properties. I go where I want. And I'm here to tell you how it is with you. Welcome to my home. (*King Rat*, China Mieville, 2011)

A brief review of the etymology of the word 'urban' reveals a number of interesting perceptions. As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* ("Urban," 2015), 'urban' is derived from the classical Latin *urbanus* and draws its roots from its association with Rome. The Italian capital has a unique mythology named after a wolf-figure, Romulus, who slayed his twin brother for the right to choose Rome's site. We forget that the phenomenon of cities is not modern, but has mythic and epic roots. As Burton Pike (1981) stated, '[s]ince there has been literature, there have been cities in literature' (p. 3). The city already existed in ancient literature in a vital way: 'We cannot imagine *Gilgamesh*, the Bible, the *Iliad*, or the *Aeneid*, without their cities, which contain so much of their energy and radiate so much of their meaning' (Pike, 1981, p. 3). Due to its history, the word 'urban' infers a multitude of ideas that the *Oxford English Dictionary* ("Urban," 2015) relates as: 'belonging to, or connected with the city, living in the city, exercising authority, control, supervision, etc., in or over a city, having the style of the city, elegant and sophisticated' (p. 1). The perception is that the urban is an experience or state of being beyond the setting of the city. It can be a multifaceted relationship in which ideas, culture and people may belong to a city, but also offer control over the space. The same word refers to the actuality of a city as an adjective, while the noun refers to the people who belong to the city. The dual use of 'urban' is reflected in most urban literature, as the writers and readers understand the symbiotic nature of the dweller and dwelling of the city. This multiplicity is not restricted to the etymology of 'urban', but also permeates contemporary thought on the nature of our cities.

The city is a location of contradictions, dichotomies and intersections. It is associated with modernity and the fluidity of change, yet can also be a place of stagnation, alienation and decay. There exists a plethora of literary perspectives on urban, from

the utopic ideals of the renaissance fantasists[26] to the dystopic cityscapes of instauration fantasy.[27] Pike (1981) is aware of the bifocal view of Western culture of the 'myth of the city as corruption, [and] the myth of the city as perfection' (p. 8). 'The urban' is not only portrayed as one of these two static forms, but as engaging in a constant cyclical rotation between these extremes. Occurring in a multitude of states, the image of the city stands as 'the reification of ambivalence, embodying a complex of contradictory forces in both the individual and the collective Western minds' (Pike, 1981, p. 8). Our relationship with the urban has always been complex—cities 'have been either exalted as the centers of vitality, enterprise, and excitement, or denounced as sinks of crime, pollution, and depravity' (Palen, 1975, p. 59). This dichotomous view has not changed and is a concern reflected in most literary considerations of urban environments. Moreover, this perception is unlikely to change with the continual growth of the world's urban centres. In fact, as John Palen (1975) pointed out, '[d]uring the last 200 years urbanisation has accelerated until today, for the first time, we are on the threshold of living in a world that is numerically more urban than rural' (p. 4).[28] It is interesting that, in every genre, a series of city-centric works have been produced,[29] yet only in fantasy has an entire subgenre developed with a distinct focus on the urban experience. As Clute (1997b) discussed, UF is a subgenre that uses the urban as a pivotal point through which the mundane and non-rational intersect.

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[26] The concept of the utopian city or settlement is commonly traced to Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516; however, a number of other authors have developed their own utopic visions. Famous examples are Edward Bellamy's (1888) *Looking Backwards*, William Morris's (1891) *News from Nowhere* and H. G. Wells's (1922) *Men Like Gods*. This concept has been more fully embraced in science fiction than fantasy, with novels such as Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and Ivan Yefremov's *Andromeda*, among many others (Clute, 2012c).

[27] Instauration fantasies are narratives set in a post-apocalyptic future society that are still in a semi-medieval recovery stage. They often feature dystopian elements that a protagonist must overcome. These novels are more common in fantasy than science fiction, or at least are labelled more commonly as instauration in fantasy. Some examples are Isobelle Carmody's *Obernewtyn* series and Suzanne Collins's recent *The Hunger Games* young adult series (Clute, 2012a).

[28] The statistics to support this are naturally difficult to locate, as the world percentage of population includes developing countries where the concept of urban living is vastly different to that in developed countries. However, according to data from The World Bank in 2014, the percentage of people living in urban areas, rather than rural areas, was 53.5%.
(https//:data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS/countries/1W?display=graph)

[29] For example, gothic literature includes a number of urban tales due to the changes post-1830s, such as *Dracula* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Also detective/mystery/crime novels are more often set in cities. However, science fiction includes a fairly equal mix of urban/rural settings, although their cities tend to lean either into the utopia or dystopia style. While, horror narratives tend to be generally located in suburbs or small towns to emphasise the stylistic elements of isolation and desperation; however, a number of successful novels have used a city locale, such as Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*.

The urban is vital to the narrative of UF; however, the subgenre did not spontaneously emerge, but was influenced by a history of city-centric literature. The significant influence of the urban setting on UF lies in its contribution to the strategic character of the subgenre. As Frow (2015) discussed, genre can be organised according to 'the social setting in which they occur (a setting which is a recurrent type rather than a particular time and place), and that of the genre modilised by the setting and by contextual cues' (p. 17). UF is discernible mainly by the second level of organisation, as its narratives and generic conventions are influenced by the urban setting and the specific contextual cues that help reinforce the reality of that real-world locale.

Real-world Urban Settings

Discernibly, most fantasy pre-1980s tended to be set 'if not in a pseudomedieval secondary world, at the very least in a rural environment' (Ashton, 2014, p. 108). Such tales could feature a city; however, when they did exist in fantasy, they were 'nostalgically medieval in nature, deliberately distant from the industrial noise and dense populations of the contemporary metropolis' (Tiffin, 2008, pp. 32–33). Traditional epic quest fantasy became synonymous with verdant landscapes and medieval romance, and to place quest fantasies in a modern city seemed oddly inappropriate (Tiffin, 2008, p. 32). Thus, there appeared to be a divide between portraying the Dickensian city—industrial, gritty and often violent—and the effort to reconcile the dichotomous concept of nature versus man. Early UF authors appeared to attempt a construction of the urban in a 'real' manner. By this, I mean they appeared to endeavour to capture both the ugliness and beauty of urbanscapes. This meant an acknowledgement that the modern city is not a dystopic concrete ideal, but maintains greenscapes and acknowledges the important influence that nature still plays in our lives.

Cat Ashton (2014) primarily discussed the works of Charles de Lint, and the effect of North American UF on concepts of urban spaces. However, Ashton (2014) also drew an interesting contextual link to the changes in fantasy form with new political decisions of the 1980s:

> This effort overlapped with political initiatives in Canada and the United States to
> increase green space, fund public transit, and provide space and resources for the

arts in urban areas, suggesting that urban fantasy both fuelled and reflected a broader cultural drive to reclaim the city in North America. The reclamation of cities is ongoing, but the drive to reinfuse the city with myth and magic has been largely successful, judging by the health of the urban fantasy genre. (p. 117)

It is easy to witness this drive to reinsert the natural into the urban. In her seminal novel *War for the Oaks*, Emma Bull (2001) located her first incursion of fae[30] and human in a park on the city's outskirts. The Phouka (fae guide) tells Eddi of the importance of water—a traditional symbol of life, not just in nature, but also in the city:

> All things that live are drawn to water, and arrange their lives around it. Humankind is no different. There is water at the heart of every human community—as much as the sea, or as little as a spring. This is the water at the heart of this city … Once the falls were called holy. Now its priests are the Army Corps of Engineers and the Minneapolis Park Board, but it is still a shrine, a place of power. It is the city's birthplace and its soul. (Bull, 2001, p. 139)

Bull acknowledged the importance that communities place on these symbols of life. No longer do we attach divinity to such locales, but we still recognise the importance of maintaining and creating greenspaces in our cities. Clearly, the early UF authors deliberately created links between urban and wild spaces in the city to highlight the symbiotic relationship they shared (Ashton, 2014, p. 114).

One could continue to list innumerable examples in UF that are inclusive of the nature present in the urban. In many ways, the urban existing as a testament to humankind's dominance over nature is a false concept. UF aims to recapture a balance between the urban (perceived as civilised, political and constructed) and nature (perceived as wild, chaotic and instinctual). UFs are novels fascinated by the tensions of our past and present, and this is best expressed through the inclusion of ancient mythologies in a modern world setting. Ashton (2014) states that de Lint 'uses magic in his fiction to create connections' or rather to more explicitly highlight 'the connections that he sees already existent between human beings, events, and the natural world' (p. 113).

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[30] 'Fae' is an alternative term for fairy or folk that is often used in contemporary fiction. It has been adopted as the predominant term in most UF as a way to distinguish that writers are drawing on the older original versions of fairy and folk tales, rather than the romanticised versions popularised in the late eighteenth century.

Further discussion of these tensions will appear later in this thesis; however, the point I endeavour to highlight here is the vital importance in UF for a real world and recognisably urban setting. It is through this urban landscape that concepts of political and cultural construction and transition can be examined (Tiffin, 2008, p. 33).

The effect of our cities in developing our cultural identities cannot be underestimated. As much as the natural world once did, the city now occupies a dominant place in our cultural psyche. Tiffin (2008) described the emblematic quality of our cities:

> The scale of the city leads inevitably to visual opacity or concealment, so that no individual can hope to experience and absorb the full meaning of the city. As a result of this limitation: cultural space is continually constructed within the individual's own interior life. This accounts for the strong identity of cities, their tendency to bulk in our minds even beyond their literal size: they are emblematic, iconic, more than themselves because of the need to extrapolate beyond their reality to account for their hidden, exclusive spaces. (pp. 33–34)

The city of our imagination is present in our actual cities, and UF seizes upon this. If no individual is able to experience all facets of an urban space, then, as equally as natural landscapes once did, the mythical or divine can exist in the urban. The real city of today offers as many untouched or invisible spaces as the wilderness. Jackson (1991) commented on fantasy's fascination with the unseen; she proposed that '[i]n a culture which equates the "real" with the "visible" and gives the eye dominance over the other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible' (p. 45). The unknowable can then adopt a subversive function, and many themes in fantasy revolve around articulating the invisible (Jackson, 1991, p. 48). UF occupies a place interested in populating these invisible spaces with the non-rational.

The real city setting of UF cannot be solely calculated based on the inclusion of streets, high-rises, markets and so forth. The modern city in UF is a 'densely impacted locus of culture and meaning agglomerating and compressing a large proportion of human experience' (Tiffin, 2008, p. 33). As Tiffin (2008) indicated, the urban space is a multivalent ground where 'its scale and density [permit] a breadth of human and cultural tapestry' (p. 33) to permeate all its aspects. This includes the literature produced and located within this locale. An understanding of what urban means is as vital to the stories as the machinations of the overarching narrative. One of the original

functions associated with the city was security. Jorge Arango (1970) outlined that early cities formed in response to a need for safety:

> Self-preservation was the original reason for the grouping of infinitesimal elements of life into diminutive primitive organisms contained in a protective membrane. Similarly, when men discovered agriculture and settled in organised groups they protected their settlements by building on sites of different access or by providing a protective wall around their huts and possessions. There the city was born. (p. 17)

This desire for self-preservation remains; with changes in agriculture, industrialisation and modernity, the city continues to be pivotal in human existence. Yet it is important to recognise that the city was not formed solely for the role of safety or economic needs, but also for the deeper need for connection. Richard Lehan (1998) argued that the role of early cities was as much spiritual as protective, as the earliest cities 'were established to meet the basic needs of their inhabitants—the need to worship, to feel protected, and to find solace in the community' (p. 13). He outlined that the early cities were often constructed around a site of mythical or religious significance. Of course, this includes a contradictory element, as most ancient divinity and belief is connected to nature.

Hence, cities often play an important role in UF as a trophy in didactic battles. The city, our source of safety and economic strength, remains more significant than a mere collection of physical buildings. A number of authors use the city itself as the stake for the final battle. In Mercedes Lackey's (2005) novel, the danger threatens the very essence of the city. Diana Tregarde, the protagonist, is warned that she must keep the evil out 'or it will make of this city a Hell of blood and pain. For *every* living thing' (Lackey, 2005, p. 138). The threat is about the safety of all city dwellers, rather than a personal battle, and the heroes are asked to risk themselves to protect these human edifices. At the resolution of *War for the Oaks*, Bull's (2001) narrator reflects that there 'was no magical change in the city; what they'd fought for, after all, was the city the way it was, the way they loved it' (p. 318). The city was maintained as a monument to humanity—unchanged and safe again for those who dwell within. UFs aim to challenge the fixed sense of security a city offers by the introduction of the supernatural. However, the role of the protagonist is often to overcome or lessen the threat of danger. The heroes are tasked to protect the essence of the city—the

communities, social order and safety of the city dwellers—rather than the physical edifices of the city. It follows that the value of our urban centres is not their physical presence, but their communal or spiritual role. The concept of divinity and belief has changed because cities no longer 'belong' to the divine. Nevertheless, the collective essence of the people who live in a space can offer a tangible mythical significance.

The city can still be viewed as inclusive of the need for divinity—Lehan (1998, p. 13) suggested that the city, at heart, is an act by humanity to control nature. However, Pike (1981) noted that underlying the founding of ancient cities is the contradictory desire for a separation and conquering of nature, and that the creation of a city of necessity is 'the imposition of divinity' (p. 5). This is an act designed to separate humans from nature, and has subsequently become a defining characteristic for discussing what is urban.[31] Often, the city can be perceived as humankind's monument of dominion over nature—an almost sacrilegious act of claiming godhood over the land. Indeed, Lehan (1998) explained that the 'city promises a way of regulating the environment, subduing the elements and allowing a certain control over nature' (p. 13). Thus, the city exists as an edifice to our power over the environment; a place where we believe we are able to maintain control. The city, then, is an environment of people and a 'social organisation of individuals performing different functions' (Arango, 1970, p. 18). The people who populate the urban equally influence and are influenced by the landscapes of their cities. Palen (1975) referred to this distinct way of life as 'urbanism', which he proposed is reflected in 'how people dress and speak, what they believe about the social world, what they consider worth achieving, what they do for a living, where they live, whom they associate with, and why they interact with other people' (p. 112). The physical shell of the urban is interwoven tightly with those who occupy these spaces. It is unsurprising that the city has contrived to preoccupy our literature, given that, for many people, it is an inescapable experience.

However, a city is not a homogenous space; rather, it is if not multicultural, then at least multi-social. The city that offers spaces for a diverse range of uses also becomes a microcosm of society. This diversity of urban inhabitants is captured by many

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[31] The first meaning listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* ("Urban," 2015) regarding the word 'urban' is 'a. Relating to, situated or occurring in, or characteristic of, a town or city, esp. as opposed to the countryside'.

writers. Victor Hugo (1982) wrote of the Parisian city dwellers that 'Paris begins with its strollers and ends with its street-urchins' (p. 497)—a sentiment that reveals the socioeconomic continuum present in a city. Meanwhile, Charles Baudelaire (1970) spoke of 'the man who loves to lose himself in a crowd' as someone able to adopt 'as his own all the occupations, all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers' (p. 20), highlighting the opportunities for the urbanite. Yet individuals can be perceived as merely part of the overall composition of city life. As Peter Crowther (2003) suggested in *Cities*, the city is more than an amalgam of its physical components—the buildings assume their own personality and 'become collectively greater than the actual sum of its individual parts' (p. ix). In *Mother London*, Michael Moorcock's (1988a) character, Mummery, views London in the abstract: 'The city's inhabitants create an exquisitely complex geometry, a geographical passing beyond the natural to become metaphysical, only describable in terms of music or abstract physics' (p. 7). This perception of the breadth and specificity of city dwellers reflects the complexity of urban life.

City dwellers are a diverse and important aspect of the UF novel. Like characters in nineteenth-century city novels, UF aims to capture the diversity and busyness of urban living. For example, the sense of movement is highlighted in simile, where 'the crowd flowed towards the different aisles like water searching for the quickest route downstream' (Hamilton, 2010c, p. 13). The people of UF cities are diverse but unique: 'A boy with an enormous mohawk and a girl in a torn jean jacket and engineer boots were arguing with an earnest young man in front of the Church of Scientology' (Bull, 2001, p. 113). Bull's (2001) protagonist even muses that '[w]ith all those people, all that energy and emotion and—well, *living*, this place ought to have a life of its own by now' (p. 114). In Bull's (2001) climatic narrative point, the people of the city are caught up in the final battle and are engaged as the tool used by the Fae to decide the fate of the city:

> She demanded their minds, then insisted they think for themselves; stole their ears and made them fight to get them back. Their dancing bodies she did not take by force—those she sought humbly, and each one given to her was a treasure. She felt their sweat running down her skin, felt their arms cutting shapes in the air around her, her muscles aching with motion of their dance. Darkness and light ran together

around them like confluent rivers, like braided streaming hair, black and red, like
tangled patterns of cloud and sky. (p. 315)

The very life force of the city—the people who live there—is at stake and it is the
people who act to rescue it. For UF, the people, as much as the place, are the heart of
the city. UF novels aim to create a city that resonates with its readers; thus, UF reaches
for recognisable real-world settings. However, the setting alone cannot capture the
reality of urban life; instead, UFs must also include the spirituality and essence of the
city dwellers. Only in this balance of physical place and essence can a real-world
setting be established.

The Influence of the Literary Nineteenth Century

The city in literature has a rich tradition and history that can be traced back beyond
even the earliest recordings of written literature. Although urban cities are but one new
step in this lineage, there is one particular period that considerably affected UF. In the
nineteenth century, literary city novels and short stories (or periodicals) came into
vogue to reflect the post-industrial and post-revolution spaces of London and Paris,
respectively. Also in this time, a distinct shift occurred from pastoral to urban in the
popular gothic novels. In Jamieson Ridenhour's (2013) critique of Victorian gothic *In
Darkest London*, he discussed the development of the gothic cityscape in Victorian
London. Ridenhour (2013) showed that a shift occurred to the urban, beginning in the
late 1830s, which 'had a profound effect on fiction throughout the rest of the century'
(p. ix). Today, UF still draws on a number of themes and concerns that are similar to
gothic literature. A number of theorists have drawn parallels and attributed UF to a
literary heritage that diverged from fantasy via gothic and horror. This is
understandable, as the tones of anxiety and the presence of violence, enclosure and
fear are all notably similar. However, it is the gothic texts of the nineteenth (rather
than the eighteenth) century that best speak to UF because of this shift in setting.

The gothic novel is '[s]uperficially, a tale of terror or horror with the action restricted
or enclosed by a haunted and partially ruined building' (Frank, 1987, p. 435). It is a
fiction of nightmares—a world that gives form 'to amorphous fears and impulses
common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the authors'
own subconscious mind and the stuff of myth' (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 3). The genre's

birth occurred with the publication of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in 1764, but the source of gothic's rise is diverse. It is suggested that the gothic exists as an opposition to the Augustan ideals of rationality, order and decorum (Howell, 1978, p. 5). Further, it is argued that its popularity is tied to both the increased effect of the industrial revolution and the romantic revival. Gothic literature attempts to symbolise and even explain 'the anxiety felt by those who witnessed radical changes in the world they knew' (Moorcock, 1988b, p. 43). At a less analytical level, its popularity for authors and readers is attributed to its role as escapist literature. Although, as Elizabeth MacAndrew (1979) pointed out, this concept 'does not adequately explain why [gothic fictions] appeared when they did or why their general appeal was so immediate and so strong' (p. 4)—the desire for escapism in literature does not address the rise in popularity of particular texts (or genres). I suggest a middle ground—that, like UF, gothic literature arose both in response to changing ideas of society and in response to literary restlessness; that, in fact, the styles and forms of the realist novel were no longer able to reflect the period's deeper, darker emotions.

The latter argument is found in Frank's (1987) *The First Gothics*, which states that there was a strong craving for 'darker emotions, an imaginative attraction to decay, ruin, disorder, and death' (p. xix). Frank (1987) continued that there was also 'a fear of the false order imposed upon the mind and society by the fixed value system' (p. xix), which contributed to the outbreak of gothic impulses. There are many distinct aspects of gothic literature beyond this desire for the darker side of humanity. There appears a nearly automatic repetition of motifs of 'flight and pursuit, unabated darkness, supernatural encroachment, gruesome metamorphosis, claustrophobic confinement, and displacement of identity' (Frank, 1987, p. xxix). However, Frank (and many other critics) argued that one inseparable condition of the gothic novel is the presence of the gothic edifice—usually in the form of a castle or abbey. Frank (1987) stated that 'the Gothic building possesses the human characters, surrounds them with filial secrets, identity crisis, and lethal predicaments within its walls, and finally determines their salvation or destruction by spectacular means' (p. xxiii). This edifice commonly existed as a self-contained environment with distinct and limited boundaries used to confine the characters.

This traditional singular edifice changed in the mid-nineteenth century to instead feature 'settings more immediately recognisable to the increasingly urban-dwelling' (Ridenhour, 2013, p. 3) readership. It was important that the gothic novel underwent this change so that its mutability allowed it to continue beyond its initial creators (Ridenhour, 2013, p. 2). Ridenhour (2013) presented the idea that the 'cityscape replaces the classic Gothic edifice, or rather multiplies it' (p. 10). That, instead of the singular space of castle or abbey, the city becomes a setting of innumerable edifices— 'each capable of evoking the atmosphere of isolation and decay required for a true haunted castle' (Ridenhour, 2013, p. 10). Ridenhour (2013, p. viii) argued that the Dickensian city is the same one explored by Bram Stoker and Robert Louis Stevenson. The presence of such creatures as Count Dracula and Edward Hyde are more terrifying because of their presence in the city, as a result of their contrast to the modernity a city represents (Ridenhour, 2013, pp. 9–10). The introduction of the gothic to the city was reflective of the period. The crux of Ridenhour's (2013) study is the idea that the Victorian reader 'had learnt through experience and training to find elements of fear' (pp. 9–10) in the city, and that fear informed their representations of the urban. It is easy to see how the presence of the gothic, with its atmosphere or anxiety and darkness, can be viewed as relevant heritage for twentieth- (and twenty-first-) century UF.

More than gothic literature, the nineteenth century was informed by new developments of reimagining the urban in realist fiction. The city's representation of control, strength and safety began to be challenged during this time. These changes were due to industrialisation and a move in the purpose of the city from being a spiritual nexus to a commercial centre. As with all aspects of the urban, the changes were felt by the city and its inhabitants, which was reflected in the literature of the time. These points were made by Pike (1981) as follows:

> During the nineteenth century the word-city was increasingly represented in literature as an unstable refraction of an individual consciousness rather than as an object fixed in space. This change is part of a larger process, the increasing internationalisation of the external world, which was going on generally in literature, music, much of painting, and psychology. At the same time a large part of European civilisation, and the part which dominated public attention, was going in the opposite direction: the explosion of empirical knowledge and the mechanical

wonders of the industrial revolution occupied the center of the public stage, and the developing natural and social sciences became increasingly concerned with the quantification and classification of external characteristics. This split, and the conflicts it produced, is of course one of the great themes of nineteenth century literature. (p. 71)

This instability produced some of the greatest city-centric literature of all time, as the changing perceptions of the static city began to be reimagined. These three key points of view can be distinguished as embodying the city as: (i) an entity, (ii) a landscape encapsulating the urban drama and/or (iii) a social microcosm.

Hugo's beloved Paris is one of the best examples of the city entity. He identified her as the great mother-figure overlooking and encompassing all. Hugo (1982) stated that Paris is '[a] cluster of mud and stone if you like, but above all things a moral entity' (p. 508). As a character, Paris is both great and immense: 'Such is Paris. The smoke from her chimney-tops is the thinking of the world' (Hugo, 1982, p. 508)—perceivable as an entity that is as huge and encompassing as any god. This sentiment continued in later works: 'cities are not only monuments or the tall buildings that reach to the sky in ways that our feeble bodies can only envy. Cities are living, breathing entities' (Barer, 2006, p. 2). Moorcock's (1988a) postmodern city novel, *Mother London*, attributes a disturbing relationship between his central character and London. Mummery claims that 'London is my mother, source of most of my ambivalence and most of my loyalties' (Moorcock, 1988a, p. 27), and ultimately takes his own life in the Thames, becoming one with his mother city. The idea of the city entity has not continued into UF in such a literal manner. Instead, UF's supernatural phenomenon takes on a metaphoric role in embodying aspects of the city. For example, the wind, often considered the voice of divinity—or, in UF, the breath of the city—will speak to the protagonist. In Suzanne McLeod's (2009) novel *The Sweet Scent of Blood*, the trees on the street whisper messages, telling of a dark-man stalking her. In China Mieville's (2011) *King Rat*, the rooftops and dirty alleys appear to actively shelter and conceal the protagonist, Saul, as he discovers his true heritage.

The fact that the city is regarded both a physical and metaphysical space has allowed for the diversity of literary portrayals of the idea of the city (Beville, 2013, p. 603). In Maria Beville's (2013, p. 605) article, she alluded to the growth and changes of the

idea that modern societies became primarily urban societies. In literature, these urban societies began to reflect the spectrum of the urban experience—rejecting the dichotomous good as pastoral and evil as urban. Writers did not romanticise the urban, but became focused on the variety of life offered by the city, and the city became a theatre-like backdrop. Authors such as Baudelaire and G. K. Chesterton began to present this spectacle of urban life. Chesterton (1958) particularly captured the relentless routine of urban life: 'That vague and somewhat depressed reliance upon things happening as they had always happened, which is with all Londoners a mood' (p. 12). Baudelaire (1970) revealed the pandemonium of New Year's Eve as the 'official frenzy of a big city designed to trouble the mind of the most impervious solitary' (p. 4), indicating the vivacious nature of city life. In much the same way, UFs include these moments of mood and breadth to capture the sense of the urban drama unfolding. Both the city as a backdrop and the city as an entity are tropes occurring in many city literatures.

Another form the city often takes in literature is acting as a representational microcosm of society, either imagined or real. However, evaluating the city as a sociocultural microcosm is a less straightforward task because this is largely an applied reading of a writer's work. It is difficult to identify easily how deliberately the author is highlighting social changes and challenges, and the degree to which a reader adds meaning. For example, Beville (2013) pointed out that, although 'the negative repercussions of the political and sociological aspects of the city were important to Hugo and his contemporaries, it wasn't until after the writings of Emil Zola and Karl Marx that they came to be fully appreciated' (p. 606). It is clear that Hugo's city presents the schism of the rich (strollers) and poor (street urchins), who are two distinct species of Paris. He categorised them respectively as: 'Passive acceptance content to merely look on, and inexhaustible enterprise; Respectability and Riot … All monarchy in the stroller, all anarchy in the urchin' (Hugo, 1982, p. 497). In a similar manner, Mieville's work in *King Rat* captures the divide between the empowered and marginalised. He displayed favouritism for the disenchanted in society: the mentally ill or divergent, musicians, the unemployed and street people. Mieville, most akin to Charles Dickens, captured the socio-political issues of the city. Beville (2013) argued that the development of capitalism and an urban 'proletariat' affected the representation of the nineteenth century city, which 'eventually came to focus on the

superficiality of upper-class urban life, the emptiness of urban living, the downfalls of industrialism and the institutionalism of society' (p. 606). These concepts of class were not new even in the nineteenth century, and they continue today in many different genres as a dominant preoccupation. UF, as both a child of fantasy and urban realism, cannot ignore the presence of these socioeconomic divides, and subsequently often includes these concerns in its construction of city microcosms and in the hierarchies of characters.

The growing commercialisation of cities has only exacerbated the divide of wealth, and authors are drawn to either polarised side or to the spaces between. Lehan (1998) closely examined the development of city literature through the stages of commercial, industrial and global, with an accompanying review of the critical materials available on such topics. He proposed that cities 'cannot be divorced from the systematic processes that brought them into being—and neither can they be divorced from the ideological processes that they in turn bring into being' (Lehan, 1998, p. 112). Thus, the ambiguity of the city occurs throughout literary history because the rapid changes and instability allowed a diversity of ideas (Pike, 1981, pp. 35–36). Therefore, as time progresses, the ideas associated with cities in general, or even specific cities, change and become mutable. As Lehan (1998) indicated, with the change of a city's function, 'its very nature changes, and those changes alter our ideologies that are encoded in cultural signs, including our literary texts' (pp. 111–112). Yet there remain key ideas of duality, multiplicity of place and transgressions that continue thematically in most urban literature. Due to the presence of encoded ideologies in UF, Clute's (1997b) definition of UF suggests that UF authors are continuing the tradition of reimagining the city.[32]

The UF city must operate as an independent city with all the expected sociocultural signs. If the city is constructed without dealing with the important role an urbanscape plays in influencing the psyche of the characters that live within, it only offers a backdrop setting. A microcosm requires social, cultural, political, economic and historical ideologies to be present. However, this does not mean that a narrative must delve deeply into each and every one of these discourses, but that the characters must reveal evidence that they exist in a rich tapestry of such ideologies. Authors of UF

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[32] See Chapter 1 for the full quotation by Clute.

choose to locate their tales in a real-world urban setting; thus, there is an expectation that the frameworks that govern our lives will also appear and affect the lives of their characters. The best example of this is the governing bodies that appear in many UF narratives, such as police or other law-enforcement groups, government officials, criminal prosecutors or lawyers, hierarchical workplace structures, and military references. There are also subtler reminders of the systematic society in which we live, such as paying rent and fines, buying food, and functioning in a Western world that typically operates between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. The presence of a social microcosm is undeniable in UF for the simple reason that, without drawing on the contextual elements expected in an urban locale, the texts are rendered ineffective and subsequently cease to be UF.

Returning to Clute's (1997b) association of UF with the earlier works of nineteenth-century authors, it becomes clear this link affords the subgenre a connection to a rich history. In her piece 'The Labyrinthine City', Elber-Aviram (2012) proudly asserted: 'I propose that what Tolkien is to epic fantasy, Dickens is to contemporary urban fantasy—the mythical literary father who inadvertently cemented the genre's foundation' (p. 273). It is easy to see the influence of the Dickensian city on UF, especially in the works of Mieville. Yet the model of such a city has not remained static; instead, UF also challenges and revises these cityscapes. The genre of urban realism to which Dickens is often attributed overlooks a number of narrative freedoms Dickens took in his creation of cityscapes. Urban realism is reliant on visual and empirical modes; thus, it is easy to assume that it rejects the non-rational, distinct to fantasy (Elber-Aviram, 2012, p. 269). However, urban realism is forced to acknowledge the existence of the invisible and visible in all cities. Where urban realism involves the invisible metropolis, it becomes aligned with the fantastic, and can 'therefore be seen as the mirror image of urban fantasy' (Elber-Aviram, 2012, p. 270). Since both UF and urban realism treat the city as their primary subject matter, it is clear that they 'share a fascination with the liminal zones that spread outward beyond the visible cityscape' (Elber-Aviram, 2012, p. 270).

It is difficult to read UF without acknowledging the work of urban realists that came before. Mieville's novel *King Rat* exists equally in Dickensian and contemporary

London. The epigraph from Moorcock (1988a)[33] at the start of this chapter comments on London's ability to be everything to everyone—a concept embraced in UF as much as in urban realism. Elber-Aviram's article developed a comparison between Dickens's *Bleak House* (a seminal urban realist novel) and the UF work of Mieville's *Perdido Street Station*. It is quickly obvious that Mieville drew on *Bleak House* to compose his own novel, as both begin with a similar portrayal of a grittier urbanscape. In *King Rat*, this rough landscape again appears through the eyes of King Rat in the prologue, and Mieville (2011) wrote:

> I spill like mercury over the lip of a building and slither down drainpipes to the alley fifty feet below. I slide silently through piles of rubbish in the sepia lamplight and crack the seal on the sewers, pulling the metal cover out of the street without a sound. (pp. 3–4)

King Rat then travels above, through and below the city, capturing all its invisible and ignored spaces. Mieville's (2011) work clearly follows in the footsteps of the urban realists that came before. King Rat narrates that '[a]ll the dimensions of the city are open to me' (Mieville, 2011, p. 3) as he travels across a London full of shadows, criminals and secrets, which has been seen before in the darkest parts of Dickens, Bram Stoker and more. UF exists as a subgenre of a number of distinct sources, including fantasy, classic mythology, folklore, fairy tales, urban realism, city literature, gothic and horror—it draws on a range of important literary traditions. Yet, consistently, the discussion of all elements returns to the nexus of the urban because, in UF, the locale is the starting point of all other discourses.

Multiplicity in the Construction of Urbanscapes

The urban necessarily needs to occupy a physical presence in UF. Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik (2009) offered the concept of 'urban charisma':

> By this term we mean two things: on one hand the charisma *of* a city as in its 'soul' or mythology that is emitted from its buildings, infrastructure, the historicity of its sites and its anonymous crowds. On the other hand, there is also charisma to be

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[33] *Mother London* is a postmodern novel with suggestions of magical realism. However, it is predominantly considered part of urban realism and is of interest to this thesis due to its depiction of London as a presence both created by the characters' own psyches and a larger mother figure that surrounds, comforts and controls them.

found *in* the city—in its crowds, in the styles and reputations of its people, their knowledge, and the special skills and extraordinary acts the city enables and necessitates. Quintessentially urban figures—be they artists, taxi drivers, cops or those belonging to a more opaque popular world—may be charismatic by virtue of their actions and the knowledge and resources in the city they are rumoured to command. They, like their gestures, are suffused with the elusive spirit of the city, or the neighbourhood, itself. (p. 6)

The charisma of the urban environment is strongly highlighted by the nineteenth-century urban realists. It is captured by the 'essence' of what a particular city means. In this manner, a city can have a distinct and recognisable presence in a narrative without needing to be constantly described physically. As Hansen and Verkaaik (2009) stated, 'some urban spaces are so heavily mythologised and enframed through circulating images and narratives that they suffuse, if not overdetermine, any empirical or sensory experience' (p. 6). Cities such as London, Paris and New York are often touted as having such strong mythological presences that they need no depth of description to capture their essence. Other emerging cities, especially in America for American readers, have a similar 'representative' charisma. Mieville's London is easily recognisable in the few descriptions of sewer systems, cobbled streets and subway systems. Even in his early settings, the reader can already feel the weight of Dickens's atmospheric London pressing into the landscape. Anita in St Louis is touched by the city's European history, which is furthered by the ruling French vampires. This facet of the city also taints the characters and their interactions, as they become representative of a city's charisma: '[b]y invoking the name of the city as their own they also incorporate, and bring into existence, the myth of the city as something that lives within themselves' (Hansen & Verkaaik, 2009, p. 5). Although the city is related to the character's interactions with and within the city, the city is still more than that which inhabits it because it 'is an urban habitus they do not entirely own because it is larger and more enduring than themselves, or any individual life' (Hansen & Verkaaik, 2009, p. 5). The urban landscapes of UF should not be restricted by their mythologies or by the characters that may represent them—they are enduring monoliths that exist beyond the stories placed within.

Understanding the construction of the urban landscapes in both city literature and UF requires consideration of the authors' choices of spatial viewpoints. Pike (1981)

argued that a city can be presented from the view of above the street, at street level and below the street, suggesting that each particular space can exist independent to the others, and that all three do not need to appear in every construction of a literary city. However, for the mimetic demand of the representational 'real' city required in UF, the landscape needs to operate as a functional setting. Further, UF deals with mimetic (rather than abstract or surreal) representations of the city. For this realistic style to operate, the 'image could not be fragmented beyond the point at which the reader would become disorientated' (Pike, 1981, p. 34) or fractured to a degree where realism becomes doubted.

The City from Above

In maintaining a singular view, the first constructed vision is often of the city seen from above. This does not mean the experience of a bird's eye view or other aerial oversights, but an impression of *being* above.[34] The narrator or narrative offers an attitude of contemplation and a separation from direct involvement. This 'elevated observer is within the city but above it at the same time, removed from the daily life taking place on the streets and within buildings' (Pike, 1981, p. 34). Hugo (1982) captured this sense of removal in his reminiscence of Paris:

> Going about one's native land one is inclined to take many things for granted, roads and buildings, roofs, windows and doorways, the walls that shelter strangers, the house one has never entered, trees which are like other trees, pavements which are no more than cobblestones. But when we are distant from them we find that those things have become dear to us, a street, trees and roofs, bland walls, doors and windows; we have entered those houses without knowing it, we have left something of our heart in the very stonework. (p. 399)

This is a powerful perspective that captures a reader in a silent moment, when the city becomes more than its physical components and can instead represent a depth of emotional connection. It is a contemplation of the city removed from its activity, which often appears to be tinged with regret or sentimentality. Such insights are not

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[34] 'Being' here refers to existing in relation to a place or condition—to be understood as a narrative contemplation existing above both the place of the city and the experience or condition of living in a city.

experienced during the daily bustle of city life, but require a withdrawal or moment of transition.

One of the most common occurrences of this experience of removal is in the between times—the dusk, dawn or evening—when it is easy to envisage one is alone or separate from the entity of the city. Bull's novel uses the transformation of busy daytime city locales to silent, still night-time spaces to capture this feeling of otherness. *War for the Oaks* opens by highlighting this change of the Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis from being full of life to being as follows:

> The street lamp globes hand like myriad moons, and light glows in the empty bus shelters like nebulae. Down through the silent business district the mall twists, the silver zipper in a patchwork coat of many dark colours. The sound of traffic from Hennepin Avenue, one block over, might be the grating of the World-Worm's scales over stone. (Bull, 2001, p. 13)

In these quiet spaces, the narrative is able to lessen the powerful presence and overwhelming fullness of a city, and instead expose the reflective strength of silence. As such, Pike (1981) stated that this 'greatly diminishes the city in size and its activity in importance in relation to the emptiness and silence of the spaces around it' (p. 34). Bull's (2001) protagonist, Eddi McCandry, ponders the view of her city, and its presence becomes diminished in comparison to her own thoughts. It becomes a symbolic landscape of time, shapes and colour—a backdrop for her personal concerns:

> Eddi hung over the back of her seat watching the Minneapolis skyline rise up and unroll behind them. White light banded the top of the IDS building, rebounded off the darkened geometry of a blue glass tower nearby. The clock on the old courthouse added the angular red of its hands. The river glittered like wrinkled black patent leather, and the railroad bridges glowed like something from a movie set.
>
> 'I love this view', Eddi sighed. (Bull, 2001, p. 21)

Eddi looks to the silent views of the city to settle her mind and contemplate her life. The city is a vital part of her life; she is not escaping it for the wilds or pastoral lands, but looks to the city and its silent places for peace. Only this view from above—of being 'beyond' the daily bustle of the city—can provide such restful spaces.

Further, Pike (1981) indicated that the perspective of above ensures that 'what is observed must pass through the filter of the narrating consciousness' (p. 34). Thus, these empty, silent spaces where the narrator is able to be segregated from the vibrancy of the city are important to help a reader understand their experiences. This act 'reinforces the isolation of the speaking voice, since it is the only "character" in such senses' (Pike, 1981, p. 34). Primarily, UFs are written from first-person narrative, which tends to emphasise the isolated speaking voice. However, UFs predominantly revolve around constant interactions and action/adventure developments that drive the majority of the narrative. Thus, these moments in which the city appears to withdraw and become muted allow the narrators to reflect on their concerns, sense of self or sense of belonging. UF novels tend to be action packed, which makes these internal moments valuable to character construction. For instance, in a night cemetery, Anita Blake reflects that the 'city makes you forget how dark the night, how bright the moon, how very many stars' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 132), which acknowledges the controlling power of a city to distort one's view of the world. The city and its associated vivacity have a tendency to drown out internal musings. UF's characters are often driven by time-sensitive plot lines (a murderer to catch, a plot to uncover or a victim to save) and this fits the time-poor experience of city life. As such, these moments of being above the city and its bustle offer an important space for necessary narrative pauses and character development.

The perspective from above also allows the spatial form to develop both a grid or map impression of a city and an image of the labyrinth. Creating these views in the narrative often works as 'figures by which characters orient, but can also lose, themselves' (Pike, 1981, p. 121). It is expected that the physical landscape of the city be able to control and shape the actions of the characters as they attempt to circumvent the maze of city life. This is often best expressed when characters are in transition through the city landscape. Either by foot or transport, traversing the space removes them from the immediacy of the city experience. For Eddi, travelling the city results in an emotional revelation: expecting to see the usual city 'only to find that everything suddenly seemed precious' (Bull, 2001, p. 137). She finds her view of the city touched by sentimentality—'[e]ven the stucco duplexes, common as field mice, looking gracious and welcoming' (Bull, 2001, p. 137). By travelling through the space Eddi often takes for granted, she is able to reveal new emotional points of view. Similarly, in *King Rat*,

Mieville's (2011) protagonist Saul learns to traverse the city as perceiving that the '[a]lternative architecture and topography were asserting themselves' (pp. 119–120). An understanding of the spatial form of the city is altered by Saul's new perception of the city above—of being able to traverse the city in a new manner: 'They wove in and out of central London, climbing, creeping, moving behind houses and between them, over offices and under the streets' (Mieville, 2011, p. 120). The city is reduced to a layout the protagonists travel through, rather than exist within—a vantage that offers Saul the view that '[t]he whole city had become horizon punctuated by fat towers' (Mieville, 2011, p. 131). These moments of removal, of being above the city, offer a vital perspective on the landscapes the characters experience. It captures the ambiguity of both existing in and being separate from the city. As such, it works to reduce the hugeness of the city and creates a space that is able to be governed and overcome by the protagonists.

Finally, the perspective of above allows for an important development of boundaries. UF novels fixate on concerns of control and the existence and importance of boundaries. Any city dweller is aware of the boundaries that divide up their spaces: residential, commercial and industrial—or beyond this to cultural neighbourhoods. As such, a city presents clear sectors through which dwellers are able to transit. The most obvious boundary is the city itself, since the particular selection of a city and its urban landscape and history shape its understood boundaries. These boundaries are often appropriated by UF authors to stretch the spaces available to the supernatural. For instance, King Rat situates his throne room in a hidden place—a locale he negotiated with the man who designed the original sewers of London: 'He was the man with the plan, built the whole maze in the time of the last queen … I can thank him for my underworld' (Mieville, 2011, p. 109). The particular heritage of a city is often included as a way to expand the commonly known zones of a city to allow the use of unseen places. The tension this creates between the city and the hidden history within adds believable weight to the presence of ancient mythologies. The boundary of the city also offers a limit to the range available for the narrative. It can help contain the activities of the non-rational to a field reasonably believable for a character to resolve. As the characters traverse the space within the city boundaries, it becomes expected that the resolution of the narrative will be contained by those same boundaries. This confinement adds to the atmospheric sense of entrapment, confinement and anxiety

that UF attempts to perpetrate. However, the exact dimensions and range of the outer boundaries of a city are usually only developed in a vague manner that does not interfere with the internal spaces. Most UF authors focus on creating smaller divisions within a city and focus on navigating those boundaries.

The division of areas or sectors in the city are afforded further consequence as they are used to highlight supernatural divides and conflicts. In Kim Harrison's *The Hollows* series, the supernatural community has settled in an outer suburb named the Hollows. This was a deliberate move following the revelation of the 'Interlanders' (the magical and supernatural), which saw the humans move into the city centre and these mythical others move to an outer suburb. In the *Mercy Thompson* series, after the fae's revelation, they elect to live in reservations on the outskirts of major urban areas. However, regardless of these separations, at the heart of each city are areas that become known as supernatural sectors: '[t]he savage, dangerous reality blooms only in the depths of the city, where people gather and emotions run rampant' (Harrison, 2011, p. 59). Laurell K. Hamilton (2009) created a 'Blood Square' as a supernatural district: 'It is our town's hottest vampire commercial district. Big tourist attraction' (p. 108). McLeod's series succinctly names the same area in her novels 'Sucker Town', while in Kelly Gay's *Charlie Madigan* series, it is called the 'Underground'—an entertainment and supernatural shopping district that is a mix of party clubs and 'exotic' markets. UF novels have structured these supernaturally populated areas in a manner similar to the expected divisions of entertainment, commercial, industrial and residential districts, often with further separation of the supernatural and human in each sector. The novels also make a cultural distinction between supernatural creature groups (such as vampires, fae and weres). In Hamilton's novels, the location of the groups is often a reflection of their nature. For example, the wererat community is largely situated in the inner-city 'slums' or low socioeconomic areas, while the werewolves live on the outskirts of the city near the outlying woodlands. The vampires remain in the entertainment centres, while smaller were-communities develop 'neighbourhoods' that reflect their particular creature. Hamilton sought to divide the city between the groups in a manner that would occur in nature, with different predators developing hunting zones. These zones then overlap the human city, which can be understood as belonging to that hunting area. Thus, it appears that Hamilton constructed these supernatural divisions as a cross between migrant cultural

neighbourhoods and gang-based territories. These divisions help establish clear boundaries in the city that the narrative uses as sources of tension. The development of these spaces is often undertaken via narrative description that elucidates the overall appearance, uses and occupants of such zones—an above view of the city—rather than providing an 'in the moment' character view.

The City from Street Level

The most common spatial viewpoint of the city, which is often expressed immediately after a description from above, is the street-level vantage point. This view occurs in most presentations of the literary city, as it is best able to encompass the experience of city life. As Pike (1981) stated, the street vantage is a vehicle suitable for conveying the complexities of city life, while still remaining close to a reader's everyday experience. This is because the street level is 'a fixed place, rich in resonances of all kinds, which offers a setting or atmosphere for action' (Pike, 1981, p. 35). Returning first to classic urban literature, the best examples of this immersion *into* the city are the works of Dickens. His London is a realm fraught with action, as the city is seemingly overflowing with human life. Dickens (2003) captured the night-time streets of London as being full of 'the foul and frouzy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn' (p. vii)—a sensory immersion into a city. Undoubtedly, UF cities are urban dramas; thus, these revelations of life in the city are vital. The cities of UF are never completely utopic or 'dystopic'; rather, they lean towards a realistic grittiness with which most urban dwellers would be familiar: a city full of well-maintained business areas that are intersected with dirty alleys, human and food waste, and the criminal underbelly. UF novels are full of moments that capture the active, ever-moving urban space. De Lint's (2002) *The Dreaming Place* is set in a generically designed city named Newford. His city is vibrantly full of activity and vitality, storytellers, commuters, a cat lady, panhandlers, joggers, junkies and truants (de Lint, 2002, p. 21). De Lint's (2002) protagonist sits watching 'the last of the commuters trail into the office blocks that fronted the park' (p. 20), before a foray into the inner-city slums, where 'walking through the rubble-strewn streets', she sees 'junkies congregated in the mouth of one alley' (de Lint, 2002, p. 32). De Lint develops a city as diverse and populated as those by Hugo and Dickens.

The spatial importance of the street-level view is not only to highlight the life of the city, but also to remove the objective envisioning of the city. This may appear counterproductive to the previous development of an above view; however, a city is a fluid and transitional space that offers a multiplicity of views, often all at once. As Beville (2013, p. 612) argued, the city's very structure, when experienced from within, is one of being overwhelmed, dwarfed and disconcerted. She suggested that:

> It is often grid-like, with no single path. No beginning point or destination. It is essentially defined by the connections made by each individual street walker. As such it is shape-shifting and constantly in flux. It cannot be pinned down. No objective view is possible. And attempts to map it, to present a grand narrative, cannot represent any truth about the city at all. (Beville, 2013, p. 612)

This mutable city is embraced in UF because it enables the protagonist's self-exploration to occur in a non-linear space. Control over the city is a subjective imposition as the city becomes an unmappable space. UF particularly embraces this view by populating the shadows of the city with portals and creatures, or by using magic to alter a seemingly ordinary space. Therefore, the city of the UF novel is designed to be a subjective space, for all its mimetic qualities, which aims to make the known strange.

These two ideas of flux and shadows add to the atmospheric quality of UF. A significant component of UF storytelling is the development of anticipation and anxiety in the protagonist and reader. Thus, knowable and safe city spaces become dangerous or inverted. For example, Bull's (2001) novel begins by highlighting this through the effect of the change of day to night—an unsettling of spaces emphasised by the presence of otherworldly beings. Creatures appear whose voices are 'susurrus of the fountain itself' and 'deep and rough; if concrete were an animal, it would have this voice' (Bull, 2001, p. 13), who are fundamentally out of place in the mundane urban setting. These creatures endanger the spaces by transforming in what should be an ordinary setting: 'the woman sank into the water … spreading out until only her eyes glinted in the moonlight, then disappeared' (Bull, 2001, p. 28). In McLeod's (2009) novel, the vampires further perpetrate this violation of the ordinary by being creatures of the shadows: 'As he walked from me, the harsh light from the ceiling bulbs dimmed. Shadows that couldn't exist leached form the black of his suit,

coalesced into darkness around him, and he vanished into nothingness' (p. 102). In addition, safe public places become traps: 'Why couldn't I hear the music from the party boats anymore? Or the traffic? I shivered. Maybe the sensible thing would be to go back outside' (McLeod, 2009, p. 238). Meanwhile, dangerous places, such as alleyways, become deadly: 'I found the fang-gang in a narrow passageway behind The Leech' (McLeod, 2009, p. 412). The mutation of the known city into the strange is a key element offered through the street-level vantage. It occurs because of the many variables offered by this perspective, which increases the degree of uncertainty that both the protagonist and reader may experience.

At the street level, the protagonist no longer has control over the environment. In contrast, the above vantage can remove the sense of immensity and diminish the city by presenting it as a traversable space, while the below space provides a dimension available for escape or avoidance. Instead, the street level is often overpowering in its immersion of the character into the city. Mieville's protagonist has been removed from society due to the discovery of his heritage, yet has gained strength from his ability to exist in the liminal spaces above and below. Thus, when he returns to the city and walks the streets with the other city dwellers, he is diminished: 'People bore down on him from all directions. It took him a moment to realise that they also moved away on past him, that they were simply walking along the street' (Mieville, 2011, p. 129). The populated city is best represented by these glimpses of the street-level vantage: people in their everyday lives occupying the space of a generic city. However, these moments are often used in UF to highlight the differences in the protagonists' experiences from those of 'ordinary' people. There is a deliberate line drawn between the mundane world and extraordinary world of UF with the inclusion of street-level descriptions. Mieville's (2011) character of King Rat expresses the division as understanding that '[a]ll the main streets, the front rooms and the rest of it, that's just filler, that's just *chaff*, that ain't the real city' (p. 45). The street vantage is a necessary aspect of UF because it helps emphasise the alternative presentations of the non-rational and supernatural located in that mundane space. Without this view to act as a comparison point, the vital element that helps differentiate UF from other fantasy can be lost.

The City from Below

The final spatial vantage of the city seen below is deliberately designed to unsettle the reader. This view deals with the hidden and forgotten spaces of a city that often recall an ancient history of the city, alongside a reminder of the temporal nature of humanity. Dickens often included this realm of inhuman discards and subterranean nature (Lehan, 1986, p. 106) as a way of suggesting that the monument of human cities exists in a tenuous state. The novels of UF continue this tradition by frequently using locations of otherness, such as the outskirts of industrial areas, underdeveloped or abandoned locations, the sewers or other underground natural or human-made places. In Lackey's (2005) novel *Burning Water*, the monsters scout these places for the vulnerable. They find weak victims (children, homeless people, drunks or foolish teenagers) in forgotten spaces—abandoned railways, empty silos and back alleys. Similarly, de Lint's (2002) characters seek a 'juju man' (a voodoo practitioner) in a squat 'right in the heart of the square mile of empty buildings and rubble-strewn lots' (p. 31). In these spaces below the observation of a normal city dweller, magic and monsters appear.

However, the more literal interpretation of the space below is the subterranean spaces. These are places associated with the realms of myth and instinct (Pike, 1981, p. 36). Pike (1981) stated that to 'see the city from below is to demonise it' (p. 36). Such city spaces become a place associated with our fears; no one, not even the most heroic characters, relish descent into an underground or underworld. These are the places in UF where the monsters are most at home. Hamilton especially trades on this trope in her *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series as a way to emphasise the transition from safety to danger or, more importantly for Anita Blake, from control to vulnerability. In the first novel, *Guilty Pleasures* (Hamilton, 2007), Anita is trapped below ground in a series of underground caves and rooms, facing off against a trial of supernatural creatures that progress her through to the master. She ends in a room 'like a warehouse, but the walls were solid, massive stone' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 57), and the location of the confrontation adds to the atmosphere of fear. The hero is underground, trapped and isolated in an unnatural space. Here, all her strengths, weapons and powers are stripped away as 'Nikolaos had washed over my mind like the ocean in a seashell, filled me up and emptied me out' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 60). Anita has stood fast against threats of

physical violence, rape and transformation, but the threat of the loss of her self most terrifies her. We fear the unknown more than any other tangible threat—a fact that UF expresses by placing the monsters in subterranean caves below a living city.

The spaces that we reject as unliveable become locales that reflect the adaptability of the mythical. The cave tunnels through which Anita struggles are home to wererats: 'The rats seemed designed for the tunnel, sliding along, flattening their bodies in a strange, scrambling grace' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 246). In *The Laughing Corpse* (Hamilton, 2009), the voodoo priestess in her homely suburb uses her basement to house the horrors she creates. In this space, she is transformed: 'She wasn't just bad, she was evil. There was no other word for it. It gleamed around her like darkness made liquid and touchable. The smiling old woman was gone. She was a creature of power' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 59). Meanwhile, in *Circus of the Damned* (Hamilton, 2002), the locale is a morgue in a closed inner-city hospital. It is a location already associated with disease and death, with 'its own memories of pain' (Hamilton, 2002, p. 130). Empty and silent, it is a locale 'where silence hangs in heavy folds' and '[e]nough people had died in this place to make it thick with real ghosts' (Hamilton, 2002, p. 130)—the hospital is a place ripe for the presence of the non-rational. These roots of the city—of places built, forgotten, unfinished or serving below as the cloacal places of a living city (Pike, 1981, p. 36)—are where readers can easily believe that creatures exist. The use of these spaces, alongside atmospheric descriptions, adds to the tones of fear and anxiety that UF novels seek to develop. They build on pre-existing anxieties about these 'below' spaces to encourage an uncanny hesitation about the existence of the supernatural.

In her article 'The Past is Below Us', Elber-Aviram (2013) argued that UF is best understood through examining urban archaeology—a study of the below spaces operating in UF. She presented the idea that UF 'almost invariably follows an archaeological pattern of revelation whereby suppressed material evidence from the past opens up a portal into the secret history of the metropolis' (Elber-Aviram, 2013, p. 2). The vantage of the below offers this archaeological insight and UF draws on this secret history of the city. The supernatural creatures occupy spaces of privilege in the below. This is the base of their power—the source of mythologies and perceived demonic powers. Places that have been overlooked or ignored gain further significance

because they have been left open to the taint of the 'other', or, in UF's case, the supernatural. The creatures thrive in these places; thus, 'the fantastic city's subterranean history poses a constant danger to the integrity of the present' (Elber-Aviram, 2013, p. 2). Such underground forces are presented as poised to erupt onto the surface. The representation of this threat is developed in the places described by authors as outside of the mimetic norm. As I have previously discussed, these underground or forgotten locales exist on the boundaries of the everyday and threaten the safety of the city.[35] The threat of such places aids in developing the permeating atmosphere of fear expected. These below spaces, occupied by creatures, become Pike's (1981) realm of myth and instinct.

Cemeteries are considered the realm of the dead, where 'once living bodies underlie the bustle of the present time' (Pike, 1981, p. 36), and play a particular role in our urban psyche. The city is often represented by the aliveness of its spaces. People live there because of its opposition to the stereotypical rural space: it is fast-paced, overwhelming and vital. We attempt to ignore that the flipside of vitality is illness, death and loss. However, cities also deal with the turnover of human life: they hold hospitals, funeral homes and cemeteries. The locales and thematic concerns of mortality are significant to UF because UF deals with the epic struggles of its heroes, where death is a risk and often needs to be faced psychologically as a likely outcome of the hero's journey. Thus, a discussion and awareness of the fragility of life arises in the narrative. In addition, since UF draws on mythic sources, there is often the presence of undead supernatural creatures, which act as a reminder of both immortality and mortality. Authors place their characters either near or far to symbols of death, depending on their narrative. Hamilton's protagonist has an affinity to the dead; thus, a predominant number of the spaces in which she must operate belong to the dead. These places, such as cemeteries, are already permeated with suspicion and taboo: 'They stood among the ancient grave markers of the small family cemetery, waiting. Nothing waits as patiently as the dead' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 152). Western culture fears the dead because it reminds us of our mortality. The fact that UF authors populate their

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[35] As previously discussed, the safety of the city is often the premise of the novel's central conflict. In addition, this idea of the threat within is an important subversive aspect of UF.

novels with these terminal landscapes appears to be a deliberate choice to remind the reader that such places exist, even in the most modern cities.

The development of the urban landscape is a pivotal aspect of UF literature. As Clute (1997b) indicated, the modern UF novel is endeavouring to engage in a rich history of city literature. The functions of the city as monument, entity and microcosm are continued in this subgenre. UF embraces the idea of the city as more than an inconsequential background; rather, it is a pivotal node through which the narrative interweaves. These novels take the mundane spaces of the city and populate them with the supernatural and mythical. UF authors develop their cities through a multiplicity of spaces in an effort to maintain the mimetic elements central to all low fantasy, while also confronting the reader with the spaces that are usually ignored and forgotten. Thus, UF literature is resolutely urban in its locale and can be considered as inspired by the urban literary tradition.

Chapter 3: Fear, Anxiety and Dread

And a city the size of this one, with all the hiding places it contained, would make such a perfect hunting ground for a demon—especially one that could look like a cloud of smog. (*Children of the Night*, Mercedes Lackey, 1990)

That was what they wanted, what they all wanted: to feed until they killed. The power of life and death. (*The Sweet Scent of Blood*, Suzanne McLeod, 2009)

They stood among the ancient grave markers of the small family cemetery, waiting. Nothing waits as patiently as the dead. (*Guilty Pleasures*, Laurell K. Hamilton, 2007)

This chapter explores the thematic concerns of fear, anxiety and dread that permeate UF literature. Following from the previous chapter, I primarily focus on the urban elements that contribute to these themes, presenting the argument that fear, anxiety and dread are developed through the presence of liminal spaces, terminal landscapes, the city edifice, and tensions between the past and present. The opening epigraphs were selected as examples of elucidating fear, anxiety and dread in UF narratives. For example, the use of the terminal space of the graveyard is a staple of any horror story, as demonstrated by Laurell K. Hamilton. A place that reminds us of our mortality, tainted by superstition and fear, the graveyard is a landscape already connotative of dread. In addition, UF authors go beyond such stock locales and delve into the city itself to reveal the myriad liminal spaces and confined places of the city edifice. As Mercedes Lackey indicated, a city is full of hunting grounds suitable for the supernatural. In turn, Suzanne McLeod reminds the reader that the creatures that stalk the cities are the salver an author uses to evoke the thematic concerns of fear, anxiety and dread—for what is more terrifying than the threat of death?

UF has deep roots—it draws on ancient myths and folklore, the terror and gore derived from horror and dark fantasy, and the more subtle atmosphere of fear and dread of gothic literature. As a subgenre, like any other fiction, UF touches on a wide variety of thematic concerns. However, at its core are the prevailing concerns of fear, anxiety and dread. These themes are a consistent element due primarily to UF's choice of situating its tales in an urbanscape. The aspects of the non-rational, supernatural, violence and gore are present in UF as aids in developing the concerns of fear, anxiety and dread. However, UF is fundamentally tied to the city; thus, it is the presence of those aspects *within* the city that evoke these thematic concerns. The urbanscape that

UFs develop are necessarily based in the real world because they conform to this need as a characteristic of the subgenre. UF authors deliberately connect the intersection of the non-rational and real-world setting of the city to unsettle the reader. As Levack (2014) stated, the effectiveness of terror themes is when 'those who are horrified at what they witness fear that they too may become victims' (pp. 926–927). The familiarity of the setting in UF works in a similar manner to popular horror fiction. It uses the threat of within-the-known to excite a negative response in the reader. As a theme, fear occurs often in fiction because it is a 'reliable source of suspense, conflict, and reader identification' (Attebery, 2008, p. 1). UF introduces fear, anxiety and dread into the narrative because these are recognisable concepts for any city dweller. The flipside to the modern, freeing city is the dichotomous den of darkness and danger. In turn, UF deliberately develops particular landscapes that are able to feature these thematic concerns.

Within the boundaries of the city are spaces and vantages that offer a uniquely disturbing landscape that is able to inspire fear, anxiety and dread. As a form of fantasy fiction, UF is an imaginary and illusionary subgenre that offers itself easily to the creation of liminality. As such, authors have seized on this and developed liminal spaces within the city. Such transitionary locales offer a thinning of the boundaries—a way for the supernatural to intersect with the ordinary. They are temporary and at times able to occur unexpectedly. Thus, they appeal to our inner anxiety about the changeable nature of the world. Their continued presence throughout the tale evokes fear and dread, opening up the space to examine the inherent fears of city dwellers. Further, owing to the focus on concerns of death, dying and the undead, UFs are populated with terminal landscapes—both in the physical locales associated with these concerns and the inclusion of undead characters who challenge the linear concept of existence. Places belonging to the dead are already touched by emotional awe and fear, since they are an unwelcome reminder of mortality. Thus, the creatures of the undead are a challenge to the sanctity of life, as they must take others' lives to continue their own. It is easy to see how the undead evoke the same fear and dread as the landscapes they inhabit. The senses of fear, anxiety and dread are further developed by the presence of the city edifice. Arising from a history of gothic edifices, the city edifice contains the boundaries of the cityscape. It fulfils the characteristics of claustrophobic

confinement, subterranean pursuit and supernatural encroachment.[36] The city acts to enclose, confuse and subvert the ordinary and orderly spaces of the city. Beneath these urban landscapes further lies a continuous tension—an anxiety at the heart of the modern city. The mythologies and locales of the UF city draw on ambiguities and tensions recognisable in real cities. The conflict between the past and present threaten the continued progression of the modern city. As such, by exposing locales of the past and allowing insidious incursions by mythological creatures, the past encroaches on the modern city and threatens its safety.

Any form of dark fiction draws on these similar thematic concerns as they work to unveil the deeper psychological concerns at place in the literature. They help to reveal our worldly concerns and, as such, indicate why readers are drawn to them. This point was made by Cavallaro (2002):

> We cannot resist the attraction of an unnameable something that insistently eludes us. Narratives of darkness nourish our attraction to the unknown by presenting us with characters and situations that point to something beyond the human, and hence beyond interpretation—a nexus of primeval feelings and apprehensions which rationality can never conclusively eradicate. (p. 6)

Cavallaro argued that readers are drawn continually to tales that evoke their darker imaginings. A reader may realise also that the monsters of fiction are frightening because they are already present and representationally believable in our minds (MacAndrew, 1979, p. 8). Yet stock monsters, extreme violence and obvious metaphors are not enough to evoke readers' deeper, more primal fears. The traditional role of dark fiction is to help readers learn to dispel their fears (Attebery, 2008, p. 1). Thus, it is necessary for the narrative to develop believable (in the context of the story) elements that unsettle, but do not evoke disbelief. UF authors must then draw on atmospheric qualities to guide the reader into moments of fear, dread and anxiety

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[36] Clute's (2012) definition of UF includes the following connection between UF and gothic literature: 'The headings under which Frederick S. Frank anatomizes the form in *The First Gothics* (1987) also work to describe the early forms of UF: claustrophobic containment; subterranean pursuit; supernatural encroachment; "extraordinary positions" and lethal predicaments; abeyance of rationality; possible victory of Evil; supernatural gadgetry, contraptions, machinery, and demonic appliances; and "a constant vicissitude of interesting passions"' (p. 1).

within the believable boundaries of their cities. The atmospheric element is best explained by H. P. Lovecraft (2004):

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplained dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming it subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (p. 105)

UF relies on both the unsettling insertion of the supernatural and the already fixed presence of fear in the city. If the city evoked less ambiguity in the minds of society, then the incursion of the non-rational would fail to upset and disturb. Thus, to enrich their narratives, UFs employ the already present struggle with tensions, threats and fears common to a modern city. This suggests that the thematic concerns of UF are intimately linked to their urban settings.

When considering thematic concerns, there is always conjecture over the use of terminology, and the words 'fear', 'anxiety' and 'dread' share a number of similar connotations. Even in their definitions, they encroach on each other, with dread being an intense fear or anxiety about future events[37] and anxiety an uneasiness or uncertainty.[38] This definition is also shared by fear, which is an uneasiness of impending danger.[39] Although subtle, the differences in terminology are important. However, the difficulty arises from the connotative interpretation of key terms used in each definition, which opens up each to a degree of uncertainty. The terminology of dark fiction resolves this issue by encouraging flexibility to suit the particular context. When considering such terms, Cavallaro (2002) made a very relevant distinction:

> First, that terror and horror, the concepts around which assessment of dark fiction have traditionally revolved, are not antithetical, as it has often been contended, but

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[37] Dread is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* as: 'Extreme fear; deep awe or reverence; apprehension or anxiety as to future events' ("Dread," 2015).

[38] Anxiety is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* as: 'uneasiness or trouble of mind about some uncertain event' ("Anxiety," 2015).

[39] Fear is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* as: 'The emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger, or by the prospect of some possible evil' ("Fear," 2015).

complementary. Terror has conventionally been linked to fear triggered by indeterminable agents, and horror to fear occasioned by gore. Although feelings of disorientation and anxiety indubitably alter according to the degree to which their causes may be related to material or incorporeal occurrences, these do not constitute fixed and self-contained categories for they incessantly collude and metamorphose into each other's interdependent affects. (p. vii)

This fluidity and interdependence of terminology is important to understand when explaining dark fiction. As already noted, UF differs from horror fiction and weird tales in that the presence of the thematised horror and terror are not the dominant narrative focus. Both occur as 'indeterminable agents' and gore is present in UF narratives; however, UF follows a plot structure more similar to gothic or detective fiction, where the agents become known before the final confrontation, and the gore, though present, is not imperative to the development of the atmosphere. Instead, a primary characteristic is fear created by an awareness of impending threats and danger. The protagonists are hunters who actively seek out the danger, which does not alleviate the reality of that threat, but instead heightens the feelings. The fear in UF can range from facing the supernatural to incremental fears of not knowing, which Patricia Briggs (2009c) identified in *Moon Called* as '[n]ot the kind of fear you feel when unexpectedly confronted by a monster in the dark, but the slower, stronger fear of something terrible that was going to happen' (p. 123). Fear of the unknown occurs throughout the UF narrative; however, it is alleviated by revealing the antagonist early in the plot. Fear is used to provoke the reader into considering the outcomes of the threads facing the protagonist. It is an element used to sharpen the consciousness (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 6)—it heightens awareness of the multitude of reality; an understanding of the layers of the unknown present in reality (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 6).

Also present in UF is a more primal threat—of dying. After all, to be mortal is to be concerned by death. UF evokes a range of primal emotions along a spectrum of violence, murder, death and terminal landscapes. Dread is not simply fear, but is touched by an awe or reverence for that which evokes fear. The deliberate use of terminal landscapes, at times death-scapes, provokes this sense of dread. In particular, vampires are creatures designed to conjure a mix of reverence and fear. They represent a form of immortality, as well as being disturbingly unnatural. UF authors exploit the landscapes of the city environment—both natural and unnatural—to produce a sense

of dread, which works to awaken other emotional experiences. Cavallaro (2002, p. 7) suggested that, in experiencing dread, a reader turns to curiosity and anger. In the anticipation of dread lies 'a consuming desire to know who or what is unsettling us' (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 7), thus evoking curiosity, while anger comes from 'a sense of irritation produced by the impossibility of final knowledge' (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 7). Dread becomes a gateway to a range of other sensory emotions by the reader. The author encourages the reader to engage more fully with the actions or environment of the narrative by developing a sense of dread.

The concern with unnaturalness and disorder is at the heart of humankind's monumental triumph over nature—the city. The urban environment is meant to protect, yet, within its walls, people are aware of the threat of that order descending into chaos. This understanding underpins the sense of anxiety that runs throughout UFs. The liminal spaces, city edifice and tensions between past and present all emphasise the anxiety that is already a part of city life. The violation of cultural boundaries within the city—aided by images of disorder, alienation and monstrosity (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 8)—is unsettling. Yet it is recognisable in a real-world city as the source of anxiety. UF adds a non-rational element to the narrative, but is drawing on anxieties already present in Western cities. At their core, UFs are primarily urban dramas that build on already-present thematic concerns with the incursion of the supernatural. The threads of fear, anxiety and dread tie UF cityscapes together more completely than any other thematic concern.

Liminal Spaces

Liminal[40] refers to being on the boundary or threshold of different states, or existing in an intermediary or transitional position. The concept of liminal is commonly used in anthropology to discuss the progress of rites of passage, where the transition from childhood to adulthood is accompanied by a series of culturally significant processes. The liminal state is a secondary phase outlined by Victor Turner (1994) in his work 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage', which he elaborated as being a state of ambiguity in which the 'passenger' passes through a 'realm that has

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[40] Liminal is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* ("Liminal," 2015) as: 'Characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc.'.

few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (p. 5). The liminal state is almost a position of limbo, and those undergoing this transitionary period exist without clear definition. For example, there is no secular definition in a society for the existence of a 'not-boy-not-man' (Turner, 1994, p. 6). This concept from an anthropological perspective is adopted into young adult UF series, where characters engage with supernatural beings and non-rational phenomena as part of their rite of passage. The central narratives are often focused on this liminal period, in which the characters operate in a transitionary space and must overcome a series of obstacles before they are able to pass into the third phase of consummation. For the adult literature upon which this thesis is focused, the role of the liminal space is less about the rite of passage from child to adult; instead, UF novels engage with the liminal to examine both physical and symbolic locales that function as spaces of imagination and possibility. Turner (1994) stated that, as members of society, 'most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture' (p. 5). UF already challenges expectations of urban realism by including the non-rational in a real-world setting; however, it goes beyond this to attempt to examine the spaces often overlooked, ignored or blindly accepted by society—the liminal spaces of a city.

These liminal spaces are necessarily only available to characters that exhibit liminal characteristics. The ability to cross into these liminal spaces is a particular characteristic of the UF protagonist—the urban hunter.[41] Their ability to traverse these landscapes imparts power. Yet the protagonist does not exist exclusively in such spaces; instead, the liminal mythic characters the protagonist hunts or associates with primarily occupy such zones of the city. In addressing the question of liminality, Charles La Shure (2005) identified that, for liminal mythical characters, liminality must be their original state. Their existence in these liminal spaces 'allows them access to the social structure at any number of points, much like a sewer dweller would have access to a city at any number of points' (La Shure, 2005, p. 1). These antagonistic mythical characters are able to emerge from the liminal spaces 'betwixt and between' a city, and influence the ordinary world. Thus, they are able to 'flit across the borders at any time, penetrating the social structure at will, but [they] cannot stay there' (La

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[41] A more comprehensive discussion of the UF protagonist known as the 'urban hunter' is presented in Chapter 4: The Urban Hunter.

Shure, 2005, p. 1). In contrast, the protagonists must act as a bridge between the real-world setting of the city and the liminal zones of the fantastic. The protagonists' unique characteristics (often supernatural in form, but not always—as in the case of musicians, poets, artists or so forth) allow them to pass into and through the liminal spaces to which mythical characters become confined. The clearest example of this is China Mieville's (2011) *King Rat* novel. There, the human protagonist, Saul, traverses both the city and underground to gain power, while his mentor, King Rat, is weakened when leaving the liminal space of his sewer home.

UF authors tend to develop liminal spaces such as those that exist on the edges of human society. In a city, this can refer to the literal outskirts (often slums, ghettos or industrial areas), but also to spaces that are unique to a city, yet often overlooked or ignored by daily city dwellers. Common choices are the underground sewer systems, water courses, ancient cave systems, crypts and basements. These places exist below ground, are often ignored in ordinary life and still retain a taint of the unknown. Liminal spaces are also the abandoned or forgotten places around a city, such as alleys no longer commonly used, rooftops without access points, rubbish or construction dump sites, abandoned transport centres, and unfinished or decayed buildings. They are locales forgotten or abandoned for various reasons, and while they may still be used by people, these are people already on the outskirts of humanity—the homeless, lost, infirm, insane, runaways and so forth. In turn, ordinary spaces can also become liminal when their usual purpose in usurped by the non-rational. This is when the supernatural is able to subvert a traditional space for its own use. It is a distinct part of UF that the known may be turned unknown by the presence of the supernatural. The supernatural are able to render the ordinary fantastic, and subsequently create the liminal in the truest sense. These are transitionary, in-between spaces that are able to operate in a temporary state for the actions of the supernatural to occur. A further element is often incorporated to add to the mythical transformation of the city space into a betwixt space, such as night-time, shadows or locales of transfer (stairs, alleys, windows, doors or transportation) that link a start and end point. Any space that can be used to represent a midpoint can be adopted as a liminal space.

Liminal spaces in UF serve a number of vital purposes. First, they provide a distinct locale within which the supernatural and antagonists can operate without causing

dissonance from the believability of the real-world setting. Even though a number of UF authors have inserted supernatural creatures into the ordinary parts of their cities, it is notable that, in these spaces, they behave in expected human roles. For example, the vampires in Laurell K. Hamilton's series are often strippers or entertainers at night. Their job suits their lifestyle and is not beyond believable. In a similar manner, when UFs include shapeshifters and were-animals, whether the world knows of their existence or not, they remain in human form in public and hold human jobs, rather than roaming the streets in their animal form. Thus, the supernatural is incorporated into city life in a believable manner. The liminal space is then able to offer a believable locale where the otherworldly can expose their otherness. Urban liminal spaces are already imbued with particular connotations that the UF author uses for atmospheric purposes. Operating in these spaces helps emphasise the otherness of the supernatural. By locating their stories in these below, forgotten, abandoned places or by corrupting the safety of the known, UF authors are able to develop strong senses of fear, anxiety and tension in the reader.

The most commonly developed liminal setting is the below space. A 'below' urban setting is associated with myth and instinct (Pike, 1981, p. 36), drawing on a rich background of classical mythologies. Below has always been associated mythically with underworlds. Two well-known examples are the Orpheus myth of travelling to Hades' Underworld and Dante's journey into Hell. Even contemporary parodies and popular-culture representations of Hell are commonly located in an intangible 'below'. In the urban context, these subterranean spaces are also populated with imagined myths and horrors. For example, the sewers—a place whose purpose is to discard human waste—are a source of disgust and ignorance, and already hold a popular-culture association with urban legends and horror stories, such as the alligators that live in New York's sewers, or the 'below' people of dystopic stories that emerge to kidnap and kill the 'above' people. UF novels tap into a mythos (both classical and modern) that is already strongly in place. Even without the mythic, human instinct shies away from places that enclose us or are associated with waste and discard. The UF novel that most successfully captures the liminal space of the sewers is Mieville's *King Rat*. The sewer system under London has already been developed by authors of urban realism or horror. It is a system that allows criminal elements to travel unseen, undetected by the ordinary citizens. It is a place to hold secret meetings and hide a

body. It is a space occupied by only the most rejected of society, and by rats. Mieville's (2011) character King Rat is the human embodiment of a ruling rat:

> I'm the big-time crime boss. I'm the one that stinks. I'm the scavenger chief, I live where you don't want me. I'm the intruder. I killed the usurper, I take you to safekeeping. I killed half your continent one time. I know when your ships are sinking. I can break your traps across my knee and eat the cheese in your face and make you blind with my piss. I'm the one with the hardest teeth in the world, I'm the whiskered boy. I'm the Duce of the sewers, I run the underground. I'm the king. (p. 34)

King Rat represents the rats and their role as vermin, disease carriers and insidious citizens of the below. He, more than most UF characters, embodies the mythical liminal character and is subsequently inseparable from his environment.

The sewer system Mieville (2011) created is more than literal—it becomes a liminal space when King Rat reveals it to the protagonist, Saul:

> Shapes moved in front of him. He thought they were real until the corridors themselves began to emerge from the darkness and he realised that those other fleeting, indistinct forms were born in his mind. They were dispelled as Saul began to see. (p. 102)

Saul learns to perceive the sewers as a space of fluidity. He sees more than the drains and walls, but also 'the energy it contained spilling out' (Mieville, 2011, p. 103)—the 'aura' of the sewer space. Saul is inducted into the liminal space by a mythical trickster—the king of rats—who leads Saul into an unknown world that is separate, but clearly abutting, the real world, where '[o]ccasional growls of traffic filtered through the earth and tar above, to yawn through the cavernous sewers' (Mieville, 2011, p. 106), reminding the reader that this space is present below the streets of London. Mieville created a labyrinthine space that appears to have no start or end—it is a mid-space that only a rat could traverse at ease. As Saul observes, the 'rule of the sewers were different, the distinctions and boundaries between areas blurred' (Mieville, 2011, p. 206); in opposition to the certainty of above-ground landmarks, the sewers take on a 'sameness'—an endless quality. Akin to Dickens's own representation of London, Mieville did not attempt to beautify the space; rather he was brutal in portraying the ugliness. It is 'a study in perspective, the shit—and algae—

encrusted walls … and everywhere the smell, rot and faeces, and the pungent smell of piss, rat piss' (Mieville, 2011, p. 103). Mieville's sewers are functionally a concept for disgusting and unsettling the reader. Only Saul's adaptation and rat-training allow him to exist in this space, and it is a transitionary space even for him.

As a UF novel, Mieville's narrative does not remain isolated in the sewers. Mieville did not attempt to create a secondary world below the city streets. Instead, Saul must traverse the sewers, while learning to move between the sewers, the ordinary world and other liminal spaces of the novel. In many ways, Mieville's novel is the most liminal of the UF subgenre because the protagonist and his mentor occupy almost exclusively liminal spaces, while the central antagonist moves in the ordinary world. When Saul is above ground, he remains in back alleys, feeds from dumpsters and travels across the '[a]lternative architecture and topography' (Mieville, 2011, p. 119) of London's rooftops. The places where violence and fighting occur are liminal—a hidden room in the sewer system built for King Rat, a vehicle demolition site that is abandoned and decaying, a ghostly subway station that is no longer in use and a derelict warehouse used by ravers. All such places are ignored in the ordinary world, but become battlegrounds and haunts for the otherworldly. Such liminal spaces are never fully forgotten or abandoned, but live 'a half-life, never being finally laid to rest, haunted by the unlikely promise that [they] would one day open for business again' (Mieville, 2011, p. 173). All these spaces are decayed, broken, dangerous and isolated. They add to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty because, unlike traditional fantasy battlefields, these UF liminal spaces offer the option that good will not prevail.

Saul comes to view the city as an entity of weakness—a place that is vulnerable when its secrets are learnt, and only a character who sees beneath the city's façade can understand its truth:

> This point of view was dangerous for the observer, as well as for the city. It was only when it was seen from these angles that he could believe London had been built brick by brick, not born out of its own mind. But the city did not like to be found out. Even as he saw it clearly for the product it was, Saul felt it square up against him. The city and he faced each other. He saw London from an angle against which it had no front, at a time when its guard was down. (Mieville, 2011, p. 338)

Saul's perspective allows the transformation of the entire city into a liminal space because, at its heart, a city is a place of transition. This view captures the anxiety associated with weakness and change that a reader can understand, which transforms the entire landscape of the novel into a place of ceaseless tensions. The illusion of Mieville's liminal city is furthered by the development and focus on the individual liminal places where the action of the novel occurs. This causes the individual liminal spaces of the novel to become inseparable from the overall transitional nature of the city. Even as time moves forward and alters the uses and façades of a real city, the UF city locates in these changes the liminal, forgotten places left behind.

Mieville is not alone among UF authors who have seized on the opportunities available in developing a liminal city. Newford city, the creation of Charles de Lint, is an urban landscape filled with liminal spaces that allow de Lint's UF tales to unravel. His collection, *Dreams Underfoot* (de Lint, 1993), is a series of interweaving stories set in a North American city that is rich in history:

> Old City was the original heart of Newford. It lay deep underneath the subway tunnels—dropped there in the late eighteen hundreds during the Great Quake. The present city, including its sewers and underground transportation tunnels, had been built above the ruins of the old one. There'd been talk in the early seventies of renovating the ruins as a tourist attraction—as had been done in Seattle—but Old City lay too far underground for easy access … Old City had rapidly gone from a potential tourist attraction to a home for skells—winos, bag ladies and the other homeless. (de Lint, 1993, p. 45)

The space of the Old City has become an ignored place—home to the homeless and the supernatural. It is a city of transitions, with night creating a different landscape to that of day, where '[e]verything felt very different in the morning light' (de Lint, 1993, p. 51) and distinct seasonal changes create new landscapes, especially in the winter snow. A plethora of forgotten or abandoned places are touched with the non-rational. Bridges alter the locale from one end to another, and even time boundaries blur on a corner in the rain, with 'the feeling of time flipping by like the pages of a calendar in an old movie, except each page was a year, not a day' (de Lint, 1993, p. 81), and people can cross between. De Lint (1993) is a master of subverting the ordinary places of a city into sources of the unknown:

> This alleyway was the last place in the world of that she would ever expect to find a marvel. The grime and the dirt, the plastic garbage bags torn open in their corners, the refuse heaped against the walls—this wasn't the stuff of magic. Magic was Tolkien's Middle Earth. Cat Midhir's Borderlands. This was … She ran a hand down the side of the wall and looked at the smudge it left on her fingers. This was an armpit of the real world. (p. 128)

Akin to Mieville, de Lint implies that the places most often ignored by society offer glimpses of the unknown. The history left behind in a developing city is tainted by our anxieties about resolving our past and present. These locales are left open for a UF narrative to expand their mythologies into the realm of the supernatural. By adding the fantastic to abandoned, misused or forgotten places, a plethora of liminal spaces become available to explore. De Lint captured these opportunities in his Newford series as a way to explore ancient mythologies in a modern setting.

In the city of Newford itself, de Lint added 'the Tombs'—a slum, ghetto and liminal space where everything is in a gradual state of decay:

> It was the lost part of the city—a wilderness of urban decay stolen back from the neon and glitter. Block on block of decaying tenements and rundown buildings. The kind of place which the homeless gravitated … It was also the kind of place where the freaks hid out, waiting for Lady Night to start her prowl. (de Lint, 1993, p. 136)

Here, as in the Old City, are the places ignored by society, where de Lint situated his supernatural creatures. They are able to use these derelict places to live and interact with the ordinary world. De Lint is slightly different in his approach to UF because he focuses on the need to reinsert myth back into the city. However, through his preference for the marginalised and disenfranchised, he captures the ever fluid state of a city. As Thomas Hall (2008) stated, the city can offer an abundance of opportunities for those with no home—to reclaim transitional places in the city for themselves. Hall (2008) stated that there 'is an irony here in which disregard for the city—commercial neglect, spaces despoiled, sites run down and abandoned—bends back on itself and makes space for the disregarded' (p. 73). De Lint's story offers the ignored people unique places in his city full of magic and opportunity. Mieville's story implies that a city is a liminal place for unique characters who must step outside their mundane lives,

while de Lint's story suggests that a city is full of liminal spaces for anyone willing to look beyond the ordinary.

Although de Lint included a few characters who are interwoven into the fabric of his short stories, he predominantly used ordinary people who—through choice or accident—are exposed to the extraordinary. In this manner, de Lint followed in a broader tradition of fantastic liminality, as do all UF authors. Clemens Ruthner (2012) explained that 'liminality appears to be that state of affairs in which the human protagonist of the literary Fantastic (and with them the readers) are displaced' (p. 43). This displacement often occurs due to unheard-of supernatural or unnatural incidents. This point of the narrative was referred to by Joseph Campbell (1973) as 'crossing the threshold',[42] which is a core component of fantasy literature; however, UF deviates in its choice of locale. Set in a real-world city, UF opts to use liminal spaces for the displacement of its characters. Once introduced to the supernatural, characters do not usually remain in these liminal spaces (Mieville's *King Rat* being an exception). These spaces can be returned to later or found elsewhere in the city. This enables the characters to continue to interact with the liminal spaces, but also choose to leave such places. De Lint used both forms, with set locales (such as the Old City and Tombs) that remain and transitionary places (such as alleyways, bridges, and night-time or abandoned decaying buildings). All these share the primary purpose of presenting liminal spaces for the intersection of the ordinary and supernatural. This intersection is a key characteristic of UF. As stated in UF's definition by Clute (1997), 'UFs are normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly *about* a real city' (p. 975). Fantastic liminality occurs when the known and unknown are forced to interact simultaneously. This occurrence in UF is expected to transpire within the believable limits of a modern city. As such, UF authors select locales in the city that already represent, in popular-culture, places of myth, transition or uncertainty. The authors can interweave the non-rational into these mundane places because of the ambiguous associations that already exist.

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[42] Campbell's (1973) 'crossing the threshold' is a highly symbolic act in which the hero departs from their home to undertake his or her journey. It is often associated with the rites of passage into adulthood and is considered a defining moment. The threshold is assumed to offer its own form of challenges that must be overcome before the hero is able to move forward in the journey.

The city has always been considered ambiguous. As Diane Wolfe Levy (1978) commented, '[a]ttitudes toward the city have varied from optimism and enthusiasm to despair' (p. 66). It is a place that represents human achievement and barbarism. Levy (1978) suggested that our literary fascination with the city is located in the notion of control—that, as the creation of humankind, the city becomes a setting where man 'must realise his own salvation or damnation' (Levy, 1978, p. 66). The UF city offers liminal places as the locale for these trials to occur. Unlike urban realism, it is not the private places of home in which the characters must confront and resolve their problems. Instead, UF characters face the problems and tensions of their lives in the public, yet often unseen, spaces of the city. Within the boundaries of the city are the threats and possible resolutions to their stories. Emma Bull (2001), a seminal UF author for her novel *War for the Oaks*, divided the human and fae (fairy folk) of her novel by their use of spaces. The fae fight and celebrate in the wider boundaries of the city—a parkland bordering the city and a disused park in the city. By their nature, they are associated with natural places and battling for control of the human city. When they insert themselves into the city, they are subverting the ordinary space for the duration of their presence, and thus creating a liminal space. The locations where conflict occurs in the human-made spaces of the city are altered by the presence of the cusp of night to day. These city locales have their usual role as commerce or entertainment suspended to become places of magical occurrence. Bull chose the night-time streets of Minneapolis and the clubs, music venues and botanical gardens (where nature is present, yet tamed and managed by human control) as her liminal locales. The story begins with their ordinary use, which is then usurped for the purposes of the fae, before being returned to the ordinary. Bull has managed to convey the threat of this transition by implying that any space in the city is at risk of becoming liminal. This helps evoke a sense of anxiety throughout the story because, at any time, the mundane may turn extraordinary without warning. As a result, the lives of the characters are under a constant threat of danger and violence.

In many ways, Bull set the tone for later UF narratives. The underlying threat of danger, anxiety of facing constant unknowns and influence of primal fears are as much a characteristic of UF as the magic and expected supernatural. These senses of fear, anxiety and danger are evoked by the presence of antagonistic supernatural forces, yet also by the unfriendly and fear-inspiring locales. It is noticeable that the latter authors,

Hamilton in particular, have drawn on Bull's foundations. Thus, the liminal spaces of Hamilton's novels often include the presence of a threshold that alludes back to Bull, and further to the work of Joseph Campbell (1973). She requires her protagonist, Anita Blake, to descend stairs to an underground to face the unknown. The stairs are a liminal space because they are the midpoint between two ends; they serve no other purpose than to transition the character between zones of known and unknown. In *The Laughing Corpse* (Hamilton, 2009), Anita is driven to a deal with a voodoo priestess, and descends into her sanctuary, pausing midway aware of the danger below:

> The basement stairs were steep, wooden slats. You could feel the vibration in the stairs as we tromped down them. It was not comforting. The bright sunlight from the door spilled into absolute darkness. The sunlight faltered, seemed to fade as if it had no power in this cave-like place. I stopped on the grey edge of daylight, staring down into the night-dark of the room. (Hamilton, 2009, p. 56)

The stairway offers neither danger nor safety—only access to either. The descent below draws on the trope of the underworld and death through the imagery of the dark divided from the light. Anita is later chased from the depths, pursued by a monster. Here, the stairs again only represent the opportunity to reach safety as, during the pursuit, '[t]he darkness was snapping at our heels' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 72) and only continuing onwards can save her. Only when Anita reaches the top and exits the stairs does the light return fully, and suddenly 'the darkness, the zombies, all of it seemed wrong for the sunlight' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 73). Hamilton used the liminal space of the stairs to heighten the reader's anxiety about the danger the protagonist faces and to reinforce the expected dichotomies of light being good and safe, while evil haunts the dark. The monsters and unknown terrors remain below in the dark, and only by crossing the threshold back into the sunlight is safety ensured: 'Something screamed behind us, caught in the edge of daylight' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 73).

The dens of the supernatural draw on expected concepts of subversion and confinement. They are caverns, dungeons and basements that appear to entrap the protagonist, while the creatures are able to move easily in and out. In *Guilty Pleasures*, Hamilton (2007) situated her villains in an underground cavern: 'The room was huge, like a warehouse, but the walls were solid, massive stone. I kept waiting for Bela Lugosi to sweep around the corner in his cape' (p. 57). It is an expected landscape—

the proper backdrop for a vampire to appear. To escape that room, Anita must first successfully ascend the stairs to safety—while danger lies below, above represents safety. However, the stairs are a liminal space and act as a place that offers both and neither. As Anita flees, she is still forced to fight for her escape: 'An explosion ripped up the stairs. The wind smashed us down like toys … I scrambled on all fours trying to get away' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 70). The protagonist realises: 'I had to get away, had to, or I would die in this place, tonight' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 71). Only when Anita reaches the top of the stairs is she safe: 'we were leaving the underground chamber of horrors behind and approaching the real world. I was ready to go home' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 75). The stairway did not represent a place of safety—only a point of transition. The fear of the horrors in the cavern is replaced by the anxiety of the hero's escape. A reader is aware that, at any moment, the creatures below could ascend after the hero and drag her back underground. This causes the anxiety and dread of the situation to become tied equally to the liminality of the situation and the presence of the supernatural.

The effective use of the liminal is due to UF's roots in the fantastic. As a form of low fantasy,[43] UF must balance the presence of a believable real world and the incursion of the non-rational. UF is able to do this by creating liminal spaces in an ordinary urban environment. It seeks to take the comfortably known and make it unfamiliar. UF acts to create an uncanny experience, although this is not to say that UFs are necessarily uncanny literatures; rather, they develop uncanny moments to further the reader's experience. As Julian Wolfreys (2008) stated, the condition of this uncanny experience is 'that there is always the inexorable slide … from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the homely to the unhomely, the "canny" or "known" to the "uncanny"' (p. 170). The uncanny occurs in conjunction with the evocation of dread and horror (Freud, 1988, p. 339). An uncanny moment is liminal because it is a moment in transition from known to unknown. In that experience, the character (and often the reader) feels a moment of fear and horror. Sigmund Freud (1988) suggested that 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced' (p. 367). In UF, such occurrences arise when the non-rational

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[43] 'Low fantasy' is a term used to distinguished fantasies set in the real current era or a realistic past. It works in contrast to high fantasy, which is secondary world fantasy that occurs in another place or time distinctly different to the real world.

and mundane occupy the same space in an urban setting. The intrusion of old mythological creatures, such as vampires, ghouls and demons, into a 'new' modern city conjures primal fears:

> It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animalistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (Freud, 1988, p. 363)

Animalistic fears of taboo subjects, such as the demonic or undead, help heighten the moment of terror when such creatures appear unexpectedly in the urban locale.

Indeed, in UF, it is the locale that allows for the uncanny to occur. Wolfreys (2008) argued that the location or context of the subjects influences their responses:

> In this, and in all motions associated with spatial orientation and disorientation, structural, topographical, and, inevitably (on occasion), architectural figures and tropes serve to illustrate what takes place. Topography becomes or is already haunted by topography. Space, place, and displacement vie uneasily in the same location, situation, site, or locus. As soon as there is a form with repeatable if irregular shapes, the experience or occasion of the uncanny has its chance. Turning this around, the uncanny is there, as soon as undifferentiated space gives way to even the most haphazard construction of place. For the uncanny experience may take place as soon as there is a place for the occasional, jarring encounter. (p. 170)

This urban uncanny described by Wolfreys is often present in the liminal spaces that UFs develop, such as the labyrinthine sewers of *King Rat*, the stairways of in-between by Hamilton, and the myriad darkly-lit streets of a city that seem to loop back onto themselves in de Lint's Newford. In de Lint's story 'Timeskip', the streets weave together in a thin drizzle of rain and a ghost from the past appears and steals away a young woman. The presence of night and darkness helps create a labyrinthine sameness in the city streets. It produces liminal spaces where characters are in transition and vulnerable to the uncanny. Kelly Gay's (2009) novel *The Better Part of Darkness* develops these moments in a similar manner to Bull, where the noise of the city is cut off at night and a new darker set of sounds begins: 'The sudden passing

from the loud and boisterous to the dim, eerie quiet' (Gay, 2009, p. 112). In the shadows or alleys will emerge an unexpected creature that evokes fear, before it withdraws as if never having been present. The uncanny can only occur in moments of uncertainty, when it is unclear if an incident is real or imaginary. An important point of departure for UF is its fantasy nature, which means that UF stories can only create a few rare moments of uncanny before the reader becomes acclimatised to the presence of the non-rational.

The cities of UFs offer themselves as liminal and uncanny spaces. The ambiguous presence of the city in the imagination is well documented. As Hall (2008) suggested:

> Cities present us with an extraordinary terrain, which we nonetheless take for granted sometimes, perhaps because the terrain is so massively *there* … We might find a place within such landscapes, but to do so is to make a life amidst rigid structures, gradients and surfaces that were there before us and are not now essentially negotiable. (p. 72)

UFs are fundamentally embedded in their cityscape and understandably draw on the tensions, threats and anxieties already present in contemporary cities. As a monument of humankind's power, the city has become as confining as it is freeing. An atmosphere of routine and frustration is present in the everyday lives of our large cities. Arango (1970) argued that:

> Man's life in many of the large industrial cities crawls by in an atmosphere of routine and frustration. Tension, hate, and sadness have distorted the faces of the people riding on subways or waiting in the large bus and railway stations of the world. Crime is common and perversion abundant, barely kept in check or forced underground by the police who in large, advanced societies have become large and very advanced in their systems of watching over the behaviour of individuals and punishing the ones at fault with isolation or death. The law, the government, the job, the standards of behaviour, have created the cages within which most people spend their lives monotonously pacing from one side to the other, getting fat, living longer, and saving money in hope of escape. (p. 92)

Adapted to captivity, people have begun to resent the confines of ordinary city life. Like any fantasy, UF offers an escape by developing extraordinary occurrences and locating them in these ordinary cities. While Lewis Carroll and C. S. Lewis created

doorways to escapism from the real world, UF is embedded in the real city. The escapism offered by the fantastic in UF is an extra supernatural 'film' placed on top of the already ambiguous city. The liminality of the thematic concerns of UF mimics the concerns of city life: 'illness/dying; violence/crime; sexuality; drugs/intoxication; mysticism/rapture; madness; … the numinous; monstrosities; and ghosts' (Ruthner, 2012, p. 44). UF simply dramatises these concerns through the fantastic, while ensuring they are recognisably urban in nature.

Terminal Landscapes and Liminal Themes

In UF, the liminal themes are often explored in what can be perceived as a terminal landscape—by which I mean a landscape involving, associated with, symbolic of or populated by death, dying or the undead. Such spaces can include, but are not limited to, morgues; cemeteries; hospitals; the underground; ancient ruins; burial grounds; crypts; or any space populated by dead bodies, bones or decaying bodies, vampires, ghouls, zombies or other forms of the undead. The inclusion of terminal landscapes is part of the underlying mythologies present in UF. Our association between urban and death has been present since the development of the earliest cities. Lehan (1986) suggested that, as the first cities 'were founded as a place where wandering tribes could return to worship the dead … the idea of the city has never been separated from the reality of death' (p. 105). We attempt to deny our mortality, and equally yearn for and are appalled by immortality. From there rises the myths of the immortal vampire—a creature that may live forever, but is always a monster. Cities house the lives of people, yet also contain the dying and dead. UFs often centre on the transitionary stage of life into death and, through magic and myth, this can include the undead. Existence then becomes truly liminal because, with the option of being undead, the final resolution has been moved out of reach.

More so than other undead, the vampire represents a prototypical liminal character. As Ruthner (2012) stated, liminality is a temporary state hovering 'on the demarcation line between the two fields separated by the boundary' (p. 41). Thus, the vampire 'removes the biological and cultural border between death and life' (Ruthner, 2012, p. 42). It is a living corpse that symbolically violates the moral border of existence. For a vampire to feed, it must take the life force and blood of a living human—a fundamental violation of our belief in the sanctity of life. Hamilton (2007) delineated

the difference between humans and vampires by identifying the 'otherness' of the vampire—the contrast to our warm mammalian selves:

> There was a neck-ruffling smell to the room, stale. It caught at the back of my throat and was almost a taste, faintly metallic. It was like the smell of snakes kept in cages. You knew there was nothing warm and furry in this room just by the smell. (p. 249)

Although they serve as love interests, Hamilton's vampires are depicted as monsters and unnatural. They sleep in coffins and live in underground spaces. The presence of the vampires becomes synonymous with blood and danger, regardless of the intimacy of a scene. Hamilton further related her vampires to sexual deviancies that stand against mainstream American culture. Linked to death, sex and violence, they are portrayed as unnatural and immoral. As Lockwood (2010) stated, their role is to be read as 'an expression of transgressive cultural impulses' (p. 1). The vampire is a monster 'associated with a wide range of boundary-crossing, deviations, abnormalities and alterities' (Lockwood, 2010, p. 2). This alternative nature was once associated with isolated 'dark lands', yet has now come to be connected with the urban. As humankind expands its borders, it is believable that vampires have slipped within the city boundaries to hunt.

Associated with elements of countercultural norms, the vampire has a tangible effect on the landscapes it inhabits. When feeding, killing, taking blood or hunting, the vampire becomes a siren of imminent death. Its hunting zones then become terminal landscapes because the vampire's presence comes to represent the potential for death. More disturbingly are the realistic locales that UF authors select for their vampires to emerge from:

> Crowded terraced houses blurred into unkempt semis with junk-filled gardens and peeling paintwork. Light spilled around half-closed curtains to pool on the pitted, uneven pavements. Graffiti-scarred tower blocks thrust into the night sky like giant tombstones and here and there houses squatted like waiting nightmares, their windows shuttered with blank steel plates. Sucker town in all its midnight glory. (McLeod, 2009, p. 132)

These places in a state of decay are already tainted by the terminal. It is believable that the edges of a city that experience crime and social problems are the perfect hunting

grounds for all types of monsters. These terminal landscapes are atmospherically emphasised by the use of dark imagery—the vampires emerge from shadows and out of darkness. They belong to the night—a time considered dichotomous to life and light. UF authors depict their creatures in caverns, sleeping underground (Hamilton, 2010a) or in abandoned houses surrounded by the ghosts of those they have killed (Briggs, 2009c). For UF, the terminal landscape and undead are irreducibly linked because each functions to further the imagery of the other.

The terminal landscapes developed in a living city aid in the atmosphere of fear and dread. Many of the liminal spaces are situated in terminal landscapes, which are places in a state of decay or abandoned/forgotten locales. However, unlike the below of a city, a terminal space is implied as any place touched by the dead. This opens up all the traditional safe zones of a city (such as homes, sacred spaces and places of authority) to the threat of the dead, thereby creating invasive terminal landscapes—for who can escape death? The emotional weight of a terminal landscape contributes to the development of UF's thematic concerns. The physical locales associated with the transition of dying are tinged already with fear and dread. For although people may come to accept death, they have not accepted the process or its presence in modern life. The locales of the dead are touched by a mix of emotional worship, loss and grief. However, the deep pain of loss is often negated by a final acceptance of the permanency of the state. By introducing the undead to such static places, UF authors are subverting and somewhat perverting these places. This creates a terminal landscape of liminality where the end point has become unclear because, even though zombies may be laid to rest and vampires 'die' in the day, the mythology of UF allows these creatures to rise again in the same space. This notion evokes an unsettling sense of dread.

The mythos connected to raising the dead already occupies a place of deep unease in Western Christian society. Connected from a Christian view to the story of Jesus and the saints, it appears in UF as a strong perversion of divinity. The other legends of the dead rising commonly used in fiction today derive from Vaudun or voodoo traditions.[44] Every culture, religion and time has a set of beliefs regarding the ability

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[44] Voodoo traditions arise from the Caribbean and represent a particular belief system. Their relevance to UF is in the association of ceremonial 'magic' and the myths of raising the dead. Many of the

to raise the dead. It is a fundamental desire of humankind to be able to find a way to restore our departed. UF appears to primarily maintain that the ability to raise the dead comes either from the process of vampirism[45] or a personal ability of necromancy.[46] Regardless of a particular UF's mythology, the result is the presence of the undead, whose very unnaturalness upsets the balance of the world. With a focus on the undead or death in various forms, UF requires the presence of terminal landscapes where characters face horrors dichotomous to natural life. The dread evoked by these places in the reader is furthered by the accompaniment of blood and violence. Hamilton's protagonist, Anita, is a necromancer by birth and an animator, homicide consultant and vampire hunter by trade. Thus, her most common locales are terminal spaces populated by death. She is situated in bloody back alleys, ghoul-infested cemeteries, hospitals and morgues filled with 'killer zombies', murder scenes and burial grounds. Predominantly set at night, these spaces already belong to death. The further descriptions of violence and gore heighten the natural dread to become fear—a fear that is increased by the understanding that these terminal landscapes remain confined to the city.

The City Edifice

The city as a confining edifice in UF owes its roots to the gothic edifice.[47] Frank (1987) identified that the blueprint of eighteenth-century gothic literature was to 'find a set of frantic characters restrained and enclosed by some version of a mighty and mysterious building beneath which there is a sort of hell or "long, labyrinth of darkness"' (p. xxiii). The gothic edifice was at the heart of what defined gothic imagery. It was more

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traditions and myths have been translated into Louisiana or New Orleans traditions, which have inspired the particular 'flavour' of raising the dead in American UFs.

[45] Technical choices to support the mythos of the vampire differ in many UFs. The variation in constructing the 'type' of vampire in UF is a distinction particular to the author and is often selected to fit the particular mythos or parameters of the narrative. However, the common element in UF is the vampire's ability to be integrated and hunt within the scope of an urban landscape. UF vampires commonly have the ability to become smoke, blend with shadows, fly, fascinate with a gaze and influence the weak minded. In addition, the vampires are strongly human in appearance to better blend in with other city dwellers.

[46] Necromancy has a rich history arising from the Ancient Greeks, when Odysseus visits the realm of the dead. It is a term used to refer to the raising of either the physical dead or an apparition of the deceased to allow communication with the dead. As a form of death magic similar to voodoo, it is considered 'evil' and associated with satanic worship, black magic and witchcraft.

[47] Refer to the Introduction for a more detailed examination of the gothic's influence on UF.

than a setting, but rather a representational landscape that reflected the psychological and emotional turmoil of the villain. As Ridenhour (2013) stated, the gothic edifice was the 'physical metaphor of both the rotten inner self of the villain and a decayed and imposing history' (p. 8). It acted as a symbol for the fear and dread incited by the threats facing the stability of the modern world. The nineteenth-century gothic authors adapted and transported this space from crumbling isolated castles to industrial urban cities. UF continues to draw on this stock setting because it offers the same imperative motifs as it did gothic authors: claustrophobic confinement, subterranean pursuit and supernatural encroachment. In his definition of UF, Clute (1997, p. 976) also suggested that it is reasonable to argue that UFs derive from the notion of edifice, which came into existence in *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole. UF cities are constructed as a type of edifice because they conform to the primary role of an edifice, which is as follows: '[f]rom without, an edifice may seem self-contained and finite; from within, it may well extend beyond lines of vision, both spatially and temporally' (Clute, 2012b, p. 1). The city edifice allows UF authors space to extend their narrative beyond the believable parameters of a real city, while still maintaining a sense of confinement.

A feeling of being trapped—of a physical, emotional or psychological confinement—is understood in contemporary cities. Arango's (1970, p. 92) metaphor of humans living a caged existence—that city dwellers have adapted to their routine of captivity—is easy to see in the rise in crime, suicides, depression and anxiety disorders in contemporary time (Hall, 2008). The city, which was once a site of security, has become a locale of unease. UF plays with these fears by emphasising elements of confinement, pursuit and encroachment. Frank (1987) outlined claustrophobic confinement as follows: '[a]ll of the characters must feel enclosed by buildings, by compartments within those buildings, and by compartments within compartments such as coffins and cells' (p. 435). The sense of being trapped evokes a primal response of fear and dread. In Hamilton's novels, Anita is positioned a number of times to experience confinement, including being trapped underground in cells by supernatural enemies, captured and taken to a deep natural cave, enclosed in a coffin and locked in rooms. In such a long-running series, Hamilton has drawn on any number of confining situations. By nature, Anita is a character who prefers space, which helps emphasise her vulnerability and fear when placed in these situations. Hamilton is not alone—the

use of claustrophobic confinement occurs throughout UF. While it was isolation in early gothic literature that worked to emphasise the terror of this situation, UF instead reveals that, even in a city teeming with people, it is possible to be cut off from help—that places exist in a city that are ignored, forgotten or unknown. The city edifice offers any number of 'compartments' that can entrap and hide a person. As such, the city is not an orderly, safe place and 'images which depict the city as an unruly, unsettling and disorderly place are increasingly dominant' (Bannister & Fyfe, 2001, p. 807).

The use of subterranean pursuits adds to the sense of the city as a chaotic and unsettling place. The fact that the city holds in its 'basement' a network of tunnels, sewers, subways and underground rooms adds to the impression of an inescapable edifice. However, the pursuit does not need to be completely underground—it can also be through the night laden streets of a silent city. This can be seen in Bull's depiction of her protagonist being chased by a giant black dog, unable to reach the lights and safety of other people who appear always just out of reach. It is present in Mieville's *King Rat* when Saul races through the sewers and is pursued through the dark, confusing topography of London's rooftops. Both protagonists and victims are pursued in this manner—through the dark night streets of a city already perceived as dangerous. Although UF has departed from the traditions of gothic character roles of the 'stalking of an angelic heroine by a satanic villain by night' (Frank, 1987, p. 436), the pursuit of protagonist by villain has remained. The age-old response to a predator pursuing his prey remains in UF, and no end of characters in the dark streets feel 'a shiver along my spine … that creepy sensation of someone lurking behind me' (Gay, 2009, p. 112). Yet, throughout their adventures, UF characters do not break free of the confines of the city edifice. Instead, as Levy (1978, p. 66) pointed out, they must realise their own damnation or salvation within the city.

The senses of fear and dread are emphasised by more than the construction of the city edifice—the influence of the supernatural encroachment removes the stories from urban realism to UF. Frank (1987) observed that these 'supernatural figures enter the lives of the characters and constantly impinge upon and disturb the order of the natural world' (p. 436)—the natural world being the setting unique to the story where the infractions of the supernatural act to disrupt the order of a normal city space. UF authors are able to add to the unruly elements already present in a city. Acting to

subvert the norms of the city, the supernatural creatures deepen the fear and terror by offering added dangers to an already dangerous place. Confinement is now guarded by a supernatural creature, and pursuit on a dark night is by a monster. The creatures of UF tend towards the nightmarish, such as the undead and demons. UF also turns to old mythologies of fairies and transmutation for less 'Disney' elements. However, it is again worth noting that the strength of response to these characters is through their impingement on the city. Their occurrence and then withdrawal from the cityscape produces liminal spaces of fear and anxiety. The known is challenged by the unknown's ability to appear and disappear in a non-rational manner. The city edifice is developed as a constrictive zone for the conflict between the ordinary and supernatural to occur. Thus, UF heightens the sense of fear, anxiety and dread by drawing on these well-established tropes of horror and the gothic.

Tensions between the Past and Present

As a physical and social construct, cities struggle between the polar influences of the past and present. Cities built on ancient foundations must learn to accommodate the archaeology of their past. In much the same way, people struggle to resolve the traditions, expectations and social constructs of their past with their new commercialised city life. This process of adaption, change and rejection creates an atmosphere of tension in the city. The city depends on the development of old ideas, even as new ideas emerge. Michael Barer (2006) suggested that 'urban life is an odd amalgam of past beliefs, present perceptions, and future speculations' (p. 1). UF explores this tension through its continuous collision of mythologies, ancient locales and the modern city. It places supernatural creatures with roots in myth, fairy tales and folk lore in seemingly real-world urban environments. They represent the old, traditional and unwieldly and their presence in the city heightens tensions and anxieties, as it also heightens the comparison of past and present. UF in conjunction with the supernatural reveals the ancient, hidden and decaying parts of a city—places ignored by present-day city dwellers—and threatens the established order.

The threat of the eruption of the past into a contemporary city creates a sense of anxiety and tension. Pike (1981) suggested that humans' relationship with their created world evokes this deep-seated anxiety and that the city 'crystallises those conscious and unconscious tensions which have from the beginning characterised the city in Western

culture' (p. 4). No protagonist of UF is fighting a war on a visible battlefield—they are not the prototypical heroes of epic fantasy. Rather, they are involved in small private battles that may affect the outcome of the city, yet remain unseen. In this manner, the protagonists are often engaged in a battle to subdue the past before it boils over onto the surface of the present city. Elber-Aviram (2013) stated that, in UF, 'the fantastic city's subterranean history poses a constant danger to the integrity of the present' (p. 2). This is due to the symbolic representations of the past as the city's 'underground layers harbour supernatural forces threatening to erupt onto the surface' (Elber-Aviram, 2013, p. 2). In Mieville's and de Lint's work, this can often be very literal, with the supernatural creatures escaping from the below and inserting themselves into the city. In contrast, in other UFs—such as those by Hamilton, Gay and Lackey—the threat is more insidious. In these stories, the supernatural threatens to alter the nature of the city—to take control from humankind. In this style of story, the threat is as much recognisably gothic as it is psychological and morally perverse. The supernatural is a corrupting past—a throwback to primitive barbaric urges that threaten the enlightened present.

The tension of past and present is a common characteristic of civilisation because, even as we progress, we are reminded of the steps that came before. With its roots in gothic literature, UF unsurprisingly shares this thematic concern with those earlier works. Ridenhour (2013, p. 4) outlined that the tensions present in gothic literature arise from a teleological view of history. He suggested that the period reflects a belief that 'the progressive present is haunted by the primitive past, whose presence threatens the stability of the modern situation' (Ridenhour, 2013, p. 4). In fact, Ridenhour argued that the myriad psychological, political and symbolic readings of gothic fiction arise from a principal fear of the re-emergence of the past. The fear evoked by the past placed into the present is used dually to reassure and threaten. As Ridenhour (2013) stated:

> In a Gothic novel, the threatening past is used as a foil for the more enlightened present, reassuring modern readers of a historical telos of which they are the ultimate beneficiaries while simultaneously threatening the overthrow of that progressive paradigm. (p. 8)

This statement is as valid for UF as it is for gothic literature. The presence of the past reminds us that the real world has moved beyond the superstitions and mythologies of the past. However, because it continues to threaten and evoke fear, this reminder attempts to highlight the weakness of ignoring or choosing to forget the past.

The ambiguous city of the nineteenth-century gothics and urban realists is also present in UF. As Pike (1981) stated, this ambiguity arises because, at a deep level, 'the city seems to express our culture's restless dream about its inner conflicts and its inability to resolve them' (p. 8). The image of the city reflects the tensions between trying to resolve 'who we are', while we equally attempt to accept and ignore our past. The heroes of UF all struggle fundamentally with this problem—with the difficulty of establishing their identity by accepting, but not being overwhelmed by, the past. The monsters and supernatural creatures offer a symbolic representation of this threat; however, they are too easily conquered and abolished. Instead, it is the architecture— the topography of the city in UF—that best reveals this tension because, even after the evil has been subdued, the city remains. The city—full of liminal spaces, terminal landscapes and compartments within compartments—cannot be banished. UF does not attempt to hide this fact—all the fear-inspiring places remain in both the figurative story city and real-world cities. The protagonists return to their lives, jobs and homes in the city, changed by their experience, but still fully entrenched within the city. The implication is that, although they have resolved one vestige of the past, it was only one of many that exist in the city. A prime example of this is Mieville's (2011) Saul, who remains deep 'under London, in a rough chamber off a tube line abandoned' (p. 417), surrounded by his rats beneath the city—a living reminder of the past.

Chapter 4: The Urban Hunter

Eddi had never been suited to a normal life. (*War for the Oaks*, Emma Bull, 2001)

In Montana, on a hunt, the wolves howl and cry, but in the city all hunting is done soundlessly. Growls, whines, and barks are all bluffing tools—it is the quiet wolf that will kill you. (*Moon Called*, Patricia Briggs, 2009c)

A primary characteristic that delineates UF from other fantasy subgenres is the protagonist. Perhaps more than any other genre, fantasy narratives are focused on the journey of the protagonist or, more commonly, the journey of the hero. This chapter explores the role of the hero, changing gender expectations of female characters and key characteristics of UF's unique protagonist—the urban hunter. The urban hunter is a character uniquely situated to gain power from their urban landscape. As revealed in the epigraph from Patricia Briggs's (2009c) novel *Moon Called*, the urban hunter has evolved to understand the hunting grounds of the city. The discussion of the urban hunter in this final chapter will revisit a number of key elements already outlined in previous chapters. It builds on the prior characteristics identified in UF—such as UF's roots in fantasy and connections to urban realism—to discuss how the urban hunter has evolved.

UF is a subgenre rich in heritage. Like any type of fantasy fiction, it draws on ancient mythologies and follows a recognisable pattern of the heroic quest. From its heritage of urban realism, via the gothic, horror and city authors of the nineteenth century, it embraces the urban as the heart of UF. Necessarily then, the key character—the protagonist and hero—has developed as a unique amalgamation of urban realism and fantasy. The UF protagonist exists in a real-world urban setting, with all the expected pressures and freedoms of modern city life, while also facing an incursion of the non-rational and supernatural. Their role is to lead the reader through this labyrinthine landscape of real and unreal, brushing against horrors and wonders. As a hero, they must face the horrors and find resolution. Added to this burden are the complications of gender. UF is female-centric; thus, the UF protagonist tends to also be female, with all the burdens of gender expectation. Bound by the realism of UF, the female protagonists are not Amazonian warrior women, but contemporary women—unique individuals thrust into an extraordinary situation. An example is seminal author Emma Bull's character Eddi (mentioned in the opening epigraph), who is a musician in tune

to the city, yet always on the outside waiting for a moment of greatness. This chapter traces the development of the UF protagonist through UF's fantasy and urban roots to examine the new emerging archetype of the urban hunter.

The Fantasy Hero

UF fundamentally belongs under the wider umbrella of fantasy; thus, it is necessary to begin this discussion by examining the adaption of the traditional hero before continuing with how the hero has been further transformed in the urban landscape of UFs. The hero lies at the core of any fantasy fiction, including UF. Traditional myths, folklores, fairy tales, epics and so forth centre on the journey of the hero: the heroic quest. These are taken at times from historical figures or the oldest mythologies because 'the tales of heroic endeavours have been popular from time immemorial' (Grixti, 1994, p. 214). Such influential narratives invite readers to 'admire, emulate and/or measure themselves against the deed, attitudes and beliefs' (Grixti, 1994, p. 214) of their heroes. The traditional hero is more than a role model because, alongside his or her foil (the villain), the hero is the measuring stick for understanding the social complexities of the time in which tales are produced—with the hero representing the perceived correct choices and morality of the period, while the counter-character represents the immoral, antisocial and taboo aspects of society. Of course, this is a simplification of complex and deeply connotative tales. It is well documented and accepted that the role of the hero contains a deeper codex to understanding the period in which it is produced. Charles Elkins (1985) suggested that the role of fantasy stories is complicated because '[h]istorically, the basic *social* function of fantasy … is to provide the forms of social gratification and desire for specific audiences that have been thwarted in satisfying those desires' (p. 25). Thus, these tales offer a coping strategy for situations in which other solutions may appear impossible (Elkins, 1985, p. 25). It is the hero's role to traverse the landscape of such tales and offer acceptable strategies. As such, the hero is often an everyman—a representative type or culturally recognisable character who is able to represent 'us' on the journey (Tymn et al., 1979, pp. 7–8). It is important that the heroes adopt conflicts, flaws and virtues that are shared by the reader (Tymn et al., 1979, p. 8). As such, the hero often becomes an archetype because the universal aspects of shared experience 'take precedence over their individual personality traits' (Tymn et al., 1979, p. 8).

The archetypal hero adopts the relevant attitudes, beliefs and values important to the period. They are not perfect, but include a flaw relevant to the didactic resolution of their narrative. Their flaw and struggle to overcome it is matched against the foil of the villain, who encourages the flaw and attempts to weaken the hero's resolve. The conflict of the tale often reflects the particular conflicts present in a social group. The outcome of the hero's journey may reinforce, reject or question the principles of a social group (Elkins, 1985, p. 24). As such, the qualities of a hero vary greatly in traditional tales, from humility to arrogance, or from humble origins to great physical or magical prowess. Heroes are endowed with a uniqueness that allows them to stand apart and complete a grand quest. The elements of the quest often reflect both their flaw and unique ability. However, the points of narrative development are often common and easily understandable, as revealed by the work on the monomyth by Campbell (1973):

> The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth:
>
> *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are the encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (p. 30)

The contemporary fantasy novel has developed from these roots and continues to serve the same purpose. A hero is still expected to fulfil this traditional journey. Although the exact nature of the experiences and stages in the journey may have changed from Campbell's examination of traditional myths, the core remains. It requires a hero representative of the yearnings and desires of the day to set out on a transformative journey. The echoes of traditional heroes remain closest to their original form in the epic or Tolkienian fantasy stories[48] from which UF deviates. Yet, regardless of the

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[48] Examples of such traditional masculine heroes are present in the works of George R. R. Martin, whose works have exploded in popularity due to the television adaption of his series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Authors such as Robert Jordan and Robbin Hobb have also continued writing in the high fantasy, fairly traditional masculine hero form from the early 1980s to today.

thematic or even generic changes, the hero's journey remains a vital element of any fantastic narrative.

The characteristics that define a hero vary between the context of a narrative's production and the overall didactic resolution of the narrative. In UF, heroes tend to be driven by three motivations: a sense of moral responsibility, the desire to act, and a willingness for self-sacrifice. Individually, these characteristics are already present in society. However, combined, they are the makings of a hero, and too often the last two are absent in contemporary society—especially in cities. UF author Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita is an example of this because, unlike most UF protagonists, she is not motivated by danger to her own family or friends. Instead, usually in the parameters of her job, Anita becomes aware of a threat that needs to be contained or resolved, simply because it is the ethically right thing to do, regardless of the risk to herself. An example of this is the following discussion between Anita and another character in *The Laughing Corpse*:

> 'I have no personal stake in these people, Jean-Claude, but they are people. Good, bad, or indifferent, they are alive, and no one has the right to just arbitrarily snuff them out.'
>
> 'So it is the sanctity of life you cling to?'
>
> I nodded. 'That and the fact that every human being is special. Every death is a loss of something precious and irreplaceable'. (Hamilton, 2009, p. 221)

Hamilton (2002) provided her protagonist with a deep moral code that guides her decisions, stating simply that '[y]ou gotta be able to look at yourself in the mirror' (p. 175). What makes these UF protagonists heroes is the fact that they are motivated beyond their own personal safety and wellbeing. Patricia Briggs's protagonist Mercy throws herself in front of a projectile to save another, and later alone hunts down a dangerous vampire. Kelly Gay's hero Charlie offers up her own life willingly to save others, as does Suzanne McLeod's Genny. In addition, novel after novel, Hamilton sends her hero into every dangerous, horrifying situation imaginable to risk her own life in an effort to continue keeping St Louis safe. The motivations and actions of UF heroes are inspiring, yet are merely continuing to draw on the tropes of older mythos.

In exploring the development of the contemporary hero from their mythological roots, Grixti (1994) emphasised the continued necessity of the hero's role. With the development of psychoanalytical readings of fantasy came an understanding that, in fantasy, the archetype of the hero remains important to contemporary readers because it appeals to the inner heroic self. Grixti (1994) suggested that tales of heroism 'encourage the imaginative exploration of these recesses and are thus important facilitators of psychological and emotional development' (p. 213). The experience of the hero offers a pattern for both aspiration and self-criticism. However, the difficulty faced by fantasy literature is also the popularity of the form, and critics often dismiss the critical value of such texts as pulp entertainment. This is for a valid reason because, due to the boom of mass production, fantasy has been swamped by series of formulaic novels. Grixti (1994) acknowledged the difficulty this poses:

> In other words, are we to accept the assertion that contemporary popular fantasies about heroic individuals encourage and nourish positive self images among their readers, and thus help them deal with the complexities of late-20th-century existence with more zest and less despondency? If the answer is affirmative (as many of the genre's enthusiasts often imply), then the functions performed by contemporary bestselling fantasies are indeed double-edged: encouraging optimistic faith in the creed of heroic selfhood from within the very multinational entertainment industries which have a vested interest in 'mainstreaming' their audiences so as to ensure that there is a continuous mass market for newer and bigger best-sellers and blockbusters. (p. 217)

Thus, the entire value and purpose of the hero is affected by this problem. It is difficult to emphasise a message that is unique and culturally important when it is reproduced a thousand times over. As such, these reprints of the hero in popular fantasies have become farcical, offering only a self-delusive reinforcement of cultural norms. However, we cannot so easily dismiss an entire genre that draws on mythologies still present in our cultural conscious.

The role of the hero is to act as a reflection of the concerns and conflicts of his or her period. In many ways, I argue that the mass-produced heroes perfectly reflect the commercialisation of mythology in our contemporary world. The hero is an evolving character and it is necessary to understand that such a process also reflects the changing ideas of different times. One of the most significant shifts in the construction

of the hero, during the same period of criticism, is the development of the female hero. The traditional hero in epic fantasy has been predominantly male, which, as Grixti (1994) stated, is unsurprising because, 'given the patently patriarchal and phallocentric orientations traditionally endorsed by such tales, for a long time heroic fantasies of this broad type were very much an exclusively male-dominated area' (p. 208). This is understandable since much of literature and history endorses this view. Indeed, still today, there is contention over the right of women to fight in the military in Western society (Buttsworth, 2002, p. 186). If women are denied the right to participate in real heroic roles, it is unsurprising that fantasy continues to favour male heroes. Although the masculine hero remains a staple of fantasy, there have been significant developments in the role of the female hero that continue in today's UF.

The Female Protagonist and Hero

As aforementioned, UF owes much of its history to low fantasy, gothic and urban realism literature. It is not a subgenre sprung into immaculate existence, but like all generic changes is reflective of the cultural shifts in points of view over time. It is necessary to understand the female protagonists of urban realism, the heroines of gothic and the female heroes of fantasy from which the UF hero has evolved. UF is a predominantly female-centric literature, as the subgenre is primarily written by women, for women, about women.[49] The necessary development of the female hero is as much a part of fantasy as the continuing existence of the alpha male hero. As Jackson (1991) stated, 'a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context' (p. 3). To an extent, the role of a heroine is fulfilled in the same manner as the orphaned child hero in fantasy literature—it addresses the need to see strength in vulnerability during periods of unease or unsettlement in a society. Fantasy pushes at the boundaries of the social order because it is not realism and is subsequently able to illuminate that which lies outside the dominant value systems (Jackson, 1991, p. 4). As Grixti (1994) indicated, this is expected:

> In a world characterised by change, and where one's place in the social order is a
> matter of perception, and often the product of diligently assembled illusions, there

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[49] There are exceptions of course, such as the works of Charles de Lint, China Mieville, Jim Butcher and M. L. Brennan, to mention a notable few, in which there are male authors and/or male protagonists.

are critical hegemonic functions performed by the manufacture of repetitive images of asocial (often isolated) individualist figures. (p. 224)

These individual heroes are a vital part of exploring cultural understandings. While the traditional hero acted as an everyman, the contemporary fantasy hero more often stands outside or at the lowest point of the social hierarchy. This asocial character has the opportunity to press against the edges of social expectation. For female protagonists, this is a complex issue. It is not as simple as saying that, because a hero is female, they are a successful depiction of aspiration and self-criticism.

Approaching a feminist discussion in literature has become akin to attempting to discuss Shakespeare; there is such a plethora of voices adding to feminist theory that it is almost impossible to know where to begin. This thesis touches on the use of female protagonists; thus, it needs to acknowledge the great diversity of feminist theory that could be applied to the urban hunter. However, because this is not the focus of my paper, I am going to attempt to neatly side-step this by directing readers to Marleen Barr's (1987) *Alien to Feminist: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*. Barr commented extensively on the changes occurring in speculative fiction (which abuts fantasy literature) in the late 1980s, which corresponds to the development of UF. She stated:

> Speculative Fiction has in recent years been enlivened by the contribution of new female (often feminist) voices. Because these writers are not hindered by the constraints of patriarchal social reality, they can imagine presently impossible possibilities for women. Their genre is ideally suited for exploring the potential of women's changing roles. (Barr, 1987, p. ix)

Barr linked second wave feminism and emerging female authors and their female characters. Although her text centres on speculative fiction, there are notable parallels that can be drawn to the expectations placed on female characters. The female warriors of this period are interestingly urban in character:

> Women who succeed in both their professional and personal lives must be superior to men and must fit their roles as nurturers within the definition of 'careerist' which does not quite include 'mother', 'wife'—or even 'female'. The mother and wife who does excel professionally receives special acclaim. She is the achiever of a

nearly impossible feat, a female hero. She appears on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*. She is a woman warrior. (Barr, 1987, p. 83)

The female warriors in the feminist sword-and-sorcery series 'constitute a challenging, feminist encroachment upon a formerly male-dominated, limited popular literary form' (Barr, 1987, p. 85). These images of the emerging female hero—especially the complex urban woman—are present in the early UF tales by Bull, Lackey and de Lint. This 'new' woman continues to dominate in later UF series.

The debate surrounding the role of the female protagonist is complex and at times quite negative because often the role of the hero is ignored by the debate over gender. A hero exists in and represents the cultural order that created him or her. The role should question, inspire and challenge, but is not utopic in quality. Fantasy is an amalgamation of past, present and future images used to help readers evaluate the current era (Elkins, 1985, p. 24). Thus, the female protagonists of fantasy will always partly represent the expectations and limitations of the culture that produced them. The fantasy society derived from contemporary society is still, like other historical societies, a patriarchy. This influences any perception of culture because, according to Joanna Ross (1973), patriarchies 'imagine or picture themselves from the male point of view' (p. 4). In fact, Ross (1973) argued that the female protagonist lacks a true existence because:

> They exist only in relation to the protagonist (who is male). Moreover, look at them carefully and you will see they do not really exist—at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play, but they are the public roles and not private women; at their worst they are gorgeous, cloudcuckooland fantasies about what men want, or hate, or fear. (p. 5)

This is an accusation levelled by a number of critics—the implication being that female heroes are mere empty mirror reflections of their male counterparts. In response to this, Kay Vandergift (1993) asked:

> What then is woman's story? Are there female or gender-free archetypal patterns or motifs? Can we identify a uniquely female search for identity that emphasises birthing or nurturing rather than hunting or conquest? What are the trials that female heroes face on their actual or metaphorical journeys through life? (p. 25)

The difficulty in answering Vandergift's relevant questions lies in the confusion among women readers about what they actually want to see. A female hero runs the risk of sacrificing either masculine or feminine qualities—she may need to reject either traditional gender roles or new-age gender roles,[50] and must either accept a partner or remain alone. Regardless of the choice, the protagonist will be met with criticism from some faction. Even the 'earth mother' hero comes under fire as perpetrating gender stereotypes by women who have rejected this role. The problem is that there does not exist a single representational view of women, even in the form of an accepted archetype. I argue that the underlying issue is that contemporary gender roles are *still* evolving and no single character can capture this.

A characteristic of the UF female hero is the sense of inner conflict that reflects the issue of unclear gender roles in contemporary society. Sensitive to the challenging role they are forced into as women and heroes, the characters are often presented as deeply conflicted individuals. Gay's protagonist Charlie is deeply troubled by the changes in her life that have thrust her into the role of hero. Charlie reflects that '[m]y mind, however, was filled with self-loathing and analysing. Hell, maybe I deserved to carry my burdens alone' (Gay, 2009, pp. 145–146). She is further torn between the various demands on herself as a police officer, mother and hero. Charlie realises that, as a single mother, she should give up her job to offer a more secure future for her daughter. She also rejects the destiny her life is attempting to shape, as she works 'to push all that good and evil shit aside and pull up my humanity' (Gay, 2009, p. 75). As a hero, Charlie is engaged in most of the novel in attempting to reject the call to adventure. Yet the very aspects of her life that Charlie rejects are the same that define her sense of self. She is a female trained officer (a contemporary woman warrior) and a mother. These two strongly gender-specific roles are at the centre of her ability to be a hero.

Moving backwards for a moment, it is worth discussing the female protagonists of the genres influential to UF. The female hero of the Middle English romances (who influenced the heroines of Augustan and Victorian literature) tends to be developed as a woman with two voices, thus producing heroines that Jane Tolmie (2006) labelled 'at once aggressive and opposed, active and acted-upon' (p. 146). Such women were

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[50] I use this term loosely to refer to the dichotomous view of the career woman, lesbian, earth mother, and so forth that can be located on the continuum opposite to the traditional mother and wife figure.

able to shape their own lives, yet were still bound by the social hierarchies of their time. This meant that, although the women could engage in acts of heroism, they eventually returned to their traditional places as wife and mother (Tolmie, 2006, p. 146). Thus, they were restricted to expected roles as defined in relation to the male hero of the story (Mains et al., 2009, p. 180). This produced representations of seemingly stronger female protagonists, yet they were ultimately passive heroines unable to match active heroes (Mains et al., 2009, p. 180). The passive heroine suffered further setbacks in her emergence in gothic literature, which is where the precursor for the horror fiction victim can be found. As Carol Ann Howell (1978, p. 12) suggested, it is unavoidable to recognise the close connection between the gothic heroine and masochistic fantasy. The 'pattern of heroine as deceived victim caught up in an endless series of flights from her persecutor' (Howell, 1978, p. 12)—who is usually male— occurs too often to be ignored. In fact, Frank (1987) used a term to describe the particular sexual niche that this and much of gothic fantasy fulfils: 'algolagnia'. On this topic, Frank (1987) outlined its use as the following:

> Masculine algolagnia usually manifests itself in the Gothic by the motif of sadistic pursuit and assault carried out ruthlessly by an all-powerful male. Female algolagnia is expressed by the metaphoric pattern of the maiden's flight through enclosed darkness together with the masochistic fear of being caught and sexually victimised. (p. 433)

Disturbingly, the gothic heroine was believed to embody all 'the fashionable feminine fantasies and neuroses' (Howell, 1978, p. 9) present in other women's fiction of the time. This passive heroine often quickly dissolved into a victim. In addition, when the heroine was able to maintain her virtues by rejecting and escaping the villain, she was simply rewarded by marriage to the hero—passing from one male to another.

This presentation of the passive heroine has continued to resonate throughout fantasy literature. Unfortunately, its popularity has not diminished with time. Sitting inline, and often confused with UF, is the subgenre PR. The subgenre of PR can be epitomised by two infamous novels: Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series and Kresley Cole's series *Immortals after Dark* (Deffenbacher, 2014). The subgenre is supposedly separated from more traditional 'rape fantasy' romances by the incorporation of supernatural forces. These forces are then responsible for removing consent from the heroine,

instead of the traditional removal by the hero (Deffenbacher, 2014, p. 925). The implication of a firm line between the styles of the romances is meant to reassure a reader; however, it cannot be ignored that, akin to such earlier style romances, including the gothic, the heroine's consent is ultimately still absent (Deffenbacher, 2014, p. 925). However, PR is not a monolithic category, and the subset of such 'bodice rippers' in PR do not designate the entire subgenre (Deffenbacher, 2014, p. 925). Some similar accusations have been levelled against UF novels; however, I argue that one trait in UF is the strong distinction between engaging willingly in submissive/dominance sex and rape. The most obvious proof of this is the issue of consent. UF authors, especially Hamilton, have made it distinctly obvious that consent is given freely and continuously throughout—otherwise, sex is considered rape, regardless of the type of sex being undertaken. This distinction is largely maintained by the UF hero. While the traditional heroine has continued to be used in much of PR, epic fantasy and other subgenres of fantasy, the UF hero is a distinct deviation. UF was a reaction to the continued 'sameness' of the high fantasy produced in the late twentieth century, and the UF hero is a deliberate departure from expected female fantasy roles.

A secondary characteristic of UF, as offered in my definition, is the presentation of changing ideas on sexuality. As the female hero has changed through time, the sexualisation of women has been re-examined. UF characters often engage in non-traditional forms of sexual intercourse. This is not a unique trait itself; however, what UF offers is a positive view of sexual experimentation for women, while equally condemning rape, power-plays and force. The threat of rape is a legitimate concern for women, and, unlike in PR, UF does not forgive the use of force if the antagonist is handsome or magical. Briggs's (2009b) protagonist, Mercy, in the third book of the series *Iron Kissed*, is raped by a human through magical means. Every description and discussion of this rape is presented negatively. In the next three novels, although Mercy resumes her relationship with her previous lover, she suffers posttraumatic stress disorder[51] due to this harrowing situation, which reinforces the wrongness of this occurrence. Similarly, other UF characters faced by the threat of rape respond with

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[51] Mercy exhibits symptoms of panic attacks, nausea, night-terrors and vertigo. Eventually, she is diagnosed by a doctor. For years after the event, she continues to experience posttraumatic stress disorder during seemingly random and trigger events.

prejudice, treating the threat of rape as equivalent to the threat of murder. The message present in UF is significant because 'the world in the text also resembles the reader's own, the genre's repeated stories of women warriors suggest the possibility of women not just facing down and surviving rape but successfully fighting rapists, and rape culture itself' (Deffenbacher, 2014, p. 932). The issue of consent is raised continuously throughout the novels of Hamilton. While popularised versions of bondage, dominance, sadism and masochism (BDSM)[52] accept that anything may be done to a woman who accepts a man, UF emphasises the need for continual, freely given consent to the different aspects of sexual encounters.

UF is continuing a tradition of fantasy literature to 'often feature new forms of sexual identity and relationships' (Garrison, 2009, p. 222). The reason for this is that fantasy worlds 'offer unique environments in which to explore sexual identities that could exist outside the range of real-world scientific or cultural probability' (Garrison, 2009, p. 222). Obviously, symbolic meanings can be taken from the sexual acts performed with mythic creatures, including the question of bestiality and whether, because a were-animal is self-aware and able to give consent, this is either more or less taboo than traditional bestiality. Another issue is the fact that vampires and zombies are dead, although fully functional as 'human'; thus, the question arises whether a sexual act with them is categorised as necrophilia—an equally distinct taboo. The vampire itself is a figure strongly associated with deviancy and aggression. Only the recent romanticisation of the vampire as a sexual creature has attempted to overshadow its innate connections with death. However, underneath any romantic softening, the vampire is still an offensive character, as Buttsworth (2002) stated:

> Vampires are creatures of transgression in relation to gender and sexuality. 'Undead' rather than dead or alive, sexual yet only able to reproduce through death, penetrable and penetrating, the vampire blurs traditional binary oppositions underpinning heterosexual constructions of masculinity and femininity. The vampire exists outside human society, and yet is able to 'pass' for human, a constant fear associated with homosexuality. Regardless of whether the vampire in question

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[52] BDSM is the popularised recombination of B&D and S&M of the 1990s. It refers to any roleplaying sexual games that include elements of the terms, as well as a strong dominance/submission dichotomy. The popularised versions of these—in which women lose the right to consent once they begin the sexual encounter, and can be read as rape fantasies—are the infamous series *The Twilight Saga* by Stephanie Meyer and *The Fifty Shades Trilogy* by E. L. James.

is 'male' or 'female', in contemporary constructions the vampire seduces, and penetrates, members of both sexes. (p. 186).

While accepting the negative connotations of the vampire mythos, UF offers a new resolution—the female protagonist. As the female hero either engages sexually or violently with the vampire character, she does not surrender herself to 'penetration'. If she is a lover, she controls the encounter and often gains power. If the encounter is violent, the act of staking or shooting the vampire is empowering and an act of control. As Buttsworth (2002) suggested, it 'is fitting, therefore, that the agent of their destruction should also be a transgressor of gender constrictions' (p. 186). Ross (1973) argued that for 'the heroine the conflict between success and sexuality is itself the issue, and the duality is absolute' (p. 8). By no means am I able to state that UF has overcome this duality, but it does offer a distinct shortening of the distance between success and sexuality. A UF hero is often able to engage in fairly non-conventional sexual relationships without loss of power or the ability to succeed and resolve the narrative. However, too often, although empowered by their encounters, the female heroes still sacrifice something tangible to achieve sexual freedom—commonly, social acceptance. This is partly because of the continued acceptance of traditional monogamous heterosexual relationships. UF women tend to find a way to avoid the submission expected of their gender to 'not only resist gender expectations to realise their "true nature", but also often find romantic love with men who appreciate their power' (p. 933). Although this is partly positive because the women find relationships that empower their unique identity, it is still an adherence to and reinforcement of traditional patriarchal gender roles.

It is difficult to determine whether the mythological heritage of supernatural creatures should be considered a reflection of the sexual interests of contemporary society, or dismissed as 'flavour' that is used to distinguish the relationships as countercultural. I feel that UF is more interested in exploring the second area. While PR maintains the patriarchal standard of one male and one female, regardless of mythos, UF has begun to more fully explore homosexual and polyamorous relationships. Given the positive manner in which these relationships are present in the discourses of the narratives, it appears that this is an attempt at normalisation by UF authors. Hamilton has been at the forefront of this in UF with her protagonist, Anita's complex sexual relationships. In the latter novels, Anita is an advocate for polyamorous relationships, going so far

in the recent novel, *Dead Ice* (Hamilton, 2015), to suggest a polyamorous marriage to the three main men in her life. There is also open acceptance of Jean-Claude's (central vampire character, lover of Anita and Master of the City) homosexual love for Asher. Even though both engage in sex with Anita, it is accepted that Asher and Jean-Claude share a separate sexual relationship. Interestingly, in Hamilton's early novels of the 1990s, Anita is initially repulsed by this relationship and to polyamorous relationships, which represents the attitudes of 'middle America'. Yet over the course of the next twenty-odd novels, into the 2010s, Anita comes to believe that sexual identities should not be oppressive. However, Anita still struggles with social perceptions of her relationships, and Hamilton often brutally presents the bigotry and prejudice such non-conforming relationships evoke. This is part of UF's adherence to a real-world setting. Regardless of the exploration and acceptance of in-text situations, the authors of UF also include contemporary views of their own society. However, they are exploring changing perceptions of sexuality and how these can affect the construction of identity in fantasy heroines.

Returning to the evolution of UF's heroines, it should be noted that UF has benefited from its urban realist roots, as it has from its fantastic roots, especially when considering the importance of the urban in the subgenre. As such, I briefly now turn to the female flâneur. Notable works of late nineteenth-century urban realists, although at times exalting the female, tended to be strongly focused on the male protagonist (particularly in the aesthetic movement) and the male flâneur.[53] Vera Eliasova (2009) offered insight to the modernist works of Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys and so forth, as developing female protagonists that can be considered flâneurs. This is of interest to UF because of the concept that these protagonists' interactions with their urban landscapes allow them to seize new possibilities. The role of the flâneur represents recognisable urban experiences because 'the flâneur represents a lens to examine the manifold phenomena of modernity such as consumerism, the culture of spectacle, mass culture and the growth of mass media, but also individual alienation

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[53] Further explanation of the flâneur: 'The tradition of observing and interpreting the city is a long one. The revival of the Theophrastian character books in the seventeenth century marks the need of readers to taxonomize urban crowds … However, it is only in the nineteenth century, the century of industrial growth and the ensuing expansion of cities and urban culture, that the experience of the flâneur as a register of modern urban life and a representative of urban modernity becomes a dominant literary motif' (Eliasova, 2009, p. 5).

and the feeling of loneliness in the crowd' (Eliasova, 2009, pp. 6–7). While the role of the UF hero should not be confused with the female flâneur, the relationship with the urban remains pivotal. The female flâneur, or flâneuse, must learn to negotiate her urban space by allowing 'new dialogical understandings of her self and its relation to the world' (Eliasova, 2009, p. 1). In a similar manner, UF protagonists are forced to re-examine their understanding of self, and reassessing the new world into which they have been thrust.

Even with the development of women's liberation, some gender stereotypes run deep in Western culture. In the early twentieth century, the sphere intimately linked to women was considered "the private" –primarily being the space of the home. As such, they were protected from exposure to the public spaces of city life (Eliasova, 2009, p. 7). Although women are freer in today's city, it is still considered a dangerous place for a woman alone. The flâneuse attempted to reclaim these public spaces in much the same way as the UF female protagonist. These women embrace the opportunities available in these destabilising spaces, finding that it can be empowering (Eliasova, 2009, p. 16). Eliasova (2009) suggested that such women 'embrace the destabilising power of the city because it is the power that opens new possibilities of imagining' (p. 17). The city offers myriad opportunities for women that rural spaces cannot. As the site of modernity and change, it presents women with avenues to access public spaces. The urban encounters available to the flâneur and UF protagonist open up possibilities to reach unexpected gender roles. The city can be a transformative place that allows a protagonist to reassess her place in the world. Of all the urban realist characters, the role of the female flâneur can be argued as inspiring UF's female protagonists.

However, the UF female is more than a flâneur because, as a protagonist, she must also fulfil the role of hero. She follows a fairly familiar version of Campbell's (1973) hero's journey and must meet the criteria expected of a hero engaged in heroic exploits. An archetypal hero is responsible for saving their world from a villain and must display an ability to transcend temptation (Ramaswamy, 2014, p. 1). The UF hero performs these functions by resolving the antagonist, securing the safety of their city and overcoming an internal flaw in the process. UF is still primarily a fantasy subgenre; thus, the elements of a fantastic journey are present. The hero is expected to face a threat of a proportionate level, or 'evil', on equal ground (Waggoner, 1978, p.

12). It is vital that the hero is changed by this experience and sacrifices something significant to ensure success (Ramaswamy, 2014, p. 1). The UF hero meets all these requirements to be considered a heroic archetype. However, the hero is further distinguished by their gender. As a female, the UF hero offers an opportunity to examine the characteristics of a hero. As Grixti (1994) stated, 'the depiction of women in roles demonstrating strength, initiative, independence and wisdom (the ingredients of the heroic life) constitutes a critical reclaiming of the concept of heroism out of the patriarchal rut into which it had been lodged' (p. 209). The UF female hero adopts the opportunities of her urban world to help fulfil her heroic journey. A complex melding of heroic archetype and urban woman forms the UF hero. Yet it is notable that the construction of a female protagonist, let alone a hero, has been a struggle in fantasy fiction.

Fantasy fiction's flexible boundaries offer female (and sometimes male) authors a space to experiment with the female hero. One of the first notable changes was what is best considered the 'shero'—a female hero with all the same characteristics, concerns and motivations of a male hero. The shero is a hero with a female body and predominantly masculine traits. Simply put, heroic masculine attributes were added to desirable female bodies (Wulf, 2005, p. 122). As Elizabeth Wulf (2005) stated, this resulted in the creation of a 'new breed of female hero without challenging the existing model of heroism or upsetting the gender balance' (p. 122). These female heroes, such as Red Sonya,[54] were savage fighters with a hero's strength, but were also overly sexualised and often skimpily clad. In epic and sword-and-sorcery fantasy there appeared female heroes who would 'play conventional male roles as warriors' (Spivack, 1987, p. 8). These female heroes would fulfil the masculine hero role in the story, accompanied by the fulfilment of traditional quests. However, their personal behaviour and motivations often reflected what was considered more feminine resolutions. As Charlotte Spivack (1987) stated:

> Their [male heroes'] emphasis is on physical strength, courage and aggressive
> behaviour. In the fantasy novels the female protagonists also demonstrate physical

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[54] Red Sonya is a character developed by Roy Thomas and Barry Windsor-Smith that appeared in Marvel Comics. Depicted as a muscular and extremely sexualised redhead, she wears a bra and loin cloth made from chainmail. After being raped at a young age, she is gifted by a goddess with incredible fighting skills upon the condition that she will never lie with a man unless he defeats her in combat—a premise that is already disturbing and hopefully not particularly aspirational for young women.

courage and resourcefulness, but they are not committed to male goals. Whether warriors or wizards, and there are both, their aim is not power or domination, but rather self-fulfilment and protection of the community. (p. 8)

Such heroes are seen in the works of authors Ursula Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, C. L. Moore and Margaret Weiss. However, these types of heroes have remained in the minority in high fantasy because readers continue to show a preference for either alternative versions of the traditional masculine hero or the attractively sexualised female hero. These types of female heroes are accepted in popular culture 'because they embrace masculine acts of heroism combined with desirable forms of femininity' (Wulf, 2005, p. 120).

The UF hero came into being at the same time that many other fantasy authors were developing female protagonists. In the same manner that UF arose as a response to the overabundance of high fantasy fiction available, the UF female can be assumed to have developed as a response to an excess of male heroes. Emma Bull (2001) and Mercedes Lackey (2005) laid the groundwork in the late 1980s with their characters Eddi McCandry and Diana Tregarde, respectively—choosing to develop female protagonists who were heroes in their urban setting. Charles de Lint (1993) also introduced Jilly Coppercorn—an artist, impromptu social worker and diplomat to the supernatural—in his first Newford short story collection. These three authors had the greatest effect on developing the foundation characteristics of the UF hero. Following these were a plethora of authors who have further developed and polished the UF protagonist. This evolution has developed a hero with a number of distinct characteristics that I have identified as forming a new archetype—that of the urban hunter.

The Urban Hunter

As with any aspect of UF, it is vital to begin by examining the urban. A UF protagonist must necessarily be unique to the world they inhabit. This factor is as essential a part of the subgenre as the use of the cityscape setting. Clute (2012b) added to his original definition of UF that:

There is an increasing sense that writers may well be conceiving the typical inhabitant of the great cities as a kind of hunter-gatherer figure, one better able than

suburbanites or farmers to cope with the crack-up of the immensely rigid world systems created over the previous few thousand years. (p. 1)

The ability of the protagonist to not only belong, but also thrive in the city is of central importance. Like the female flâneur, they must be observers of the city and be willing to embrace the opportunities of their urban world. Such protagonists make sense as women because the city (full of its liminal spaces and adoption of the other) is more willing to allow social change. The breakdown of the city as it is challenged by the incursion of the supernatural within and without offers a space of flexibility. Already in flux and subverted by the non-rational, the city requires the non-traditional. The women of UF already operate successfully in a space of difference[55] in the city. This allows them greater ease to transition into the role of hero without needing to sacrifice their individuality. High fantasy often requires heroes to set aside their own needs in pursuit of a greater good. Instead, UF develops the individuality of the hero as an integral part of the journey. As the city and modernity encourage embracing individuality, it is unsurprising that this is a key part of UF.

The figure of the urban hunter-gatherer is not entirely new. It derives from ancient mythologies of the heroic warrior who was originally a hunter, thrust into a new landscape that he must reshape to his will. In any fantasy fiction, archetypes are plentiful and prominent because they are drawn 'directly from the most ancient well of stories, the very source of archetypes' (Tymn et al., 1979, p. 8). A hero is distinguished by his or her ability to relate to, control and conquer new contexts that would be inaccessible to an ordinary person. A differentiation that marks UF is that, although the UF protagonist is a hero and often moulded into a warrior, their strength lies elsewhere. The urban protagonist is primarily a hunter. The elements of gatherer are also present, such as community focus, a pivotal role in society and the involvement of a group in their actions. However, their role as a hunter—to hunt creatures, defend territories and protect—is more dominant. The urban hunter is an alternative hero. Wulf (2005) offered another interpretation in establishing heroism that fits the UF hero:

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[55] Character roles in UF before the incursion include police officer, detective, musician, artist, community worker, novelist, mechanic, student and magical cleaner, among others.

Alternative notions of the heroic involve courage as a mental attitude or thinking process, which leads to appropriate action and in situational, dependent on circumstances (in time). This situational dependency moves the traditional heroic away from being a fixed social role—away from the idea of stable identities with set attributes and singular subject positions. (p. 121)

The difficulties a UF hero faces are not always the traditional monster in the cave. Instead, they require a plan, they must adapt to their environment and their actions are purely situational. The urban hunter does not maintain a single set identity; rather, their identity must flex and change with the situations they face. A hunter must be canny, versatile and—more so than any other figure—one with their terrain.

Hunters must understand and be able to traverse their landscapes, but they cannot be consumed by them. They walk a fine line between belonging and observing. They must sometimes operate in a liminal zone that allows them to be immersed in the locale, but must be able to transcend the restrictions of place and use the terrain to their advantage. An urban hunter observes the city and uses urban spaces, yet must remain separate to keep their objectivity. The common first-person point of view in UF is used to express this to the reader. This is a technique derived largely from the genre of urban realism, but an understandable choice for a hero in an urban world. As Pike (1981) stated, this individualised point of view 'is the lens through which the reader views the world of the work' (p. 15). Further, Pike (1981) added: '[o]f special interest is the way in which the character or narrator typically presents himself alone against the city, an isolate individual consciousness observing the urban community' (p. 15). The urban hunter is an observer who perceives the city in a manner unique to them. This may be through supernatural gifts—such as Mercy's coyote self who had 'grown used to city scents and sounds' (Briggs, 2009c, p. 82)—or other gifts unique to the hunter that aid them in the city. In the case of Mieville's (2011) Saul, it is the ability to see the power of the city in a new way: '[t]his was urban voodoo, fuelled by the sacrifices of road deaths, of cats and people dying on the tarmac, an I Ching of spilled and stolen groceries, a Cabbala of road signs' (p. 120). UF's urban hunter is ideally created to belong in the city—to be empowered by the unique elements that only a city can offer. As Gay's (2009) hero Charlie observes, '[t]here was no denying that I thrived here; loved it here. I was meant to traverse this landscape and interact with its occupants' (p. 80). The city strengthens the urban hunter, enabling him or her

to draw the essence of the city into themselves. Eddi (Bull, 2001) discerns that, 'With all those people, all that energy and emotion and—well, *living*, this place ought to have a life of its own by now' (p. 33). An urban hunter is not only able to perceive unique elements of a cityscape, but also to exert their own control over the landscape, as does any hero. The master vampire of the city comes to Anita saying, 'Your power called to me, *ma petite*. No dead in the city could fail to feel your power tonight. And I am the city' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 337). An urban hunter traverses and draws strength from the urban landscape. The presence of the urban is a defining characteristic of UF; thus, it is also the defining characteristic of the UF hero: the urban hunter.

In the development of the urban hunter, many authors have used the gender of their hero as an element that further aids them in their immersion into the city. A hunter must blend with their surroundings, and, in a patriarchal society, gender can often become camouflage. Buttsworth (2002) suggested that the 'association of women with civilian society means that the fear of the woman warrior stems from an inability to identify her easily' (p. 192). Indeed, none of the UF female protagonists are described as Amazonian warriors who stand obviously apart from the crowd. Hamilton's Anita is depicted as a petite brunette who uses traditional gender expectations to conceal her power. For example, Anita narrates, 'I stood, hands at my side, trying to look harmless. I'm actually very good at that. I can look downright cute' (Hamilton, 2007, p. 178). UF heroes are able to blend into the crowd or be underestimated as women when they need to conceal their presence or role as the hero. After all, what better camouflage is there in a city than appearing as an ordinary woman? However, this is only one disguise of the urban hunter—one that is sometimes undermined by their differences in attitude and actions from social norms. As Buttsworth (2002) stated, it is necessary that a hero be differentiated from the crowd:

> This isolation is crucial to any narrative construction of the hero, who must be somehow separated from, and elevated above, the rest of the population. However, where masculine heroics require elements of continuity between the hero and the group from which he is separated, and by which his 'uncommon valour' can be measured, the construction of feminine heroism necessitates that the individual be 'not like other girls'. (p. 189)

The female urban hunter is separated from her gender because she does not occupy a traditional female role. However, her gender also makes her a more effective urban hunter, and thus can be used to empower her as a hero. At the centre of the urban hunter persona is a hybridisation of multiple elements. Like the flâneur, she is an observer standing apart, but she also gains strength from her urban encounters. She blends into the crowds because of traditional gender expectations based on physical appearance, yet she must also occupy a position of hero and subsequently hold a unique place in the narrative. The urban hunter is a distinctly speculative creation because, while it is based on classical archetypes, it has been transformed by the need to amalgamate the real and unreal necessary for UF.

The concept of the hybrid—a key part of the construction of the UF character—is borrowed from ancient mythologies, where gods and creatures were represented in multiple forms of human, animal, plant and elemental. The hybrid differs from shifter or transformative characters that are able to transition between different states. In UF, the protagonist is commonly a hybrid, and usually a human hybrid. This is a key characteristic understandably linked to the subgenre. UF is an amalgamation of the real world and non-rational; thus, it is a logical progression that the protagonist is as well. Further, as an urban hunter, it is necessary that the protagonist shares abilities and/or heritage with the creatures they hunt, and that their hybrid status empowers them in the urban setting. The hybridisation of the protagonist is normally either ability based (magical or enhanced physicality) or from a supernatural inheritance—usually genetic, but sometimes gifted. The hybrid protagonist often has a particular unusual ability or heritage, or has found a way to use their gifts uniquely. However, the urban hunter is differentiated further in their hybrid status by the connection to their gender. Kristina Deffenbacher (2014) observed that:

> The heroine is often a supernatural/human hybrid, with her supernatural heritage representing those aspects of her being that are alien to a feminine identity in human culture, particularly an ability and willingness to use violence to defend herself and seek justice. To reconcile the two halves of her identity, the hybrid heroine must reject the acculturated femininity that insists she is incapable of fighting and must therefore submit to violence. (p. 931)

This is common across UF's female protagonists, where the heroine is continually forced into situations where violence is necessary to ensure safety. Yet the choice to willingly engage in violence is not accepted in society, and the women are forced to sacrifice elements of their perceived femininity to be able to fight. The consequence is an internal struggle with their sense of self. Gay's (2009) protagonist Charlie asserts her humanity and motherhood, rejecting that she is 'some weirdo walking dead person whose insides raged every damn night with images and light' (p. 75). In realisation of her separation from the rest of society, Anita observes, 'I knew what it was like to be the outsider' (considered a monster for her abilities) and 'there are even days when I agree with them' (Hamilton, 2002, p. 35). However, these female protagonists' status as a hybrid allows them a freedom within the constraints of their society to act according to role (hero) rather than gender (female). As Deffenbacher (2014) suggested, this allows authors 'to represent those aspects of the heroine's nature that are incompatible with a feminine identity in human culture' (p. 932).

The locale of the urban further provides a place where the unique nature of the hybrid can be realised. Embracing their hybrid nature is central to the heroic resolution of the narratives. The hybrid must both accept her nature as 'other' and find a way to reconcile her role of hero with her gender. Gay's (2009) Charlie only comes to use her abilities when she takes ownership of her emotions and reconciles her roles as hero and mother (to Emma):

> My own power came back into me, completing the circle. It was an unharmonious clash of two warring powers, a sharp, thunderous song that spoke of uncontained strength and chaos. But amid the frenzy there was a faint soulful melody of my human powers, the grief I held on to, the mistrust and fear, the anger and injustice, all blended with the love and loyalty I had for my family, and a singular note so beautiful that it could only be my bond with Emma. (p. 308)

The power she unleashes is violent and deadly; however, importantly, as Deffenbacher (2014) noted, 'her unleashing of the power within her does not enact masculinity' (p. 931). Instead, it is resolution of the conflict between woman and warrior/hero that empowers her. The hybrid protagonist is a significant characteristic of the UF protagonist. Even if not gendered, their hybridisation offers a way to further integrate into the fabric of the unreal city of UF. As a female protagonist, being a hybrid offers

a space to examine the implications of resolving the masculine versus feminine hero dichotomy, since their hybrid abilities and/or heritage offer a traditionally masculine heroic element without needing to fully sacrifice all feminine cultural norms. In fact, the UF narrative encourages acceptance of feminine motivation and strength as the source of empowering the hybrid protagonist.

Another distinct characteristic of the urban hunter is her resolution of the dichotomous marginalised versus empowered state. The female heroes are marginalised by their gender—not always simply for being women, but also for being women operating in a male-dominated society. A brief survey of the UF texts discussed in this thesis has already identified the protagonists as being police officers (Gay, Hamilton), detectives/bounty hunters (Harrison, Hamilton, McLeod), guardians (Lackey, Bull) and/or mechanics (Briggs). Otherwise, the protagonists are already fringe characters, such as musicians or artists (de Lint, Bull). All these roles are male dominated, and then all the protagonists are ultimately forced into the role of warrior to resolve the overall narrative complication. Christine Mains et al. (2009) pointed out that, even though there is often a desire for both male and female heroes to be portrayed as holding conventional feminine values, 'the reader seems to enjoy seeing a woman doing "a man's job"' (p. 180). The popularity of UF would suggest that Mains et al. are correct. Hamilton's (2010b) Anita considers:

> We were the only two women at the crime scene, which meant we were playing
> with the big boys. You had to be tougher than the men, stronger, better, or they held
> it against you. Or they treated you like a girl. (p. 54)

In her job, Anita is forced to continuously prove that she is an asset and is 'better' than the men. Hamilton explored this cultural inequality in her later novels when Anita (through supernatural interference) is in fact stronger and 'better' than all the men she encounters in law enforcement. Anita also gains the elevated status of a US Marshal. However, instead of securing her place in the male-dominated industry, she is rejected further. Anita becomes empowered by her marginalised role as a woman; however, in the eyes of society, rather than obtaining security and respect, she has been rejected from the hierarchy altogether. Buttsworth (2002) made the salient point that '[t]he blurred boundaries that are possible in speculative texts open up space necessary to examine the arguments and gendered ideologies which govern what is, and what is not

possible in the "real" world' (p. 185). This is true in UF because the female heroes are able to retain a gendered identity unique to their character, while also fulfilling the masculine role of hero. However, UF has difficulty because it is tied to urban realism and cannot move beyond the culturally-laden gender expectations of Western society. Thus, the women become a paradox—they are empowered by their marginalisation, yet become further marginalised by their empowerment. As aforementioned, this is because the gender roles in today's society are continuing to evolve, and we have yet to move beyond needing the constraints of gender to identify the self. UF authors attempt to present the struggles and difficulties women face in a patriarchal society when learning to define themselves as individuals. This is further exacerbated by the pressure on the protagonists to become heroes. The protagonist is driven to assume a position outside of society (and social expectations) to balance their different roles. The more 'other' they are able to become, the more power available to them.

Situating this discussion more fully in the context of particular novels, I will delve briefly into Gay's (2009) *The Better Part of Darkness* and Briggs's (2009c) *Moon Called*. Gay's character, Charlie, as one of few female officers, is motivated by past trauma, her job and her role as a mother. To begin, she is weak and driven by a need to become strong:

> I'd vowed to *never* be in a situation where I couldn't defend myself. And once I had Emma, the desire to protect and defend became even stronger. It seemed the only other women I knew who completely understood my motivation were others in law enforcement or the military, or those who'd been victims of trauma. (Gay, 2009, p. 245)

A weak human and single mother in a male-dominated job, where all other antagonists are male (and supernatural), is a truly diminished character. Charlie is also rejecting her emerging powers and refusing to accept the opportunities these changes bring. Only when her child is threatened does Charlie embrace her role. It can be argued that she acts within the expected female paradigms as a mother. While Charlie is marginalised by her gender and the constrictive social roles she inhabits, her empowerment also arises from these. Gay's (2009) hero draws her power from what are considered very traditional feminine strengths—motherhood and emotion: 'I'd chosen to save my child and try to save the city, too, and I knew in my heart that I'd

done the *only* thing I could' (p. 308). Charlie, empowered by her womanhood, is able to learn control of her new abilities and rescue her daughter. Yet in doing so, Charlie has sacrificed her humanity and become resolutely other, thus further isolating her from the society in which she is situated.

In Briggs's series, her protagonist, Mercy Thompson, has already accepted her supernatural abilities (the ability to shape shift into a coyote). However, she is marginalised in other ways, such as being a female mechanic and part Native-American. She is also marginalised and isolated by her connection to the werewolf packs of Northern America. Raised among them, she still remains separated by her form (coyote not wolf), which allows her to act as an outsider who is constrained, but not bound, by the patriarchal system. Briggs (2009c) created the werewolf packs in a manner believably drawn both from natural wolf society and a very cut-and-dry version of patriarchal Western society:

> Women's liberation hadn't made much headway in the world of werewolves. A mated female took her pack position from her mate, but unmated females were always lower than males unless the male was unusually submissive. This little fact had caused me no end of grief, growing up, as I did, in the middle of a werewolf pack. (p. 41)

Throughout the novel, Briggs added further observations on the limitations of women, especially in their absence from decision making in the pack. Mercy sometimes encounters these gender restrictions, but is generally exempt and her defiance of those rules helps empower her character in a world where a coyote is very much vulnerable to a wolf. Mercy observes that '[d]efiance was a habit I'd developed to preserve myself while growing up with a pack of dominant and largely male werewolves' (Briggs, 2009c, p. 53). Mercy also works as a mechanic—a largely male-dominated job. Briggs's hero is marginalised by her unique ability–her position within, but unfettered by, werewolf society and her gender. Yet, again, it is all three aspects that empower her later in the novel to act as a hero. Her form of coyote contains enhanced senses and a resistance to magic. Mercy is not bound by werewolf laws, which allow her to act independently. This is furthered by her gender because, as a woman, she is overlooked and underestimated, which places her in position to outwit and defeat the antagonists. Neither Gay nor Briggs (nor any of the other authors I have discussed)

force their protagonist to 'overcome' their gender to achieve success. Rather, in the form of heroic fantasy, the protagonist must overcome their own fears and external obstacles, and accept their role as hero to succeed. Too often, female protagonists must turn to a male character for support and resolution in her journey, whereas UF protagonists stand alone, as a hero should, gaining power from their flaw (marginalised state) to overcome the antagonist.

The depiction of women as other is not a new concept, but one that has become part of the social milieu. However, this does not diminish the importance of examining the use of the other in UF. There exist a range of symbolic meanings that can be applied to the supernatural creatures of UF that infer particular meanings about race and class in Western society. However, these are ideas already explored extensively in science fiction and other speculative fictions. An unusual element of UF is that the gendered other exists as an element of the protagonist's marginalisation, yet is not a dominant characteristic. Instead, in their transformation from marginalised to empowered, the protagonist *becomes* other. This acceptance of the other as a position of power for the female protagonist is unusual, but has been previously used in fantasy literature. As Spivack (1987) explained:

> One of the most profound and fundamental polarities is that of Self and Other, much of human history has been characterised by political and religious intolerance of the Other. And in much literature male authors have posited the female as Other. Contrary to the long-established literary tradition of subduing or eliminating the Other as undesirable alien (or even of forcefully converting this alien presence, as in the case of Shylock), several women writers of fantasy direct their narratives toward acceptance of the Other, not merely dealienating it (and themselves) but actually integrating Self and Other. (p. 14)

The UF protagonist operates in a similar manner (largely due to the narrative, but also due to the cultural requirements of the novel). The protagonists' acceptance of their powerful self is equally an acceptance of their standing (status of being perceived) as other in their social context. Jackson (1991) stated that the '[n]aming of otherness in fantasies betray the ideological assumptions of the author and of the culture in which they originate' (p. 53). It can be argued that UF's use of the other perpetuates the limitations for women in Western society. A cultural assumption appears to be that

women may only reach heroic heights when isolated from society. Yet the use of the urban setting in UF offers an accessible place for these discourses to occur. As Tiffin (2008) stated:

> The city is a paradox: it offers and refuses experience, estranges while it absorbs, promises belonging while simultaneously withholding it. In this it both encapsulates and becomes emblematic of the experience of the individual in contemporary Western society, the difficult amalgamation of belonging and otherness which characterises a contemporary lifestyle which is increasingly migratory. (p. 34)

In situating the protagonists as other within the cityscape, a reader is better able to accept such continuing inequality in a still-evolving urban society. The city lends power to the other; thus, it is believable that a hero would not be reabsorbed into their social context, but instead be further removed by their experiences. I also argue that UF isolates its female protagonists as part of the unique characteristic of the urban hunter. By being separated from the social context, the protagonist has the opportunity to operate independently of social norms. As a woman, the city space offers some new freedoms from traditional ideologies; however, these freedoms are still tempered by gender expectations. Instead, by transcending gender to become other, the protagonists are better able to achieve their required heroic status to resolve the conflicts of the narrative. The urban (as opposed to rural or suburban) has a greater allowance for breaking with social norms.

Acting as other, the female protagonist is also able to fulfil another pivotal role in UFs. One of the most common plot devices of UF is the ability of the protagonist to reach a variety of disparate groups, whose information or help allows her to resolve the overall conflict of the novel. The protagonist must become a bridge between the different communities inimitable to her city. The urban hunter has an unusual perspective into the different cultures that operate within a city space. They must be able to identify the value in each group, and, while not expected to resolve all the differences of intergroup conflicts, need to be able to operate independent of the constrictions of each group. This is a role often supported by the protagonist's hybrid status, but it is also because the protagonist becomes situated as other from *all* groups. UF protagonists bridge not only human and supernatural, but also groups within, such as the police force, government agencies, religious groups, activist groups or human

communities that come to exist in every city based on locale, ethnicity, interest and so forth. Within the supernatural, these groups can be racial (such as vampire, fairy and were-animal), magical (such as witches, voodoo and psychic) or simply divisions based on leadership.

The protagonist is also expected to bridge the divide between the real world and unknown. Bull's (2001) Eddi observes that '[s]he could see the seams of the world around her begin to ravel and part' (p. 31) and, because she sees the truth of her space, she is able to intercede between the humans and fae. Gay's (2009) Charlie also realises, 'I was waking up to a whole other world that existed in tandem with the one I knew so well' (p 285). Briggs and especially Hamilton made clear observations on the unusual role of their protagonists in being able to move between and act as a conduit to the different groups within their city. Mercy in *Blood Bound* (Briggs, 2009a) plays an important role in helping assimilate the supernatural into society: '[i]t would also let the wolves know they had allies among the police here. People who could be trusted. That was important if they were ever to integrate into the citizenry' (p. 282). Yet acting in this way is still a risk to the protagonists. As with any character who moves between multiple groups, they run the risk of being silenced or considered traitors. The role is not one of diplomat or indifferent observer—the characters are driven by their own moral imperatives to protect and to act. As Anita asks herself, 'why were my sympathies always with the victims?' (Hamilton, 2009, p. 242). Rather than being impartial, their status as other (often beholden to becoming a hero) drives them to become involved.

In the complicated and highly hierarchal world that Hamilton built in her *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series, the protagonist's role as a bridge becomes pivotal to narrative, world building and character development. Anita exists explicitly outside of any category: although human, she has the ability to raise the dead (necromancer/animator); as a civilian she consults with the police, but has no legal power; she is a licensed bounty hunter and executioner of the supernatural, making her a 'bogeyman' of the supernatural, yet is considered one of them; she gains vampire and shifter abilities without being about to transform; and, in all of these situations, she is a physically fit, yet petite woman. Continuously, Anita is drawn into diverse communities to help:

He thought that the other shapeshifters would talk more freely to me than to him or any of his wolves. No joke. I was sort of a compromise. They didn't trust the police. And who else do the lunarly disadvantaged go to for help? Why, your friendly neighbourhood animator. (Hamilton, 2010c, pp. 117–118)

The information gained from each group works to advance the plot, while developing the protagonist's character and offering opportunities to question identity. The role of the other or the outsider, created by the transition of marginalised to empowered, is pivotal in allowing the protagonist to act as a bridge between ranges of different social, cultural and/or racial spheres. It is a role that the UF narrative relies on to the degree that it can be arguably identified as a trope central to the structure of the majority of UF novels. Due to the narrative point of view and focus on the individual identity of the protagonist, UF narratives have become reliant on interactions with numerous groups to help progress the plot. A UF hero's journey is structured around their interactions with secondary and minor characters who belong to diverse social, cultural and/or racial spheres. An urban hunter traverses these spheres, neither belonging nor being an outsider, but existing as a temporary bridge that spans the entire city.

The epigraphs at the start of this chapter provide two key elements of the urban hunter: extraordinary and deadly. The urban hunter is uniquely suited to hunt and protect in his or her urban territories. As heroes, they must be inspirational and flawed—at once recognisable as relatable humans, but modelling attributes and behaviours considered heroic. As city dwellers, they understand the unique topography of their land and stand as observers of the modern city. As women, the urban hunters are able to blend into and become part of the city. They challenge traditional gender norms, while still upholding the characteristics of community, family and emotional strength commonly associated with the female protagonist. They are other and yet are able to transform their marginalisation into empowerment. UF protagonists must bridge the various spheres present in their cities and learn to encompass all without sacrificing their objectivity. Each urban hunter is a unique creation of their author, yet they share a number of characteristics that have evolved from the creation of a new subgenre. The female protagonists are as much a reaction to the saturation of male heroes as UF was to an overly Tolkienian genre. The urban hunter is irreducible from the context of the urban locale and supernatural landscapes in which he or she exists. By understanding

the unique situations arising in UF narratives and the UF subgenre as a whole, the new UF protagonist is best understood. As a character, they are complex reflections of a changing world, and they capture a changing understanding of what it means to be a hero. The urban hunter is unique and modern, and may be a new archetype for an increasingly urbanised world.

Conclusion

A theory of genres provides a useful template with which to undertake a serious reading and analysis of an emergent group of texts with shared characteristics. As argued in this thesis, one such emergent group of texts, indeed a nascent subgenre, is UF—a seemingly loose categorisation of a body of work tonally identified as dark fantasy, but with low or real-world settings. Although UF has gained in momentum, both popularly and critically, to the point where hundreds of titles are listed as 'belonging' to UF, little theoretical work of substance has been undertaken with this subgenre to distinguish it from other subgenres, such as new weird and PR. In the absence of any definitive theory of UF—or, at any rate, any impressive theorisation of it—this thesis makes two contributions to the theoretical framework of UF. First, it explores the evolution of UF from its antecedent genres, and, second, it offers a limited classificatory framework by identifying the thematic concerns and protagonist as distinctive elements of the subgenre. The generic classification offered takes its starting point as the principal fact that UF emerged tentatively in the 1980s in response to a number of factors. First, there were socio-political changes in the urban world that could not be explored in a secondary-world fantasy; second, there was a desire to reinvigorate cities with mythology; third, there was the need for a space available in dark fantasy when horror moved to suburban and rural settings; and, fourth, there was a deliberate rejection of Tolkien's heritage and the milieu of nostalgic pseudomedieval worlds of popular fantasy literature.

As a direct rejection of the pastoral otherworld of Tolkien, UF turned to the complex realities of urban life. Authors during this early period chose to rework fantasy tropes into new urban narratives because the nostalgic high-concept fantasies of the period were no longer satisfying the postmodern reader. It followed that a revisionist fantasy (a rewriting of the 'high-concept' fantasies) necessitated more than a simple rejection of otherworld settings. Thus, what separates UF from fantasy is the intensely urban experience in the narrative—a point clearly stated in Clute's (1997b) definition: 'UFs are normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly about a real city' (p. 975). The requirement of UF texts to use real-world cities has allowed authors to draw on rich, connotative

locales. Nineteenth-century urban realist writers (such as Dickens) turned to the industrial city as the locale for their characters' lives. In doing so, they moved from the country to the city as the focus of realist representation. UF writers are clearly aware of this shift because they too locate their fantastic narratives in real-life urban settings. However, there is a difference in in their reappropriation of the cityscape, as the realist space of the city is mimicked and the locale transformed. The construction of the urban landscape itself takes multiple forms—some unquestionably realist and others not. This varied usage of the cityscape has had a significant influence on the strategic character of the subgenre.

UF literature is resolutely urban in its locale, tone and thematic concerns. The antecedent genres of gothic, horror and urban realism—genres that were aware of the underside of the cityscape—are most visible in an exploration of UF's thematic concerns of fear, anxiety and dread. UF introduces these themes into their narratives, as the later gothic had done, because they are recognisable concerns for any city dweller. A city is a complex creation that offers itself well to the incursion of the supernatural and non-rational. By using the liminal spaces, terminal landscapes, city edifice and tensions between the past and present, the insidious incursion of fantasy is able to encroach on the modern city and threaten its safety. At their core, UFs are primarily urban dramas that build on thematic concerns already present. UF does not hide the fact that the fear-inspiring places of the figurative story city are also part of real cities. As such, it is unsurprising that a specific heroic figure has emerged in UF to face this urban threat. The 'urban hunter' (a title based on Clute's (2012b) reference to a hunter-gatherer figure in his amendment to his original definition) is a character uniquely situated to thrive and hunt in an ambiguous urban landscape. As a female-centric subgenre (predominantly written by women, for women, about women), it is foreseeable that the protagonist and hero is a woman. Urban hunters must understand and traverse their landscapes, without being consumed by them. They must remain separate, yet be able to blend with their surroundings. In a patriarchal society, gender can often become camouflage, and the female urban hunter uses her seeming innocuousness or even vulnerability to her advantage. As both marginalised and empowered by her gender and role, the urban hunter is a complex character reflective of women's ambiguous role in a modern urbanised world.

In summarising the ideas discussed in this thesis, the following classificatory framework to identify UF texts may be offered. UF is a subgenre of fantasy that is distinguished by its use of a real-world urban setting where the mundane and non-rational intersect and interweave. The narrative must reflect the experiences of life in a real city and include stylistic devices that highlight the characters' interactions in an urban landscape. Thematic concerns of fear, anxiety and dread reflect the disruption of the non-rational and mundane. These themes are tied to the protagonist's interactions with both the non-rational and the urbanscape with which it is identified. For example, the presence of zombies is tied to a terminal landscape, such as a cemetery or morgue, or an attack occurs in a liminal place, such as an abandoned or haunted subway station. The point of view in UF is that of first-person narrator-as-character, who tends to be a female protagonist who is both marginalised and empowered. The UF protagonist can be labelled an urban hunter—referring to their ability to traverse, camouflage and conquer in an urban setting.

Given the narrow compass of this thesis and the need for generic clarity, it was impossible to present a comprehensive review of all the components of UF, touching on all the narratives that do or could belong to UF. Instead, this thesis has offered a limited frame of reference aimed at delineating UF from other similar subgenres. As with any study of genre, there are exceptions to the rule. However, this thesis opens ideas for further discussions of the subgenre with reference to generic specificity, narrative construction, stylistic devices and applied readings. Despite the exploratory (and necessarily limited) theoretical framework of this thesis, a number of clear and self-evident features of the subgenre of UF may be stated with considerable force. UF is a unique subgenre that comments on our fears and anxieties about urban life. It draws notice to a disturbing fascination with the dark and terrible facets of human nature. It also draws attention to changing perceptions of the constructed female hero and offers a real-world space to explore how women's perceptions of themselves are evolving. UF creates a space (often in direct opposition to PR) to explore changing views on traditional and alternative sexual expression, while acknowledging and condemning rape culture. After all, genres are socio-historical constructs that emerge out of cultural presumptions and function as valuable commentaries on the era in which they appear. As such, an exploration of this particular subgenre has raised a number of intriguing questions about the society in which UF has been produced.

Appendix

This appendix lists alphabetically by surname the authors focused on in the thesis (Note this is not a comprehensive listing of all urban fantasy authors). Each section includes a summation of the overall series (if appropriate) and a brief summary of the individual novels mentioned in the thesis. This is followed by a full listing of the series to identify where/when the focal novels are located chronologically.

Briggs, Patricia

Mercy Thompson Series (2006 – Ongoing)

Mercy (Mercedes) Thompson is a mechanic living in the Tri-Cities area of Washington. She is a 'walker' (a Native-American shapeshifter able to transform into a coyote), but was raised by werewolves. As a walker she is mildly immune and sensitive to magic, able to see ghosts and is not tied to the moon cycles for shifting.

Across the series Mercy becomes involved in the local werewolf community, eventually marrying the Alpha, who 'come out' not long after the Fae (fairy) community does the same. She is also involved with the local vampires who have chosen to remain hidden. Mercy is often called on to mediate between various groups as her unique ability means that she does not 'belong' to any one group.

Moon Called

Moon Called is the first novel and introduces Mercy in her normal life as a mechanic until a young werewolf comes to her for help, having escaped a laboratory where he was being experimented on and is now being hunted. Mercy turns him over to the Alpha Adam, who is seriously injured in the fight. She must now take him to the werewolves that raised her, which includes Bran, leader of all the North American werewolves. Returning to the Tri-Cities it is discovered that Adam's daughter has been kidnapped by the team experimenting on werewolves and Mercy joins the werewolves in attacking their stronghold. During the attack she takes a magical bullet for Adam and is granted protection by the werewolf leader.

Blood Bound

Blood Bound is the second novel of the series and shifts the focus away from werewolves to Mercy's interactions with the vampire and Fae communities. Mercy is asked by her friend Stefan, a vampire, to come with her to deliver a message to a visiting vampire, who turns out to be demon possessed. Mercy takes it upon herself to track down the creature with the help of the local werewolves, local police and Fae. The novel focuses on the discovery of Mercy's resistance to magic and her ability to hunt vampires by finding the ghosts that haunt their homes. She ends the novel by alone finding and killing the vampire that invited the demon-possessed into the Tri-Cities.

Summary

Chronology of series: *Moon Called* (2006), *Blood Bound* (2007), *Iron Kissed* (2008), *Bone Crossed* (2009), *Silver Borne* (2010), *River Marked* (2011), *Frost Burned* (2013), *Night Broken* (2014), *Fire Touched* (2016).

Bull, Emma

War for the Oaks (1987)

Emma Bull is one of the seminal authors of urban fantasy best-known for her foundational novel *War for the Oaks*. It follows the story of musician Eddi McCandry who discovers another world existing alongside her own. Set in Minneapolis, Eddi is invited to give her mortal blood to a battle between the forces of the Seelie (good/noble) and Unseelie (evil/chaos). At the same time Eddi has begun a rock band accompanied by human and faerie friends, which in the climax supports her in a playoff between Eddi and the (Unseelie) Queen to decide not only the fate of the two courts, but that of the city and her friends.

De Lint, Charles

Newford Series (1990 – 2009)

Newford is the name of the fictional North American city that many of de Lint's urban fantasy series are set. Unlike other series with a central character, the *Newford Series* instead centres on the city.

The Dreaming Place

Set in Newford, it follows the experiences of two cousins, Ash and Nina. Ash travels from the city into an Otherworld where she must face and overcome her own anger and grief (from the loss of her mother) to help save her cousin Nina who has been promised at birth to an ancient creature.

Dreams Underfoot

Dreams Underfoot is an interwoven collection of 19 stories set in Newford around the character of Jilly Coopercorn. The stories rove from the harbour, to the lost subterranean Old City, to Chinatown, to the slums and to a myriad of small rooms and coffee shops. The characters are most often human and experience intersections with the unknown in unexpected locales throughout the city.

Chronology of series: *The Dreaming Place* (1990), *From A Whisper To A Scream* (1992), *I'll Be Watching You* (1992), *Dreams Underfoot* (1993), *Memory and Dream* (1994), *The Ivory and the Horn* (1995), *Trader* (1997), *Someplace to Be Flying* (1998), *Moonlight and Vines* (1999), *Forests of the Heart* (2000), *The Onion Girl* (2001), *Tapping the Dream Tree* (2002), *Spirits in the Wires* (2003), *Medicine Road* (2004), *The Blue Girl* (2004), *Widdershins* (2006), *Make a Joyful Noise* (2006), *The Hour Before Dawn* (2005), *Old Man Crow* (2007), *Little (Grrl) Lost* (2007), *Promises to Keep* (2007), *Dingo* (2008), *Muse and Reverie* (2009).

Gay, Kelly

Charlie Madigan Series (2009 – Ongoing)

Charlie Madigan is a mother and policewoman in Atlanta. However, humanity has discovered two vastly different dimensions that intersect at Atlanta, turning the city into a supernatural crossroads. Charlie is involved in dealing with a number of paranormal cases.

The Better Part of Darkness

The Better Part of Darkness is the first novel of the series and introduces Charlie as a character struggling with all aspects of her life: being a recently divorced single mother or a teenage girl; being one of the few female police officers, and struggling with the dangerous role of her job; and also having only recently recovered from a near-death

experience. The book has Charlie following an off-world narcotic, while also attempting to avoid a death-threat and then the kidnapping of her daughter. The truth of her near-death experience is also revealed, as it appears she has a unique ancestry and was saved to be used as a sacrifice. The novel ends with her having to set aside her humanity and embrace her magical heritage to attempt to save her world, which she fails in doing.

Chronology of series: *The Better Part of Darkness* (2009), *The Darkest Edge of Dawn* (2010), *The Hour of Dust and Ashes* (2011), *Shadows Before the Sun* (2012), *The Cold Light of Day* (2016).

Hamilton, Laurell K

Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter Series (1993 – Ongoing)

The *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter Series* is a long running series that follows the life of Anita Blake a natural animator and legal executioner of vampires. Vampires and were-animals have come out of the shadows and North America is scrambling to change laws and work out how these creatures fit in. Anita Blake was born a necromancer and raises the dead for a living, she also consults on supernatural crimes with the local police in St Louis and takes work to execute rogue or dangerous vampires and shifters.

As the series progresses and Anita becomes further immersed into a world of danger and darkness much of her life changes. She begins to gain greater abilities as a necromancer, and through her link to the Master of the City (vampire) she gains vampiric abilities, including becoming a succubus. She is later exposed to a number of different were-animals and gains their creatures, but not the ability to shift. These and her growing friendships with the 'monsters' begins to isolate her from normal life and human friends, an issue she is still struggling with. Much of the middle series is focused on her developing sexual relationships and her eventual decision to become polyamorous and marry her three great loves.

Guilty Pleasures

The first novel introduces Anita who is blackmailed by the Master of the City, Nikolas, into investigating a series of vampire murders. During this investigation she begins her relationship with Jean-Claude who marks her. Anita identifies the murderer, a

fellow animator who has sacrificed others to stay alive, and with the help of her assassin friend Edward kills Nikolaos and her followers – inadvertently making Jean-Claude the new Master of the City.

The novel also follows a number of Anita's issues with intimacy and her belief that all vampires are undead and monsters. She is strongly black and white in her view and is actively trying to reject Jean-Claude's advances even-though she is drawn to him. Anita is also heavily reliant on her guns and has not yet embraced her abilities as a necromancer.

The Laughing Corpse

The Laughing Corpse is the second novel in the Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter series. *The Laughing Corpse* continues the adventures of Anita Blake, as she attempts to solve a particularly grisly set of murders, while simultaneously avoiding two potential threats to her life from people interested in using her talents as a zombie animator. The antagonists are a wealthy man wanting his ancient ancestor raised, which will require a human sacrifice, and a female voodoo priestess. The story introduces Anita's backstory of her mother's death, her uncontrolled ability to raise the dead, her training from her grandmother and her vampire hunter mentor. Meanwhile, Anita continues to attempt to come to grips with her powers and her relationship with Jean-Claude, the vampire master of St. Louis and Anita's would be lover/master.

Circus of the Damned

The third novel focuses on Anita's interactions with the vampire community. The antagonist is an ancient vampire considered as homo-erectus, able to move the earth, and a representative of The Council, the vampire governing body. The novel raises a number of questions about the legalities of being a vampire in the modern world, it discusses the hate group 'Humans First' and the legislation related to dealing with the undead.

The subplot narrative concerns an introduction into the were-animals of the series, including Richard the second-in-command of the werewolves who is passing himself off as human. Richard was infected by the optional vaccination to counteract the risk of were-animal infection, he also highlights the prejudice against were-animals, for as

a high-school teacher he will lose his job if exposed as a were. Anita is also infected by Richard and ends the novel at risk of turning.

The Lunatic Café

The fourth novel of the series is centred on were-animal issues, including Anita's own concern that she may shift with the moon and be one of the "monsters." A number of were-animals have been disappearing and Anita's investigation leads her to discover that the current leader of the werewolves and his "partner'" are using were-animals for snuff films, and also that a were-swan is selling weres to hunters. Anita puts an end to both, but at great risk to herself and upsets the were-community's hierarchy.

Alongside her interactions with Richard, there is the continued tension of her attraction to Jean-Claude that demands she date both men at once, threatening Richard's life. Anita is still resistant to the idea of being with one of the 'undead,' but she also has yet to see Richard shift. Her humanity has become a fixation for her and is also what attracts both men.

Chronology of the series: *Guilty Pleasures* (1993), *The Laughing Corpse* (1994), *Circus of the Damned* (1995), *The Lunatic Café* (1996), *Bloody Bones* (1996), *The Killing Dance* (1997), *Burnt Offerings* (1998), *Blue Moon* (1998), *Obsidian Butterfly* (2000), *Narcissus in Chains* (2001), *Cerulean Sins* (2003), *Incubus Dreams* (2004), *Micah* (2006), *Danse Macabre* (2006), *The Harlequin* (2007), *Blood Noir* (2008), *Skin Trade* (2009), *Flirt* (2010), *Bullet* (2010), *Hit List* (2011), *Kiss the Dead* (2012), *Affliction* (2013), *Jason* (2014), *Dead Ice* (2015).

Harrison, Kim

The Hollows Series (2004 – Ongoing)

The Hollows series is in an urban fantasy alternate history universe and set primarily in the city of Cincinnati and its suburbs. The alternate history is built upon two premises: the recent open existence of magical and supernatural species, within the human population; and the historical accidental release of genetically modified tomatoes in the 1960s that killed a significant portion of the human population. The series is set approximately forty years after this plague, referred to as "The Turn" in the series.

The series follows Rachel Morgan, a detective/bounty hunter witch, with strong emphasis on the use and lore of magic. Told in first-person point of view it focuses on her relationships with her partners. Rachel freelances and also works with local law enforcement agencies to deal with mundane and supernatural threats.

Dead Witch Walking

The first of the series, this novel follows the initial action Rachel makes to quit the bounty hunting organisation she belonged to, which causes a series of death curses to be placed upon her until she can cover the cost of buying out her contract. Along with two other employees, a living vampire and a pixie, she sets up in an abandoned church. Rachel takes it upon herself to continue following a lead concerning genetic drugs, which results in her being turned into a mink and kept in a cage. The narrative is not fully resolved and leads into the next novels with a continuation of a larger story arc. However, Rachel with her firm moral-centre and desire to keep fighting is clearly set up from this first novel.

Chronology of the series: *Dead Witch Walking* (2004), *The Good, the Bad and the Undead* (2005), *Every Which Way But Dead* (2005), *A Fistful of Charms* (2006), *For a Few Demons More* (2007), *The Outlaw Demon Wails* (2008), *White Witch, Black Curse* (2009), *Black Magic Sanction* (2010), *Demon* (2011), *A Perfect Blood* (2012), *Ever After* (2013), *The Undead Pool* (2014), *The Witch With No Name* (2014), *Sudden Backtrack* (2014), *Waylaid* (2016).

Lackey, Mercedes

Diana Tregarde Series (1989 – 1991)

The *Diana Tregarde Series* is actually set in a wider universe titled *Elves on the Road*, which is a modern time real-world with the presence of elves and magic. The character was originally created for use in a role-playing game. Diana Tregarde is a witch and a guardian with a responsibility to help others when needed. As her magical work is conducted only to help others, her day job is as a romance novelist.

Burning Water

Diana comes to Dallas in response to a friend's request about a series of increasingly gristly murders. The story centres on Diana, and police detective Mark, attempting to

research and discover the creature responsible for the murders. Their methods are quite hit-and-miss, but eventually a set of coincidences leads them to the home of Mark's close friend who has been possessed by an Aztec god. Diana to defeat the man must summon and open herself up for use by another god.

Chronology of the series: *Burning Water* (1989), *Children of the Night* (1990), *Jinx High* (1991).

McLeod, Suzanne

Spellcrackers.com Series (2008 – Ongoing)

Genny (Genevieve) Taylor works for the company Spellcrackers.com, who locate and crack/remove spells. Set in London, the world has been exposed to the existence of vampires, who have become the new celebrity and "getting fanged" has become a craze. Genny has a number of dark secrets that keep her isolated from others, but her unusual heritage provides her with a unique place in the world.

The Sweet Scent of Blood

Genny is called in to investigate a murder by an old friend and the narrative follows her investigation and interaction with the vampires. During this it is revealed that through a magical mark Genny is able to transform into a different body – that of a vampire, and her thirst continues in her human form also. There are clear implications to a deep backstory that this first novel touches on, but does not fully reveal. Genny resolves the murder in an arena battle with the help of the friends she has and makes during the narrative.

Chronology of the series: *The Sweet Scent of Blood* (2008), *The Cold Kiss of Death* (2009), *The Bitter Seed of Magic* (2011), *The Shifting Price of Prey* (2012), *The Hidden Rune of Iron* (2016).

Mieville, China

King Rat (1998)

Set in London in the 1990s, *King Rat* follows the journey of Saul. Saul, an ordinary and fairly useless human, comes home to find his father murdered. He is arrested, but with the help and interference of King Rat he escapes. King Rat reveals that Saul has rat heritage and begins to train him in an effort to help himself return to ruling the rats

and to escape his foe – the Piper. A reimagining of the original "Pied Piper of Hamelin," King Rat tells Saul of his heritage and introduces him to other similar rulers who are threatened by the Piper. The Piper has mesmerised two of Saul's friends and is using them to enchant humans. Saul with his newly trained rat army, and eventually with the help of the other kings, battles the Piper during a rave. Having overthrown the Piper, Saul chooses to return to the sewers and tells the story of King Rat and the Piper to the rats of London.

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