

Rewriting Heroism: Ethics of Care, Magical Literacy, and Intersectional Resistance in Nix's *Lirael* and Clare's *City of Bones*

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Abstract—Within present-day debates on feminist Re-conceptualizations of heroism in young adult fantasy, Nix's *Lirael* and Clare's *City of Bones* foreground care, relationality, and narrative praxis as resistance. Focusing on the intersections of magical technique and ethical orientation, the study reveals the ways in which practices of magical literacy and care transform inherited heroic paradigms and thus reconstruct feminine modes of heroism. *Lirael* and Clary Fray resist socially constructed, and institutionally sanctioned, forms of resistance in favor of emotional endurance, self-authorship, and united means of action that problematize masculinist tropes of conquest. Their magical techniques—archiving and rune-writing—are sorts of feminist revisions of subjectivity and social order, sharing affinities with Cixous's *écriture féminine* and Spivak's perspective of strategic resistance. From an intersectional feminist perspective (Gilligan and Crenshaw), they emerge as initiatory figures that shift the concept of heroism into care, relational ethics, and narrative repair, thus disturbing heroic absolutism. The argument further suggests the inadequate considerations of racialized and disabled identities in the texts, hinting that Okorafor and McLemore could serve as useful comparisons. Finally, *Lirael* and Clary impart a fledgling grammar of heroism that emphasizes emotional sovereignty; healing magic, memory, and story enforce interdependence over domination.

Index Terms— Ethics of Care, Heroism, Magical Literacy, Intersectional Resistance, *Lirael*, *City of Bones*, Young Adult Fantasy

I. INTRODUCTION:

RETHINKING HEROISM IN CONTEMPORARY YOUNG ADULT FANTASY

The depiction of dynamic heroism has undergone an extremely deep and complex metamorphosis in the world of young adult novels, with more and more female leads coming into the limelight. Traditional fantasy stories usually focused on male protagonists who achieved prophecies via personal adventures and actions of exceptional bravery, characters such as Frodo Baggins or Harry Potter embody this archetype. However, modern tales gradually depict heroism as shared,

associative or based in ethical intricacy, mirroring larger societal changes in how courage and autonomy are perceived. Contemporary young adult fantasy has witnessed a significant, though not universal, shift toward heroines whose power is exerted through relational ethics, narrative authorship, and self-reclamation. Garth Nix's *Lirael* (2001) and Cassandra Clare's *City of Bones* (2007) serve as turning points with feminist interventions opposing dominant young adult fantasy tropes, most notably linear heroism, patriarchal authority, and fixed identities. These narratives give priority to heroines who are emotionally complicated, morally conflicted, and collectively empowered, opposed to being told about Male-centered stories of heroes going through conventional rites of passage or so-called power bestowed upon them.

This article attempts to fill a very important gap in academic knowledge by investigating how *Lirael* and Clary form empowered identities through magical literacy while operating arcane frameworks of selfhood and resistance. Recognizing that previous scholarship has explored female heroism in young adult literature, only few studies have systematically compared how different female protagonists fight patriarchal oppression through two pathways distinct yet complementary. Under a multidimensional feminist paradigm fusing Gilligan's ethics of care, Crenshaw's Intersectionality, and Cixous' *écriture féminine*, this analytical journey looks into interpretation of how power, heroism, and union are reconstructed by challenging the patriarchal notions of fantasy.

What makes this analysis relevant is the cultural and gender aspect in power and representation of the subject at large. With the increasing thrust of young adult literature on Generation Z's political and personal concern toward plurality, authenticity, and collective good, it becomes imperative to understand how texts such as *Lirael* and *City of Bones* engage models of alternative heroism. In these texts, the heroines transform by means of preservation instead of destruction, and by care rather than hierarchical leadership, a shift that profoundly informs the dynamics of power and agency in the minds of young readers.

The methodology applied herein is rooted in close textual reading and feminist theoretical approaches. This article

conducts an investigation of particular narrative moments where instances of agency by Lirael and Clary are enacted through magic and examined as embodiments of philosophical stances on care, relationality, and resistance. The comparative framework is placed upon five operative axes: (1) deviating from gender norms, (2) interaction with magic, (3) moral development based on care, (4) negotiation of intersectional identities, and (5) agency creation. It allows for a multi-dimensional understanding of how each heroine interacts with patriarchal constraints through different yet complementary ways of being empowered.

II. THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF LIRAEI AND CITY OF BONES

Garth Nix's *Lirael* (2001), being the second in the Old Kingdom series was released at an important moment when young adult fantasy was increasingly pushing against traditional gender roles in what is defined as an epic fantasy narrative, using the *Tortall* series by Tamora Pierce as a base, while opening possibilities for more complicated female protagonists within high fantasy settings. Around that time, almost on its heels, Cassandra Clare's *City of Bones* (2007), first in The Mortal Instruments series dramatized how urban fantasy could be a place to work through contemporary identity politics within a framework of the supernatural, while *Twilight* (2005) set up the commercial viability of supernatural young adult fiction, its female protagonist's power anchored in sentimental endurance, interpersonal loyalty and ethical decision instead of physical dominance was commonly misjudged as passivity. As Flanagan (2014) claims, posthuman identity in young adult fiction reshapes power exactly in this way: "the posthuman need not be perceived as a threat to human individuality or agency. Rather, they use..... of agency in altruistic terms as collective and networked" (p. 3). This viewpoint shows how early 2000s heroines such as Bella Swan utilized power via fragility and relational connection that are types of power effortlessly disregarded without tools adjusted to non-dominant individuality. Feminist care ethics and intersectionality offer precisely these tools, making it noticeable how such stories revitalized heroism outside the world of conquest and domination.

Among these theories, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) had a revolutionary impact on traditional moral development theory by opposing androcentric assumptions and identifying an ethic of care as a different moral orientation. Gilligan (1982) noted that men usually articulate moral dilemmas in terms of justice or rights, while women's views are much more attentive to care, responsibility, and relationality (p. 18). One particular ethical theory employed in this study is the analysis of the concept of heroism in young adult fantasy, where traditional heroic paradigms have glorified individual conquest over relational maintenance. According to Nel Noddings (2003), the ethics of care conceptually address this basic human need to care and to be cared for in relation to the act of becoming moral, rather than treating relationality as peripheral to moral growth (p. 7).

This interconnected framework is enhanced by Noddings' idea of "engrossment" (1984), a position of attentive responsiveness in caring; one dynamically focuses on others'

necessities. Far from inactive assimilation, engrossment is a moral attitude that emphasizes existence and flexibility over separation or power. In a feminist rethinking of heroism, it restructures fragility and harmony as qualities, changing autonomy from skill to shared relationship.

Adding to this relational aspect, Sara Ruddick's "maternal thinking" (1989), provides a larger intellectual and political model for comprehending care as controlled, glob-perserving labor. In maternal thinking, Ruddick specifies three essential practices: protection, nurturing and education, that shape a specific ethical insight influenced by fragility and societal limitation. Although based in motherhood, this perspective can be accepted broadly as a feminist standard of defense and creative commitment. This redefines care as a societal, radical practice that defies hierarchies of violence and conquest. A female protagonist led by maternal thinking thus, symbolizes an opposition rooted in continuity, shared welfare and the moral nurturing of life.

Considering the feminist ethical lens, direct linkage is made to Kimberlé Crenshaw's landmark works on intersectionality in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* 1989/1991. Hence, the theorizing of how various axes of identity, gender, race, class, and sexuality, to name few, may combine to generate precise experiences of oppression or privilege. Crenshaw contended that traditional feminist and anti-racist discourses often fail to consider the experiences of women of colour whose identities cannot be understood on the basis of single-axis frameworks. Within the young adult fantasy context, intersectionality allows us to scrutinize not only how Lirael and Clary negotiate gendered expectations but also where the texts falter in representing the multifaceted interrelationship between multiple markers of identity.

Within this model, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's "Silencing the past" (1995) affords a pivotal perspective for appreciating how knowledge serves as a venue of supremacy and defiance. Trouillot claims that history is assembled by dominant systems that define what is retained, by whom and how. He defines four primary moments of silencing: the creation of source, the formation of archives, the construction of narratives and public reception, all assist to exclude or wipe out oppressed voices. In this context, a female protagonist who obtains restricted wisdom, reclaims subdued realities, or defies established narratives, hindering systemic power over memory and restoring narrative independence.

This restoration of silenced histories echoes with Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory" (1997), which portrays the potent, sentimental relationship to distressing histories that one bears no explicitly endured. Conveyed via tales, illustrations and actions, postmemory crafts individuality over generations, mainly in situations of structural suppression. It places the addressee as a moral viewer charged with honoring and restoring acquired loss, altering silence into declaration and burden into commitment.

Simultaneously, Gayatri Spivak notion of "Strategic essentialism" (1988), offers a vital viewpoint for comprehending how oppressed subjects perform defiance within repressive systems. Spivak claims that oppressed groups may assume harmonized identities, like a "women" or "the oppressed", to allow shared public movement, while staying attentive of the inner disparities inside these groups. This is a

strategic shift to obtain voice and power in situations where fragmentation reduces opposition. In the setting of fantasy, this approach sheds light on how heroines briefly can symbolize classical roles, such as healer, visionary or creator, to oppose masculine power over magical wisdom and systemic power, utilizing symbolic unity as a way of subversion.

According to Gilligan's ethics of care and Crenshaw's intersectionality, young adult heroines such as Lirael and Clary reimagine heroism via compassionate deeds and societal awareness. Lirael's ethical resilience arises not through triumph, but through her commitment to the Dead and the fragile embodying Gilligan's concept that ethical growth rests in reacting to the necessities of others (Nix p. 305). Likewise, Clary's denial to leave her companions and her inclusive way to blended identities (human, demons and Shadowhunters alike), mirror Crenshaw's idea of overlapping identities and systemic disparities (Clare p. 85). Through such actions of interpersonal care and inclusivity, both protagonists personify a moral heroism that opposes supremacy and restructures power as compassion and mutual responsibility.

This theoretical foundation gains further depth when connected to Hélène Cixous, the concept of *écriture féminine* (1976), which would serve well as a theoretical tool for viewing Lirael's and Clary's agency reclamations through creative engagements. Cixous argues that patriarchal language systems oppress women and their particular experiences, hence, writing needs to be grounded in the female body and psyche rather than in masculinist linguistic structures (p. 881). Within the realm of fantasy literature, magical systems are often realized as particular kinds of metaphorical language structures, making Cixous's theory even more relevant. This may be extrapolated to "magical literacy," construed as the conscious manipulation of magical knowledge systems toward self-authorship and resistance. Within *Lirael*, this is represented by the protagonist's learning of Charter magic and working as a Remembrancer; while in *City of Bones*, Clary's agency is enacted through her distinct rune-making capabilities. In both situations, heroines employ magical literacy as a tool to change their new self-concepts and envision their realities, thereby actualizing Cixous's concept of write-up as a subversive, anti-phallogocentric entity.

Building upon this, magical literacy thus emerges as a critical tool of theory for feminist analysis of heroism in fantasy. While literacy is often falsely perceived as simply rigid linguistic structures, modern scholarship describes it as a collection of culturally and socially placed traditions encompassing the creation and understanding of texts in multiple forms, including textual, visual, electronics and multiple forms (Street 1984). The idea of magical literacy (the ability to analyze imaginary frameworks as symbolic portrayal as actual power), arises out of practices in mythology and speculative narrative studies. Academics like Tatar (2003) and Zipes (2006) show that magical tales do not only delight, but represent principles connected to identity, class, colonialism and governance. These works together assert that interacting with fantasy demands a literary responsiveness to metaphors, fables and systemic critique. Indeed, in patriarchal systems historical and magical, magic serves as a device of power reflecting actual hierarchies of gender, class and race. As Silvia Federici claims in *Caliban the Witch* (2004), witch hunts were never just a myth, but a

brutal crusade to demolish women's independence over their bodies and procreative wisdom. Just as women in medieval Europe were medics, birth attendants and guardians of shared power, their vilification as witches functioned for the purpose of prohibiting feminine defiance and change their bodies into tools for the reproduction of labor within economic systems (p. 144). Federici reveals that this procedure mirrors colonialism, just as native nations were deprived of their regions; women were deprived of physical independence. Thus, whenever fictional realms limit magic by gender or lineage they reflect a tangible history where women's authority was consistently wiped out to impose male-dominated and capitalist system. Thus, the idea of magical literacy provides a way of conceptualizing how female protagonists gain access to and reorganize these magical systems. Lirael's traverse of the Great Library presents a form of magical literacy, whereas Clary's making of runes is a kind of magical authorship. Both heroines transcend the mastery of an already-established magical system and hence, create new magical possibilities, opposing and questioning the patriarchal structures therein. That theory bridges feminist ethics and literary analysis of fantasy conventions and aims to provide a more refined understanding of the ways in which young adult fantasy texts can act as sites of feminist resistance.

Collectively, these notions create a unified feminist framework that restructures heroism as mutual, moral and story-wise transformative. They facilitate an examination of how Lirael and Clary defy systemic patterns through focusing on care, memory and personal agency over domination. Their magical praxis of archiving and rune-making are metaphorical actions of defiance, using feminist changes of identity and power. This blended bases establishes the study in a precise, comprehensive viewpoint, assuming the examination is both conceptually strong and critically subtle.

III. FEMINIST HEROISM IN PRACTICE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework for evaluating feminist heroism through ethics of care, Intersectionality, and magical literacy paves the way for analyzing the reflections of such concepts in the stories. Both Lirael and Clary extended the possibilities of empowered selves beyond classical notions of heroism, dating back to conquest and supremacy, by affording themselves possibilities along more contemporary paths that speak about relation, emotional strength, and creative restoration. They embody the unique yet complementary feminist actions within young adult narratives, against male-dominated systems-practices that transform things conventional stories would see as flaws: care, memory, and relational interdependence-into bases of radical power.

The analysis that follows continues in a couple of sections. Section two sets up the conceptual structure (ethics of care, intersectionality and magical literacy), as devices for reimagining heroism past conquest. Section three provides a comparative textual examination of Lirael and Clary throughout five aspects: gender subversion, magical practice, care based ethics, intersectional boundaries and the formation of autonomy. It reveals how their actions of archiving and rune making represent feminist opposition, whereas also uncovering

the works' crucial gaps concerning ethnicity, disability and class.

A. *Ethics of Care and Magical Literacy as Feminist Resistance*

Lirael and Clary both develop potent identities by challenging patriarchal norms through ethics of care and magical literacy, through their strategies mirror unique approaches influenced by their specific fantastical subgenres. Lirael's adventure embodies what Laura Miller (2002), describes as the "heroine's journey"—a route marked by physical triumphs than by emotional and more of development. Her statement, "I wanted to belong..... Much better to be the Abhorsen-in-waiting than a sightless player, a freak" (Nix 401), shows the intense emotional burden of individualization, whereas at the same time declaring her restored independence. Contrary to conventional fantasy main characters whose position is acquired through war victories or inherited power, Lirael's heroism is shaped in isolation, her power arise from steadily studying the names of the Dead in silence embracing her loneliness as a Clary that cannot see the future and deciding to use necromantic wisdom not as means of control, but as responsibility. This is obvious when she silently studies the Book of the Dead by herself, realizing that real strength resides in grasping the vulnerability of life and death, a form of mental bravery that denies the demand for praise or glory (Nix p. 474).

While Lirael's archival strategy displays a kind of resistance, Clary's imaginative creation signifies another aspect of the same feminist drive. Clary's adventure personifies the insight that contemporary young adult protagonists amend traditional legends to foster emotional and collective autonomy over conventionally masculine journeys based on solitary conquest. This is because Clary's rune-making evolves into an emblematic recovery of missing wisdom and an action of healing instead of authority, a shift that matches ideally with Valerie Estelle Frankel's study of the unique essence of the heroine's journey. Frankel asserts that the heroine's real strength exists in imaginative skill and dedication. She clearly declares "Here is the heroine's task: pure creativity and life-force, wielding craft, magic, and devotion as weapons to accomplish her goals" (p. 186). She also remarks that many heroines lack a blade and rather use devices such as weaving, narrating or magic (p. 44). This concept is explicitly shown in the story when Clary, urged by her love for her mom and the necessity to defend Jace, obtains a rune from inside her brain, a sign of internal power and hidden strength, instead of via extrinsic might or control. As it is portrayed in the text "A rune danced against the backs of her eyelids: two downward triangles, joined by a single bar—a rune like a pair of wings..." (Clare 124). This instant represents the revival of individual wisdom and confirms her strength as one based in care and recovery hence, embodying the female way of innovative and restorative power.

Lirael's high fantasy setting matches with the classic structure of individual quests and universal responsibility, yet Nix undermines this tradition by placing Lirael's emotional vulnerability and yearning to fit in at the heart of her power. From the beginning Lirael is described by her loneliness; she is devoid of the Sight and feels excluded among her blonde relatives, remarking that she "stood out like a pallied weed

among health flowers" (Nix p. 14). Her inner conflict is embodied in the persistent thought "No mother, no father, no Sight", which emphasizes her deep feeling of isolation (Nix 13). Still, it is exactly this banishment that pushes her to the Great library where years of lone learning shape her distinct skills. Her ultimate deed of heroism (venturing into death), is born of earned bravery. When confronting Hedge, she is petrified almost yielding to his demand to kneel. However, her ability (the utilization of charter marked bells), is the peak of independent study, showing how her individual quest changes weakness into power.

In contrast, Clary's urban fantasy realm highlights shared system and communal stories depicting her freedom as profoundly rooted within bonds and shared aid. Clary does not find her individuality in solitude, instead it is facilitated via other people (Jace presents her to the Shadow realm, Hodge offers refuge and Isabelle provides guidance). Her agency is confirmed through sentimental ties. When Simon is transformed to a rat her instant response "my best friend is a rat", and her resolve to rescue him is inspired by devotion and concern (Clare p. 103). Moreover, her ultimate clash with Valentine depends on the united endeavors of Jace, the Lightwoods and Luke. Even her rune making skill grows inside the collective environment, verified through mutual wisdom and training. As Jace informs her "Then you'll see the world as it is—infinite" implying that real insight and power arises through relationships not isolation (Clare p. 75).

Thus, despite both books examine feminist heroism they do so narrative frameworks. *Lirael* recreates the high fantasy pursuit by displaying how a protagonist's internal fragility could turn into a cornerstone of her resilience through independence. *City of Bones* however, shows a structure of empowerment grounded in co-dependence where heroism thrives through collective interrelation and mutual support.

The deviation broadens to their engagement with magic that turns into a crucial size for feminist defiance via what it is called magical literacy. For Lirael, magic is not an instrument for domination, but a matter of past exploration and protection. This is clear when once facing the dreadful Stilken and realizing that she has to bind it, she states to the Disreputable Dog "I will learn a useful charter-skin," she declared. "And we will explore, Dog!" (Nix p. 128). Her search of charter magic is driven by a wish to fathom the obscured domain of the library to traverse its threats and to defend its mysteries, a journey of exploration and protecting not control. As a Remembrancer, Lirael involves herself in feminist historical recording, defying prevailing patriarchal structures that exclude and eliminate conflicting perspectives. At an internal level, Lirael has developed this archival devotion and understanding of her role within the Clary's hierarchy, "According to her superiors and co-workers, it was not uncommon for librariansmore than she did" (Nix p. 72). This passage explores how Lirael's marginalization paradoxically creates channels for resistance by directing her exclusion into passionate preservation work that is by nature subversive against the system that places no value on her. The very act of Lirael being ready to accept personal risk in recovery for knowledge is an example of oppressed peoples becoming the very willing agents to preserve the systems that exclude them, thus becoming acts of quiet rebellion in archival work.

Discovering the book of Remembrance, grows into an action of remedial magic, reclaiming fragmented reality is from the shades of muted past. Excluded as “sightless” within the Clayr, Lirael epitomizes Patricia Hall Collins' “Outsider Within” (2000) viewpoint—dwelling at the edges yet having a perspective to question and reshape controlling knowledge systems. Lirael operates from within the system to defy its omissions through reclamation of overlooked knowledge and fostering of intellectual autonomy, showing that power rises not through rebellion, but through intellectual precision and emotional connection with suppressed memory.

In contrast, Clary's magical quest focuses on authorship and imaginative creation instead of protection. Her ability to perceive and produce new runes initiates magical authorship placing her as a creator of new magical potentials instead of mere acquirer of fixed frameworks. When Clary crafts the Mendelin rune to heal Jace, she reshapes Shadowhunter magic out of a structure of power into one focused on compassion, representing Cixous' *écriture féminine* (1976), in which authorship arises from women's experience instead of male-dominated systems. This ethical transformation manifests in Clary's moral confrontation with those who enable Valentine's violence, “It will be anyway when the Clave finds out...what he plans to do with it?” (Clare p. 237). Clary poses a question in which ethical accountability rests not upon institutional rules but the dictates of conscience, thus placing care for the broader community as the basis of her resistance to Valentine's destructive vision. Here, moral authority is revealed in her resistance grounded not on the basis of her Shadowhunter lineage or combat prowess but by virtue of her ability to lay bare complicity and demand ethical responsibility, transforming speech into an act of feminist resistance that challenges the male-dominated power structures of Shadowhunter society. Clary's runes differ from typical fighting runes functioning alternatively for healing, shielding and manifestation of human sentiments. Her magic transforms into living dissent altering power via fostering and favouring emotional relationships as the essence of mystical practice. This is displayed when she utilizes her stele to transform a former spell ““Jace,” she said. “Give me your stele. “He pressed it, warm and alive-feeling, into her palm. She turned the card over and traced over the runes painted on its back—a twist here and a line there and they meant something entirely different” (Clare p. 150). This action reveals how her rune-making becomes hybridized blending primordial magical wisdom with new symbolic inventiveness to encourage flexible and adaptable resistance. Thus, although Lirael's defiance is rooted in restoration, Clary's arises from creativity symbolizing two intellectually different yet similarly feminist methods.

Lirael's heroic growth represents a responsibility toward moral principles and universal liability profoundly fixed in her solitary position inside the old kingdom's magical hierarchy. As Remembrancer and Abhorsen-in-waiting, Lirael has to keep limits between the living and the dead, protecting all knowledge and securing her world from necromancy. This is shown in the text described as “Her life would be dedicated to hunting down and destroying or banishing the Dead. She would travel all over the Kingdom, instead of living the life of a Clayr within the confines of the Glacier.” (Nix 474). Her principle of care while extensive in boundless range ultimately puts the burden of care

on her alone, showing high fantasy's inclination to glorify lone protagonists instead of shared endeavor. This individual attitude harmonizes with Sara Ruddick's “Maternal Thinking” (1989), highlighting protection, care and development, yet remains bounded by the genre's emphasis on solitary duty rather than structural shift.

In *City of Bones*, Clary does find her ethical orientation towards compassionate responsiveness and society rather than solitary transcendence. Her ethical evolution mirrors Nel Noddings' idea of “engrossment” (1984) considerate sensitive care that Noddings frames as demanding a “constitutive engrossment and displacement of motivation” (p. 24), harmonizing others' necessities with self-coherence. Clary's bonds show moral commitment that neither compromises individuality, shown when she boldly insists “I don't want someone else inside my head” (Clare p. 69), nor relinquishes others' well-being. Contrary to Lirael's cosmic yet personal issues, Clary's care is essentially social and collective, facing social systems and inequality, a view point that corresponds Joan Tronto's structure and its evaluation of the ethical shallowness of those who are “relatively privileged, and do derive benefits from systematic exploitation of the lower classes” (p. 197). Clary's ethical perspective corresponds with Tronto's (1993) stages of care attentiveness, duty, capability and responsiveness—especially obvious when protecting Simon. Her ethics of care therefore, accentuates social engagement and duty offering a feminist ethical view based in relationships, Intersectionality and social evolution.

Most protagonists' approaches to magic and ethics of care eventually function as basis for their autonomy, while displayed in diverse ways: Lirael via protection of memory and Clary through production of new emblematic frameworks. Lirael's quest to empowerment evolves through engagement with archival reminiscence and chosen relationship. In contrast to conventional young adult protagonists who achieve destiny through heritage or prophecy, Lirael prefers intellectual restoration against the Clayr's predestined structure. The discovery of the book of Remembrances symbolizes the reclaiming of historical memory typically refused female heroines, thus reshaping valor as arising from reclaiming and refining deleted stories. Lirael's character is radically changed by this objective, as she claims “I'm . . . I'm a Remembrancer. I had to find out something there, something in the past.” (Nix p. 400). Her bond with the disreputable dog further compounds this female-centered ethic of care and resistance, embodiment of a relationship founded upon fidelity and emotional exchange rather than blood, that the dog confirms by saying “I'll always be your friend, Lirael. You know that.” (Nix p. 388)

In opposition to just Shadowhunter frameworks, Clary's autonomy rests with language, magical creation and society. The ability of a person to fix runes marks an obstruction from rigid Shadowhunter frameworks operating as new-found means to oppose male regulation of arcane knowledge. Clary's runes serve as disruptive tools that question conventional masculine knowledge structures from the inside. Besides, the empowerment of Clary is established through preferred kinship developing the sentimental framework of her heroism. Hence, the story of Clary represents fluid allegiances nurtured by an emotional sincerity rather than from inherent destiny forged by martial courage. Her heroism is achieved in acts of creation,

caring, and resistance through the social medium of language. This is strongly illustrated when she is detained, employing her natural magical skill to attain her freedom:

"Slowly at first, and then more confidently, she moved the stele across the wall, leaving searingly bright ash-white lines hovering in the air before her... Then came a sound like the loudest shattering she had ever heard... the rune she had drawn turned black and sifted away like ash; the floor trembled under her feet; then it was over, and she knew, without a doubt, that she was free". (Clare p. 162)

Hence, ethics of care stand closely allied with magical practice in its intention to show how the protagonists who would otherwise be cast as having their disabilities turned against them instead turn that potential for disability into power. The Journey of Lirael embodies Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) refusal of controlling authorities that are able to silence the past, attempting to raise subdued knowledge from within the archive itself. As a Remembrancer, Lirael also personifies Marianne Hirsch's "Postmemory" (1997), acquiring and redefining traumatic silences of a history she could never have lived through. She holds her strength in achieving restorations of past erasures and also in imparting an intergenerational ethics of care. Clary carries out Gayatri Spivak's "Strategic essentialism" (1988), by establishing rune-making as a form of healing and expression in defiance of patriarchal norms. Her condition of independence materializes with a vibrant, evocative assessment toward new symbolic structures evaluating dynamic urban formations perceived by her story's cosmos. This understanding of her distinct imaginative power is recorded when she shows that her artistic representation can immediately affect the concrete world: "She passed her hand over the drawing; then, with a quick darting motion, reached into the paper. When she drew her hand back a moment later, there was the coffee cup, dangling from her fingers." (Clare p. 140). Their subtle dissent is realized through magical healing and storytelling abilities to heal, remember, and tell tales favoring relational mutuality rather than a dominant relationship.

B. Intersectional Limitations in Feminist Heroism

In *Lirael* and *City of Bones*, powerful feminist heroines break gender-role orthodoxy. However, an intersectional critique reveals several lacunae with regard to the intersection of race, disability, and class in their representations. These oversights effectively limit the feminist frameworks in both narratives by framing identity almost exclusively under a singular dimension as opposed to simultaneously composed of several interlocking dimensions of experience. In effect, these textual limitations are sustained by dominant cultural hegemonies rather than through conceptual theorization alone; rather, these absences in representation and patterns of textual treatment marginalize intersectional identities.

Both novels fashion fictional worlds in such a way as to blatantly keep racial diversity from the milieu, thereby implicitly marking the Eurocentric norms as a default set of standards. In *Lirael*, the racial texture of the Clayr has been described in deliberate terms: "Most of the Clayr had brown skin that quickly tanned to a deep chestnut...and she had dark eyes and even darker hair" (Nix p. 14). The comparison formalizes difference into a narrow whiteness-based spectrum

of chestnut to pallid skin tones, with light to dark eyes, while never acknowledging non-white racial identities. *Lirael's* "otherness" is therefore situated purely in lacking Sight, with no textual recognition of race as a meaningful axis of difference. The critique of the racial absence within fantasy by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (2019) applies here: this kind of racial invisibility normalizes for whiteness as the default human experience. Likewise, this pattern is recreated by *City of Bones* in eliminating the heterogeneous racial and ethnic composition of New York City. Characters such as Clary, Jace, and Isabelle are described in Euro-centric terms; Jace with her "golden hair" (p. 45), and Isabelle with "dark hair" (p. 12), and none of the top-ranking human characters exhibit non-white racial markers. Instead, the story shifts and displaces racial difference unto Downworlder species (such as vampires and werewolves), which is a process Thomas calls "colourblind ideologies", wherein the writer avoids the real-world racial issues by rendering difference as monstrous otherness (p. 55). This erasure prohibits an intersectional feminist analysis of race intersecting with gender and thus limits feminism in both texts to a white-situated perspective.

Disability within these narratives is primarily considered a temporary disadvantage to be surmounted rather than a stable identity or site of difference needing redefinition. *Lirael's* lack of Sight exemplifies this: her view of her internal conflict is distilled into the statement, "without it I am nothing" (Nix p. 204). This, in a way, is similar to Garland-Thomson's (2009) discussion of the fantastic freak trope: here, the disability signifies an exceptional destiny, serving as a conspicuous narrative prosthesis instead of an embodied difference. The undoing of *Lirael's* disablement does not contest the ableist framework that undergirds Clayr society but rather asserts that such a lack of Sight is an aberration that stands to be dispelled. Mogget's derogatory musings regarding *Lirael*: "Lirael is so obviously an Abhorsen... wanting the Sight must be solely a peculiarity of her upbringing" (Nix p. 475), posits a version of erasure insofar as her actual identity is normalized as existing apart from her disability.

Likewise, in *City of Bones*, the magical block delayed Clary's access to knowledge until the patriarchal mentors such as Jace, Hodge, and Bane decided she was ready. This sort of narrative gatekeeping bestows male figures with authority over her mind and thus in suspension of her agency. Her recovery was not immediate: "They could return to you more quickly than they would otherwise. It's the best I can do." (Clare, p. 139), framing empowerment as contingent on the curing of a non-normative state. The resolution thus erased the psychological ramifications of prolonged memory loss, fitting a familiar pattern within narratives of disability and neurodivergence, where alternative states are portrayed as deficits to be remedied rather than as valued identities. Clary's blockage functions as a plot device to dramatize her eventual awakening rather than to explore prolonged difference. This way, it circumvents the complex intersections between gender and cognitive marginalization and ends up reinforcing able-bodied and neurocentric norms within its feminist paradigm.

Hence, class dynamics also receive little critical attention, disappearing from view in economic inequality when narratives avoid intersectional perspectives. In *Lirael*, while the hierarchical nature of the Library is explicated, it is never

questioned from the standpoint of class. When Lirael receives a dangerous research assignment, the senior Clayr remarks, "According to her superiors... it was not uncommon for librarians to lay down their lives... in dangerous research" (Nix p. 72). Nowhere does the text consider how the intersection of her lowly Standing as a Sightless librarian with gender and disability exacerbated her marginalization. The destruction of "her librarian's waistcoat" a marker of class identity underlines her vulnerability, but without engaging with any of the socio-economic dimensions rendering her vulnerable at all. Mendlesohn's (2008) observation that fantasy often treats class as a mere backdrop, rather than as a constraint lived alongside, aptly characterizes this omission.

Similarly, in *City of Bones*, Clary's transformation from a materially struggled mundane to a privileged Shadowhunter is quite fluid and unproblematic. Her mundane existence is marked by economic disadvantage: "I'm from Brooklyn!" Clary was outraged.....rich brat like you and your sister?" (Clare p. 45). Upon initiation, acquiring the "leather gear" signifies her new set of privileges, but the narrative refrains from exploring the tensions this creates between her and Simon, who remains a working-class mundane. The Pandemonium scene is also telling as to how class is magically instantiated in this world: Clary's glowing runes, "the rune hung like glowing neon, burning her eyes" (Clare p. 221), instantly created class from thin air, putting her above the mundanes. With these portrayals, both texts ship away any dialectic of how economic inequality intersects with gendered oppression by treating class mobility as something never questioned and as if it were easy to attain.

Taken together, these textual patterns, racial homogeneity, disability as a deficit to be overcome, and an uncritical acceptance of upward-class mobility serve to curtail the feminist possibilities of both *Lirael* and *City of Bones*. Empowerment in *Lirael* depends on leaving the Clayr community within which her gender, disability, and class operated as marginalizers. However, empowerment for Clary entails the embrace of Shadowhunter privilege. As Crenshaw (1989) so rightly points out, treating race and gender separately and insisting on an either/or definition of discrimination along race or gender lines, cannot adequately address [their] combined effects" (p. 148). In other words, this failure to engage Intersectionality means that the purported empowerment actually reifies rather than overturns the existing hierarchies: there remains largely unexamined whiteness, able-bodiedness, and class privilege. In order for feminism to work towards real transformation in young adult fantasy, the narratives should forefront the sight of simultaneous systemic oppressions something that has been glaringly absent from the largely singular frameworks herein.

CONCLUSION

Lirael and *City of Bones* offer important albeit partial contributions toward feminist heroism in the young adult fantasy. In these stories, masculinist tropes are negated via heroines, with their empowerment grounded on emotional-growth processes and relational ethics as opposed to destiny and prophecies. *Lirael* contests the determinism of the Clayr, while Clary disturbs the rigid hierarchies of the Clave. Both heroines

create an empowered subjectivity through their memories, kinship relations, and self-definition, standing against constraints put forth by patriarchy. Their magic, consisting of rigorous archival restoration and the collaborative constitution of runes, applies ethics of care as feminist resistance that brings into focus interconnectedness rather than hierarchy. This works like Cixous's *écriture féminine* and Spivak's strategic resistance to recast an entirely different kind of heroine based on emotional endurance and narrative agency.

An examination of both texts reveals their relative neglect of issues of race, disability, and class. This partiality does not remain neutral; in its neglect of racial difference, it creates and supports an unusual kind of racial homogeneity that is, in fact, predisposed to the Eurocentric worldview. Moreover, disability is limited within a paradigm of deficit that necessitates overcoming: As Lirael being Sightless, and as in Clary's blocking of magic, these are seen as undesirable temporary states that must be undone rather than accepted as valid embodied identities. Similarly, they wash away class inequalities rather than bring them into self-consciousness. Therefore, empowerment can work towards active reification of these existent hierarchies where whiteness, able-bodiedness, and class privileges continue unchecked. Meanwhile, Lirael's empowerment depends on her escape from the Clayr barefoot, while Clary is utterly blind to class conflict through her acceptance of Shadowhunter privileges. While enabling key feminist debates, this genre must evolve toward including voices such as Okorafor and McLemore that explicitly laid bare Intersectionality. Ultimately, in-depth *Lirael* and *City of Bones* have become early partial attempts toward inclusive feminist heroism, which will have to address complementary systems of oppression for actual conversion to take form.

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