

Fantasy elements in V. E. Schwab's *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, *Gallant* and *Vicious*

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá žánrem fantasy literatury, jeho původem a základními prvky. Definuje tento žánr, přináší jeho charakteristiku a snaží se poukázat, jak se odlišuje od ostatních literárních žánrů. Hlavním tématem jsou potom fantasy prvky a jejich popis a přiblížení v první části práce. Druhá část poté navazuje rozбором fantasy prvků ve vybraných populárních dílech od americké autorky literatury pro mládež V. E. Schwab, konkrétně *Neviditelný život Addie LaRue*, *Gallant* a *Neobyčejní*. V rámci práce je každá kniha čtenáři přiblížena, a fantasy prvky v ní se nacházející analyzovány. Pozornost je zaměřena na práci autorky s danými prvky, jejich použití v textu a přínos v rámci příběhu. Závěrem jsou některé z vybraných prvků vzájemně porovnávány.

Klíčová slova: fantasy literatura, fantasy prvky, V. E. Schwab, *Neviditelný život Addie LaRue*, *Gallant*, *Neobyčejní*

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the genre of fantasy literature, its origins and fundamental elements. It defines the genre, gives its characteristics, and tries to show how it differs from other literary genres. The main focus of the thesis is predominantly on fantasy elements. The second part follows with an analysis of fantasy elements in selected popular contemporary books, written by American young adult author V. E. Schwab. These books are *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, *Gallant*, and *Vicious*. Each book is introduced to the reader and the fantasy elements found in it are analysed. Attention is focused on the author's work with the elements, their use in the text, and their contribution to the story. In the final part, some of the selected elements are compared with each other.

Keywords: fantasy literature, fantasy elements, V. E. Schwab, *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, *Gallant*, *Vicious*

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INTRODUCTION

Fantasy is as old as literature and storytelling itself, as it originated from myths and legends when people were imparting magical principles and origins to things they couldn't explain.¹ It has always been present in some form of way, whether it is the oldest known story *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Grimm's Fairy Tales or the most influential work in the genre J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.² Even though fantasy literature was not always taken seriously as a genre, it has been receiving more recognition and appreciation lately. It has been gaining popularity in the last decades and is rightfully one of the most favourite literary genres nowadays.³

Some fantasy stories take place in new fantastic worlds, and authors' fantasies fill these worlds with all kinds of creatures and monsters, the laws of these worlds might be unexplainable and impossible to apply in our real world, a strange people with various abilities can appear there or magic and spells are cast upon the characters. In other works the stories happen in the primary world, but some unexplainable and mystical components prevail. All of these and many other elements are essential parts of every fantasy narrative – these extraordinary or supernatural elements.

Fantasy literature is a broad genre with many subgenres, such as high and low fantasy, sword and sorcery, and countless others. This thesis tries to provide a general overview of the concept of fantasy and fantasy literature, its history and the usage of fantasy elements in today's literature. To approach the key units of each fantasy story and the fantasy elements, the thesis focuses on their description, identification, and analysis in selected contemporary novels. The novels selected are books by popular contemporary American young adult fantasy writer V. E. Schwab, the author's most popular books *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (2020), *Gallant* (2022) and *Vicious* (2013).

In the first part, the thesis focuses on defining fantasy literature, briefly describing the genre, its subgenres and most importantly its elements. Then the second essential part has the goal of identifying and analysing key fantasy elements in the selected novels, exploring how the author uses them, how she develops them, and what role they play in the plot of the stories. In the last part, the analysis is followed by a comparison of some fantasy elements

¹ Brian Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), xxxix, ProQuest Ebook Central.

² Richard Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 54-55.

³ Emrah Ozturk, "Magic and Spell in Fantasy: Historical Contexts of Supernatural Elements in Fantasy Genre Narrations." *International Journal of Advanced Research* 11(November 2023): 874.

that are being re-used by the author in more than just one of her works. These elements are compared in order to look for differences and similarities between them, how the author works with each of them and their importance for the plot of the book.

To achieve originality in their works, authors may strive to use diverse elements (in their works) and attempt not to repeat them, or at least use them in a different way, so they serve distinct purposes in the narratives. On first look, V. E. Schwab's works do not seem to contain identical fantasy elements, which supports Schwab's originality, as each of the selected works has a distinguished plot. On the other hand, she might tend to 'help herself' by slightly deforming her previously used elements instead of creating new ones and creating new stories with them. This might lead to repetitiveness and lower originality, also she might just recycle selected elements from her older stories.

1 FANTASY LITERATURE

Fantasy literature is a type of fictional text. Fiction is literature that does not present facts but is rather constructed from one's imagination. Fantasy is fiction that brings wonder, mystery, or magic to happen and causes possibilities beyond the ordinary, material, rationally predictable world we live in.⁴ The term fantasy itself is hard to define, as there is not just one clear definition. Although it can be defined in various ways, a broad interpretation includes any story featuring magic or elements beyond the bounds of reality.⁵ Therefore, it is created by elements, things or events that cannot be explained by the laws of this world. In other words, fantasy texts lack a truthful representation of the real world in some sense. It is the process and a product of one's imagination.⁶

Fantasy stories can take place in either our world or in otherworld created by the author. In both cases, the story is perceived as impossible. Fantasy texts might be described as "self-coherent narratives."⁷ This characteristic of fantasy literature involves storytelling that breaks away from our real-world understanding of what is possible. When a fantasy story is set in our familiar world but includes events or elements that challenge our reality, it creates a sense of the impossible. For example, a story might involve magic, mythical creatures, or supernatural events that don't happen in real life.⁸ However, fantasy stories also often take place in entirely invented worlds, with their own unique rules and logic. These worlds themselves may not be possible according to our reality, but within the story's context, they operate consistently. The events and elements within these worlds make sense based on the world's internal logic.⁹

While fantasy offers an escape for readers, it's a misconception to think it is the only appeal of this genre. The best fantasy stories combine exciting action, compelling characters, and detailed settings. They dive into classic themes like honour, love, war, revenge, responsibility, otherness, obsession, and loyalty.¹⁰ Additionally, fantasy can explore complex issues like prejudice, greed, religion, politics, abuse, and addiction, often in a way

⁴ Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, 1.

⁵ Neal Wyatt, Charlotte Burcher, Neil Hollands, Andrew Smith, Barry Tritt, and Jessica Zellers, "Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, Vol. 48, Iss. 3 (Spring 2009): 227.

⁶ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, xxxvii.

⁷ John Clute and John Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, (Kiribati: Orbit, 1999), 338.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wyatt, Burcher, Hollands, Smith, Tritt, and Zellers, "Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101." 227.

that sidesteps cultural sensitivities. Fantasy is versatile, incorporating historical, romance, crime, adventure and other aspects, often within a single book.¹¹

1.1 History of Fantasy Literature

The term fantasy was used for the very first time in the 14th century by the British author and poet Geoffrey Chaucer. He used the word ‘fantasye’ to describe ideas that are somehow strange and unconventional and are not bound to our everyday experiences and that revolve around imaginative narratives with fantastical elements.¹² The concept of ‘fantasy’ has often carried connotations suggesting a lack of value or has been perceived as neglecting to focus on real-world matters.¹³ This perception has contributed to the relatively recent classification of fantasy as a recognized literary genre. Up until recently, till 1969, the term ‘fantasy’ was usually associated with children’s fiction, and children's stories and taking an interest in imaginative storytelling was seen as a childish behaviour that adults should outgrow.¹⁴

Even though the term fantasy appeared quite late, and the genre began to be taken more seriously in the late 20th century, it is also the most ancient genre to exist. Fantasy is among the oldest identifiable literary forms.¹⁵ Many stories of all human cultures were set within the framework of a myth and legend, depicting a past different and distinct from the present, portrayed with elements of magic, supernatural or impossible.¹⁶ The genre is therefore related to all the magical stories, myths, legends, fairy tales and folklore from all cultures over the world.¹⁷

The early literature of every culture contained tales and legends filled with marvels and supernatural events up until the 1600s and Renaissance, which brought rejection of superstition and started to favour science and reason.¹⁸ That left less room for imagination and beliefs. During the 18th century, a genre of realistic fiction emerged, quickly gaining popularity.¹⁹ That helped to set the ground for fantasy literature when writers started to incorporate supernatural elements into their fiction stories, for instance, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who can be seen as the most influential fantasy authors. Their stories were less concerned with real, individual characters and situations than with philosophical, intellectual

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, xxxvii.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., xxxviii.

¹⁶ Ibid., xxxix.

¹⁷ Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, 1-2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

and social discourse.²⁰ With the 19th century approaching, more authors started to incorporate supernatural elements into their fiction stories, and fantasy as a genre started to attract more attention. Throughout time fantasy developed and as a genre had a range and flexibility to continue to attract authors and readers alike.²¹ By combining fantasy elements of different kinds, many new sub-genres have appeared as the genre was evolving.

Some traditional stories had been passed down through generations, therefore familiar to many, trace back to some of the oldest written records and likely have extensive prehistoric origins. These tales form the roots of contemporary fantasy literature. Also over time, these stories underwent frequent adjustments in the process of retelling.²² Certain written texts were preserved in their original form, and some changed over time. While recycling old tales in fantasy literature may appear repetitive, and lacking in originality, this deep connection to old stories gives fantasy its special charm and importance.²³

1.2 Classification of Fantasy

Fantasy literature contains a spectrum of modes and variations of the fantasy genre, each with its unique narrative dynamics and thematic elements. Among these, portal, immersive, intrusive, and liminal fantasies stand out for their distinct approaches to world-building and storytelling. These four distinct modes of fantasy are defined by how the fantasy elements enter the text.²⁴

Portal fantasies revolve around characters travelling from the primary world into a secondary realm through a portal or gateway, initially serving as guides to unknown fantastical worlds. The reader is equally unfamiliar with the environment as the character and learns about the world as the protagonist learns.²⁵

In contrast, immersive fantasies put readers directly into imaginary worlds where protagonists seek their goals and adventures.²⁶ Unlike portal fantasies, where characters travel between worlds, immersive fantasies require readers to accept fantastical elements as normal within the narrative framework. Readers are encouraged to share the viewpoint character's familiarity with the fantasy world, fostering a deeper immersion in it.²⁷

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Ibid., 34-35.

²² Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, xxxix.

²³ Ibid., xxxix-xl.

²⁴ Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

²⁵ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, lv.

²⁶ James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, 2.

²⁷ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 1-li.

Meanwhile, intrusive fantasies present a twist on traditional portal narratives by introducing fantastical elements into the primary world. While other fantasies actively take place in secondary fantasy realms, intrusive fantasies depict fantastical elements breaking into the setting of the primary world (which might or might not be our own).²⁸

Portal, immersive, and intrusive fantasies offer diverse experiences within the realm of speculative fiction. Each mode presents unique opportunities for exploration, escapism, and imaginative engagement, reflecting the permanent appeal of fantasy literature. On the other hand, in liminal fantasies, such as dream fantasies or illusions, the magic might or might not be happening. It is up to the character and reader if they believe it or not.²⁹

1.3 Sub-genres of fantasy

Genre classification can be taken even further, with the fantasy genre consisting of many subgenres. When diving into the fantasy genre even more, there are several subgenres that each text can be classified into. In addition, most stories do not fit into only one subgenre but can be classified into more than one subgenre. The subgenre is based on where the story takes place, its themes, events in the narrative, and which fantastic elements are used and how are they utilized. The subgenres mentioned in this chapter are the most prominent ones or the ones that are related to the selected stories analysed in this thesis.

1.3.1 High and Low Fantasy

High fantasy, sometimes called epic fantasy, is a story set in a secondary realm with supernatural elements and its own rules and physical laws, often inspired by the medieval world. It is often longer, and the story involves multiple characters, rich histories, and many plots and contains many themes.³⁰ Magic is likely an integral part of the world, various mythical creatures exist, and protagonists can be part of grand adventures and overarching battles between good and evil.³¹

It is opposed by a low fantasy which is set in the primary world that is modified by the fantasy elements. The fantasy elements can be surprising to the characters, occurring for the first time or can be accepted and taken as a normal part of the world. Low fantasy is usually

²⁸ Ibid., xlix-l.

²⁹ James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, 2.

³⁰ Matic Večko, "William Morris and the critical utopia of high fantasy," *Acta Neophilologica* 42 (December 2009): 45-46.

³¹ Christopher Ortiz, "11 Fantasy Subgenres To Inspire Your Writing," Self-Publishing School, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://self-publishingschool.com/fantasy-subgenres/>.

shorter, less grand and less epic compared to high fantasy.³² However, low does not mean these stories are of poorer quality than high fantasy.

1.3.2 Dark fantasy/ Gothic fantasy

Subgenres of dark fantasy and gothic fantasy often overlap as they share many elements. The main purpose of dark fantasies is to evoke fear and uneasiness in the reader. It can be set in paranormal settings with gloomy atmosphere, works with themes such as horror, despair, shadows, fear, and darkness, it dives into the depths of the human psyche/nature. Typical elements in these types of stories are ghosts, cemeteries, tombs, monsters, and haunted abandoned places. The story can be blurring the line between the good and evil.³³

Gothic fantasies are similar to dark fantasies' moody atmospherics, picturesque scenery, and darkness.³⁴ It is often horrific and fearful, can use supernatural elements and plays with the readers' imagination. But at the same time, it is seen as ludicrous.³⁵ In some gothic works, an interpenetration between dark sublimity and ludicrousness can be observed.³⁶ Gothic fantasies use similar elements as horror and dark fantasies, for example, ghosts, undead creatures, monsters, and graveyards, which is why they are often put together.

1.3.3 Paranormal romance

Paranormal romances are low fantasy stories which blend supernatural elements with romantic themes. It revolves around fantastic creatures like vampires, werewolves, shifters, and faeries or witches.³⁷ This trope presents the supernaturals and such wild creatures of the night in a way that humanizes them, almost domesticates them.³⁸ Paranormal romances typically have female heroines who encounter these creatures and unfold relationships between them and set the focus on the plot and the characters' dynamic.³⁹

As frequent as a romantic subplot is, paranormal stories where no romance is involved exist as well. Some stories focus more on other aspects, pushing the romantic element aside. These stories are usually blurred together with other fantasy subgenres, for instance, urban and dark fantasy stories. The main difference between paranormal romances and dark

³² Večko, "William Morris and the critical utopia of high fantasy," 46.

³³ Ortiz, "11 Fantasy Subgenres To Inspire Your Writing."

³⁴ James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ Wyatt, Butcher, Hollands, Smith, Tritt, and Zellers, "Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101." 228.

³⁸ James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, 219-220.

³⁹ Ortiz, "11 Fantasy Subgenres To Inspire Your Writing."

fantasies is the “secret history being no longer secret,”⁴⁰ meaning that the existence of the supernatural is commonly known in that fantasy world of dark fantasy.⁴¹

1.3.4 Urban fantasy

Urban fantasies got their name because they are placed in an urban setting, usually in the present day in the real world. Elements that all urban fantasies share are a city with modern, urban societies, where also supernatural events occur. The prominent characters are typically artists, musicians, or scholars, sometimes interfering with human institutions, such as lawyers or police, and using contemporary slang.⁴² In the world of urban fantasy ordinary coexists with magical and supernatural elements and creatures within the urban city. The protagonists can be dealing with their daily lives, engaging in adventures, solving mysteries, or discovering their extraordinary abilities.⁴³ The subgenre can be interchangeable with paranormal fantasies or utopian novels.⁴⁴

1.3.5 Superhero fantasy

The main characters in superhero fantasies are heroes, with special superpowers or abilities. They can be born with these abilities or acquire them, most likely through scientific means. They then use these abilities and their sublime characteristics to engage in battles and save the world.⁴⁵ Common themes of superhero fantasies are heroism, identity, power, the heroes sometimes facing the consequences of their powers, and being the symbol of hope.⁴⁶ The stories are set in a low fantasy world, that is quite similar to our real world. Superhero narratives are linked to the old mythological tales and legends, which feature superhuman and superpowered villains and enemies, that appear across the centuries and cultures.⁴⁷

Superhero fantasies are often published in the form of comic books, but it is not a rule. However, the narrative of colourful pictures creates a sense that it is not worthy of serious discussion.⁴⁸ Lately, new approaches to this subgenre show the complexity of this subgenre, and even though these stories may not reach the same level of depth as classical literary

⁴⁰ James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature*, 222.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 200-202.

⁴³ Ortiz, “11 Fantasy Subgenres To Inspire Your Writing.”

⁴⁴ Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 975-976; Wyatt, Butcher, Hollands, Smith, Tritt, and Zellers, “Core Collections in Genre Studies: Fantasy Fiction 101.” 228

⁴⁵ Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 905-906.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dino Mušić, “Theory of Fantasy Literature 102: On Superhero Fiction.” Arcadia, August 28, 2022. <https://www.byarcadia.org/post/theory-of-fantasy-literature-102-on-superhero-fiction>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

works, still this medium allows its readers to experience the narrative completely and uniquely.⁴⁹

1.4 Importance of fantasy

For a long time, fantasy literature was not taken seriously as a genre, and was perceived solely as children's literature. The fact that this genre has a lot to offer to its readers was ignored. The idea of the importance of fantasy literature is that by immersing ourselves in the lives of literary characters, we gain insights into human experience.⁵⁰ Nowadays, fantasy literature can be enjoyed by both children and adults.⁵¹ Through intricate storytelling techniques and imaginative world-building, authors captivate audiences, inviting them on journeys of discovery and wonder.⁵²

The development of fantasy literature showcases the richness of human imagination and the evolving relationship between readers and fictional worlds. Whether grounded in reality or steeped in fantasy, literature continues to offer valuable insights into the human experience, encouraging readers to explore diverse narratives and expand their understanding of the world.⁵³ As readers embark on these literary adventures, they not only escape the confines of reality but also confront universal truths and profound questions about existence, identity, and the nature of reality itself. This exploration of fantasy literature's evolution and its impact on readers underlines the permanent power of storytelling to illuminate the human condition and inspire imagination.⁵⁴ An important part a fantasy literate can play, just like any other type of literature is to show different people and help with representation and identity.⁵⁵ Furthermore, fantasy can help foster empathy and understanding, readers can develop a greater appreciation and gain insight into the struggles of others. It can foster a sense of wonder and curiosity and inspire in countless ways.

It's crucial to mention that while novels offer valuable perspectives, they may not fully capture the complexities of real-life individuals. Fantasy novels additionally provide a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jack Zipes, "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 10, Iss. 4, Art.3 (2008):2, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss4/3/>

⁵¹ Jessica Dassler, "Women in Literature: The Impact of Feminism on Fantasy Literature, 1950-1990," *International Social Science Review*, vol. 97, Iss. 4 (2021): 13, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/women-literature-impact-feminism-on-fantasy-1950/docview/2641935347/se-2>.

⁵² Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, xlix.

⁵³ Zipes, "Why Fantasy Matters Too Much," 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

departure from our world by gradually introducing fantastical elements into familiar settings.⁵⁶ It provides a great function of temporary escapism into fantasies, offering a sort of rest from the stresses and pressures of everyday life.

From ancient myths to modern epics, literature serves as a mirror reflecting the complexities of human experience while inviting readers to envision worlds beyond their own. As people delve into the realms of fantasy, they embark on voyages of the mind, traversing landscapes of wonder, mystery, and magic. In doing so, readers discover not only new worlds but also deeper insights into themselves, their minds, and the world.⁵⁷

1.5 Women and Fantasy Literature

The field of literature had always been the province of men, with predominantly male authors. And the genre of fantasy literature is no exception to this. Female authors have eventually found their way into all genres of literature to match men. Women started to enter the genre of fantasy literature later, especially after the Second Women's Rights Movement in the 1960s, which aimed for equality between men and women.⁵⁸

Before the 1960s, fantasy literature was dominated by male authors, who were writing stories with strong and interesting male protagonists with no or few female characters.⁵⁹ Female characters in fantasy narratives tended to be portrayed in a negative light. Women in these stories were portrayed as one-dimensional, evil, ugly, and unintelligent, and served only one purpose, which was to help the main male protagonist.⁶⁰

Not all fantasy writers view them this way. For instance, J.R.R. Tolkien's female characters in his most famous works are beautiful, intelligent and strong-willed. However, there are just a few of them and even he stated was unable to write an epic fantasy centred around a woman. That was because at that time men in the stories had adventures and women were there only as damsels in distress or to offer a piece of advice.⁶¹

And this was what feminists and female authors wanted to change, to show that women and female protagonists can achieve the same things as men and are too worthy of respect.⁶²

The Women's Rights Movement that took place in America in the 1960s was fighting for equal rights and pay, the same opportunities in the workplace and for women to no longer

⁵⁶ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, xlix-1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, lvi.

⁵⁸ Dassler, "Women in Literature: The Impact of Feminism on Fantasy Literature, 1950-1990," 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

be subjected to sexual harassment.⁶³ This political movement helped to shape the genre of fantasy literature and brought more women into fantasy among other outcomes. The movement was fighting not only for equality in society but for equal representation in popular culture as well.⁶⁴ First feminist writers were still writing the same narrative with strong male heroes but in the 1970s they were able to move away from this narrative and started writing their female characters stronger and more interesting than male characters. The male author took more time to change the narrative as they had a more difficult time seeing women and female characters in a different light, as the heroes of the stories.⁶⁵ At first fantasy novels with strong female characters were written by women only, but with time male authors followed. Since then both genres viewed female characters as beautiful, witty, charming and able to lead people and to “change the curse of a nation as well as any man.”⁶⁶

Fantasy literature has evolved greatly, and the Second Women’s Rights Movement is partly responsible for it. It enabled women to break into the male-dominated genre, change it, and bring equality there. Without the feminist movement and its female writers many of today’s literary heroines, such as Beatrice from the *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth, Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series, or Suzanne Collins’ Katniss from *The Hunger Games*, and Ric Riordan’s Annabeth from the *Percy Jackson*, would not exist.⁶⁷

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

2 V. E. SCHWAB

One of the popular and successful female writers of today is V. E. Schwab. Her work falls perfectly into the fantasy genre, whether her books for children or her young adult novels, which are being wildly discussed and getting attention everywhere, especially on social media.

V.E. Schwab, full name Victoria Elizabeth Schwab, is a British-American author based in Edinburg. She was born in California in 1987. She publishes her adult and young adult novels under the name V. E. Schwab, and middle-grade and children's books can be found under the name Victoria Schwab.⁶⁸

Originally, she went to university to study Astrophysics.⁶⁹ She has graduated from Communication Design after changing her major six times. After that, she got a Master's in Medieval Art History at the University of Edinburgh.⁷⁰ Her interest in many fields and attempts at different major courses helped her learn more things than what she graduated from.

Before graduating from university, she had already found herself a literary agent, and in 2011 she published her first novel, *The Near Witch*. Since then, she has written and published more than twenty novels, most of them being fantasy literature.⁷¹ Her most successful works are the standalone book *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, and the series *A Shades of Magic*. Many of her works have reached the title 'New York Times Bestseller', a title given to the books that capture interest and sell more copies than other works.⁷²

The books selected for the purpose of this thesis are *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, the author's most famous book, then *Gallant*, her latest published work and *Vicious*, which belongs among V. E. Schwab's older books and is according to her readers, probably the author's finest work.⁷³

⁶⁸ "V. E. Schwab," *Shades of Magic Wiki*, Fandom. n.d, accessed April 25, 2024.

https://shadesofmagic.fandom.com/wiki/V._E._Schwab#Personal_life

⁶⁹ "FAQs," V. E. Schwab, Accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.veschwab.com/about/faqs/>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Works," V. E. Schwab, Accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.veschwab.com/>

⁷² J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

⁷³ "Ratings & Reviews," Goodreads Inc., *Villains #1: Vicious*, Accessed August 10, 2024.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40874032-vicious?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=7STmP37j8Q&rank=1

3 INVISIBLE LIFE OF ADDIE LARUE

This fantasy novel about a girl who cannot be remembered quickly became a bestseller in 2020. The main character, Addie LaRue, makes a deal with the devil and in a moment of desperation trades her soul for freedom and time. But this deal has some side effects – everybody she meets forgets her once she is out of their sight. Unknown and forgotten Addie wanders through decades and centuries until she meets a man who is the only one who remembers her. Throughout the story, many time-skips and flashbacks appear to depict Addie's life through history and how she ended up cursed.

The story can be classified as a subgenre of low fantasy, paranormal romance, and urban fantasy. It takes place in the primary world, mostly in the cities of New York and Paris, and the main character develops a romantic relationship with a mysterious god-like man. According to James and Mendlesohn, it belongs among intrusive fantasies as the fantasy elements are introduced to the primary world.

3.1 The plot

The story begins in 18th-century France in a small village Villon with a young girl Adeline who has always dreamed of the world and longed for freedom and adventure. Her mother does not like Adeline's wild nature. Her father is not so strict with her and rather supports her interest in painting and drawing by bringing her sketchbooks and pencils from the nearest town. The only person who truly understands Addie is an old woman named Estelle, who is a free spirit and teaches Addie about many things but most importantly about the old gods, how to pray to them but warns her to "never pray to the gods that answer after dark."⁷⁴ Fast forward a couple of years later, Adeline is now 23 years old and is supposed to get married. Addie does not want to but her parents pressure her to do so. On the day of marriage, she escapes and runs to the forest to pray to the old gods, not noticing the sun has already fallen behind the horizon. She prays to have a life of her own, to live freely and not to be bound to anyone. Never before had the gods answered her prayers but this time something emerged from the shadows appearing in the shape of a beautiful stranger Addie used to dream of meeting. This man, perhaps a devil himself, does not care about what is Addie offering but closes a deal with her – a deal where she gives up her soul when she does not want it anymore. After this encounter, she returns home, however, nobody in the village recognizes her, not even her parents. She cannot say her name, the words get stuck in her throat, she

⁷⁴ V. E. Schwab, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, (New York: A Tor Book, 2020), 30.

cannot leave any mark and vanishes from people's minds the moment they close a door, or she is out of their sight. As it is very painful for her to stay in Villon, she decides to leave and explore the world just as she wanted before.

During all the years she navigates through her life and her curse, she learns how to survive even though she cannot die, and what she can and cannot do, for instance, to own any possessions as they disappear over time. Unable to say her name, her story or leave any mark on her own, she finds a way to plant ideas into other people's minds and how to inspire great artists she meets. Most of the time she is struggling with the loneliness of her immortal life, yearning for connection and meaning in a world where her presence is fleeting. The only person who knows her is the dark entity, the man she named Luc, who appears every year to remind her and to ask her if she's prepared to give him her soul. The story jumps between the present time (New York 2014) and flashbacks to Addie's past throughout the three hundred years. In the flashbacks to the past, Addie happens to be part of the French Revolution, and both World Wars, and manages to travel through Europe and learn numerous languages.

In present-day New York Addie roams around and walks into a used bookstore. She tries to steal a book but is caught by Henry Strauss who works there. He lets her take the book anyway. She doesn't think much of it because she knows he will forget her like everybody else. But to her surprise when she comes back the next day with the stolen book Henry confronts her, saying that he remembers her from the day before. Addie is shocked and does not understand but tries to keep Henry by her side for as long as possible, afraid he might forget her again. Late at night before they part ways, she is able for the first time say her real name. She spends the next day with Henry and continues meeting him. He still remembers her, which makes Adeline happy but wants to know how it is possible.

Henry introduces Addie to his friends and is surprised when one of them does not recognise Addie, even though he met her before, so she tells him the truth about why nobody remembers her and explains her curse. To her surprise, Henry understands and admits that he also made a deal with the devil. Henry has always been really sensitive, often using alcohol and drugs to numb his feelings. So, when his girlfriend of two years declined his marriage proposal, he was devastated and wanted to take his own life. Then a devil appears and strikes a deal with Henry, who wants to be loved and be good enough for everybody around him and trades his soul for it. This is the reason why everyone likes Henry because they see what they want to see and not the real Henry. Which is also a reason why he does

not forget Addie. However, he has only been given one year to live and he's about to die in a month.

Before Luc makes his annual visit, Addie starts to tell Henry her life story as he writes it down. When Luc appears, Addie begs him to spare Henry's life, which he declines. In a desperate attempt to save Henry, Addie strikes a new deal with Luc, sacrificing her freedom for Henry's life. Before she disappears, she asks him to remember her. Henry, therefore, writes this book about Addie's life stories.

3.2 Fantasy elements

In this story, the fantasy elements are part of the primary world. The first fantasy element introduced to the reader is the dark entity, a god that answered Addie in the forest. He then brings the most noticeable fantasy elements to the story: the curse and the magic associated with it and its side effects. These fantasy elements are the most prominent ones therefore the thesis will focus on them.

3.2.1 Curse

From the synopsis and summary of the book, the most obvious and crucial element and theme is the curse that was cast on Addie. It is also the reason for the whole plot. In the first part of the book, Addie is portrayed as unrestrained, wild, and with a desire to learn about the world. She wants to fall in love on her terms or rather not be bound to anyone. Therefore, when she is pushed by her parents to marriage she does not want with a man she does not love she runs to the forest and prays to whatever god may be listening to free her from this destiny. And one answers this time. And she strikes a deal that gets herself cursed based on her own words. "I do not want to belong to anyone but myself. I want to be free. Free to live, and to find my own way, to love, or to be alone, but at least it is my choice, and I am tired of not having choices, so scared of the years rushing past beneath my feet. I do not want to die as I've lived, which is no life at all."⁷⁵ is her plea for a better life, for an opportunity to live life to the fullest and on her own terms.

The god accuses her of not knowing what she wants and that she is only wasting his time. "You do not know.... You ask for time without limit. You want freedom without rule. You want to be untethered. You want to live exactly as you please."⁷⁶ And therefore, he declines her request. He feels that even if he would receive Addie's soul for all this, she asks

⁷⁵ Schwab, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, 46.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

for too much, and most importantly, her part of the offer is without a time limit. Addie is desperate and does not want to come back to her old life and does not want to waste the opportunity, because this is the only god that has answered her prayers. So she adds to her demand “You want an ending,” she says. “Then take my life when I am done with it. You can have my soul when I don’t want it anymore.”⁷⁷ The god agrees to this extension and kisses Addie to seal the deal.

This deal does not come across as Addie wanted, because nobody knows her and immediately forgets her the moment she is from the sight. She should have known that the god would not be fair, especially when she was warned against him. All because she was not careful with the wording of her wish and the darkness wants her soul as soon as possible. And in order to obtain her soul, which she needs to give up herself, the god tries to make her life miserable and uneasy, so that does not want to live anymore.

The reason why nobody remembers her might be because she asked for freedom and didn’t want to belong to anyone. Nobody remembers her in order not to form any kind of relationship or belonging with her. The deal Addie made is seen as a curse because of its negative impact and side effects. If Addie were more careful with her wish and wording, it might be seen differently, perhaps as a magical wish or blessing.

In Henry’s case, his deal with the god is also seen as a curse. Henry has made a deal after his girlfriend rejected his marriage proposal. Henry has always been too sensitive, lacked confidence and didn’t meet the expectations of people around him. He just wanted to be loved. “I don’t know who they want me to be. They tell you to be yourself, but they don’t mean it, and I’m just tired...” His voice breaks. “I’m tired of falling short. Tired of being... ..”⁷⁸ And then a stranger appears next to him and offers him exactly what he longs for in exchange for Henry’s soul. “You want to be loved,” says the stranger, “by all of them. You want to be *enough* for all of them. And I can give that to you, for the price of something you won’t even miss.”⁷⁹

Henry who is drunk agrees with this trade. However, unlike Addie, he does not think about time and is given only a year until the devil comes back to collect his soul. Henry’s remaining time is shown on a watch. “Four months she’s been with Henry, and in that time, the hour hand has crept from half past six to half past ten. Four months, and four hours closer to midnight, and she always assumed it would go around again. (...) But there are only

⁷⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 233.

twelve hours on a watch, only twelve months in a year, and he wouldn't, he *couldn't* be so foolish."⁸⁰ But Henry was foolish. Because a year was not enough, especially when he wasn't happy with what he got from the deal. People stopped seeing him as who he truly was, and he didn't like that. Suddenly everything works out for him, everybody loves him, and appears to be perfect to everyone because they now see what they want to see. Everyone except for Addie. She just wants to be remembered and is not looking for anything else in Henry. She sees him the way he is, not because Henry's curse does not apply to her, but just because she does not care about Henry's qualities and personal traits.

The two curses work very differently. Each of the characters ends up being cursed for a different reason and their deals have various side effects and consequences. While Addie's curse can last for eternity, Henry has been given only a year, until the dark entity comes to collect his soul. Both curses affect the way the characters are perceived by people around them. While Henry is perfect for everyone, Addie does not exist.

The author gets repetitive with these situations, where Addie is immediately forgotten, and how she takes advantage of these situations. The repetitiveness can be boring for a reader, but it shows how difficult it must have been for Addie to live through all these years. The character of Addie is very stubborn and does not want to give up easily on her soul, she wants to prove to the god that she does not regret her deal and is happy with her life even though it is not always true. There are moments of weakness when she reconsiders giving up on her soul and her lonely life but that would mean admitting that she made a mistake, and the darkness would win their little game of mouse and cat.

While Addie fights with the dark entity for her soul and life, Henry has accepted his fate and seems to be ready to die, when the time comes. The biggest difference is not in the curses themselves but in the approach of the characters towards them.

3.2.2 Dark Entity

The strange man who makes deals with desperate people in exchange for a soul is not a human being. It is never precisely stated what he is. He might be some dark powerful magical entity unexplained. Not everything fantastic has a logical explanation. Even when Addie asks, it gives an uncertain answer. "So tell me—tell me—tell me," it echoes. "Am I the devil—the devil—or the dark—dark—dark? Am I a monster—monster—or a god—god—god—or ..."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid., 378-379.

⁸¹ Schwab, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, 44.

It is spoken about as a god, but it does not claim to be one, it compares itself to darkness. “I am not some genie, bound to your whim.” He pushes off the tree. “Nor am I some petty forest spirit, content with granting favors for mortal trinkets. I am stronger than your god and older than your devil. I am the darkness between stars, and the roots beneath the earth.”⁸²

It takes on the form of a man Adeline has dreamed of meeting when it appears in front of her for the first time. “The voice splits, doubles, rattling through tree limbs and snaking over moss, folding over on itself until it is everywhere.”⁸³ At first, it is just a voice, then a shadow moving in the forest and then finally shapeshifts into a man. “The shadows in the woods begin to pull together, drawn like storm clouds. But when they settle, the edges are no longer wisps of smoke, but hard lines, the shape of a man, made firm by the light of the village lanterns at his back.”⁸⁴

When it meets Henry for the first time, it is less obvious that it is some dark entity and not just an ordinary man. However, the signs are there. When he appears out of nowhere and even in heavy rain, he stays completely dry. “Henry is not sure when the man sits down beside him on the step. One second, Henry is alone, and the next, he is not.”⁸⁵ “Even though the rain is still falling hard, still soaking through Henry’s wool jacket, ... It never touches him. It falls all around him, but he stays dry.”⁸⁶

The entity appears once Addie starts praying to the gods. “The trees murmur overhead, and then go still, as if they too are waiting, and Adeline prays, to every god in the Villon woods, to anyone and anything who will listen.”⁸⁷ This might be the reason she treats the entity as a god. It might be an easier way to understand its existence. But it raises the question of this being more of a religious element than a fantasy one. It is uncommon in the real world, but religious people believe in the occurrences of religious figures. If this is treated as a religious figure instead of a fantasy element, it is less unrealistic, it is a matter of fate and religious belief.

3.2.3 Immortality

Immortality is another element brought into our real world. In this case, it is Addie who lives through centuries and doesn’t get older, at least in her appearance. She was scared to live a

⁸² Ibid., 46.

⁸³ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

life not long enough. "...so scared of the years rushing past beneath my feet. I do not want to die as I've lived, which is no life at all."⁸⁸ The reason she does not age is hidden in her curse. "Then take my life when I am done with it. You can have my soul when I don't want it anymore."⁸⁹ Luc cannot take her soul until she gives up on it willingly by herself. It is a side-effect of her curse that she didn't take into account while saying her wish for freedom and unbound life. Her immortality enables her to live through centuries and countless important historical events. This does not apply to the Henry's curse. He did not ask for any extra time when agreed to the deal with the dark entity.

3.2.4 Magic

A certain magic appears every time Addie is forgotten by another person. The magic does not happen with Addie but with everybody around her. As she leaves a room, thanks to the curse she is by magic erased from people's memory. She also cannot leave a trace. When she breaks a wooden bird made by her dad, it magically fixes itself and seems unbroken. Same as when she spills the wine, but it does not leave a stain on a carpet.

Due to the magic of the curse is unable to say or write her name. Her vocal cords do not allow her to say her name and when she tries to write her name, it disappears just like any other trace of her existence. She cannot own anything as it goes missing over time, magically disappearing.

It is her punishment. She was warned by Estelle, but she still underwent the risk, made a deal, and sold her soul. Because of her own foolish mistake and carelessness, she summoned a dark god and sealed a deal that was not beneficial for her. Or maybe, the deal would be good for her, but she had prayed to the wrong god, and now she has to face the consequences.

In Henry's case, the magic is placed too not on him but on people around him, when they see him in a way they want. He is annoyed by that and wishes for someone to see the true him. And that someone is Addie, who does not wish for a perfect version of Henry, but to be seen and remembered. That is where the curses interfere and exclude each other, creating a hole in the deals and each character having at least one person who truly sees them and does not forget them.

The entire story becomes whole as all the fantasy elements meddle together. Just like Addie cannot be remembered and Henry is not perceived as who he is, there are magical side

⁸⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 47.

effects of curses sent upon them and the curses were cast by a dark entity or unknown god, all in exchange for soul. All these elements together make the novel a great example of a low fantasy and paranormal romance book.

4 GALLANT

Gallant is the latest work published by V. E. Schwab. It is a gothic tale about a place where the world meets its shadow and Olivia Prior who misses three things: her mother, her father and her voice. She arrives at a place called Gallant to find out about her parents and to understand her family's purpose. Only to discover the ancient realm and the Death in it waiting for her.

The whole book is divided into 6 parts, each one of them begins with a black page that tells what is happening in the other realm, where the dark master lives. The book is also interlaced with many abstract pictures and pages as if from a different book or journal.

The story is another example of intrusive fantasy where fantasy elements appear in our world, mixed with a portal fantasy, where the protagonist transfers into a different world through a portal or some passageway.

4.1 The plot

The book conveys the story of a young girl Olivia, who lives in a Merilance School for Independent Girls where she was left as a baby. The only thing that reminds her of her mother is her journal she left with her, even though most notes in it make no sense and seems her mother has gone mad. Olivia has always wanted to belong. She longs for home and family; she misses her parents and her voice – Olivia is mute. This disability of hers makes her a target of bullying from other girls at the orphanage. Not to stand out more than that, Olivia can also see ghouls, half-formed spirits who haunt the school.

One day she receives a letter from her uncle she didn't know existed who invites her to Gallant, the Prior family residence. Her mother warns her in her journal about Gallant not to go there, but Olivia wants a home and now she might have some relatives who can care about her. When she gets to Gallant, nobody expects her there. She finds out that her uncle has been dead for a year. The staff at the manor, Hannah and Edgar, accept her but her cousin Matthew is hostile towards her and wants her to leave. But Olivia has started to feel at home and stays at Gallant. She sees ghouls roaming the halls of the manor, she recognizes her uncle and mother among them. She immediately notices that this place holds many secrets.

She slowly starts to uncover all the manor's secrets. Secrets about her mother and her diary, about Matthew and his nightmares that tormented him in his sleep, about the duty of the Prior family and most importantly about the crumbling brick wall in the garden and the world on the other side of the wall – the shadow world, opposite world of this 'real' one. From her mother's diary, she finds out she went behind the wall once and met Death, but

Olivia's father helped her escape. Olivia's father was a shadow, a guardian created by Death from one of his bones. Apart from him, other three shadows were created. Olivia's parents begin to exchange messages, which happen to be notes and strange abstract images in the journal Olivia has, that she couldn't decipher earlier. Messages on how they will run away and later Olivia's mother messages as she was lonely and haunted by nightmares.

Olivia wants to see the wall to know how her parents communicated but unfortunately, she drops the journal on the other side of the wall. When she crosses the wall to get it, she appears in front of a mansion that looks like Gallant but slightly wrong and the world around is missing colours – it is the shadow world. Unable to open the iron door in the wall to get back to safety, she enters the manor of the wrong Gallant. Inside she sees Death, just like her mother. But when she's running from it to safety, it is the ghouls of this world who help her to get back to the real world, where Matthew happens to close the door in the wall with his blood.

After that, he explains everything to Olivia, about the shadow world and the Priors that came to that place ages ago to protect the wall and that their blood seals the door and does not allow the Death to escape into this world. Also, why many Priors have gone mad as they are often tormented by the Death in their sleep when the mind is the weakest to make them open the gate to the world.

Olivia goes behind the wall again to try to save Matthew's brother, but he is already dead. On the other side of the wall Death already awaits her and admits to writing the letter to get her to come to Gallant, then shows her how her parents met, that he created her father and took his life in the end. He promises her to bring her parents back to life if she opens the gate for him. Olivia refuses but when she is running back Death escapes.

Olivia with the help from ghouls and Matthew gets the Death behind the wall into the shadow world and closes the gate, sealing it with her own blood. Unfortunately, Matthew who is weak from lack of sleep and is hurt, dies afterwards. Olivia chooses Gallant as her home and stays there to protect the wall.

4.2 Fantasy elements

This story possesses many elements that can be identified as fantasy elements. From the beginning of the story, paranormal phenomena in the form of ghouls are mentioned. Later on, Olivia discovers her family's residence which unfolds many unexplainable things, the most dominant one is the gate or portal to another realm. In the new world, she encounters Death and the ghosts of her dead ancestors, among many other fantastic powers and secrets.

4.2.1 Shadow realm

The shadow realm is the other world Olivia transports to when she walks through the door in the wall in the garden. The world looks almost identical to the real world but it's much darker and feels somehow wrong, even before she discovers the Death that inhabits it. In both worlds, the mansion of Galland stands but in the shadow realm it is as if "it has all the right features, arranged the wrong way."⁹⁰

Mathew later explains the existence of such a place. "Everything casts a shadow," he begins. "Even the world we live in. And as with every shadow, there is a place where it must touch. A seam, where the shadow meets its source."⁹¹ And that seam is the wall in the garden. The world is mirrored to the real one – what is in the real Gallant is in the shadow one as well, just like the secret doors and passages, and the list with addresses where Olivia could have been.

The other world is a source of evil, the reason for the fantastic and supernatural elements to exist. It is the realm of Death, the dark master that tries to escape it and to satisfy its hunger for the living things from the real world. That might be one of the reasons why is everything dark and dead in the shadow realm as it was ingested by the Death.

4.2.2 The Death

Death is portrayed very differently in various countries and cultures. V. E. Schwab portrays Death as a male, an English or Germanic perception of death, in comparison to other cultures that personified Death as a woman, whether young or old or even as a skeleton with a black cloak and scythe.⁹² In the story, it is described as "A man, and not a man.... Dressed in a high-collared coat, his hair the black of wet soil, his skin the off-white of ashes gone cold, and his eyes... are the flat and milky white of Death."⁹³ and referred to as 'the dark master.' He seems "somehow ancient but not old."⁹⁴

Interestingly, Death does not have only the power of destruction but also the ability of creation in this story. It is able to create real people from his bones, but they lack consciousness and don't have their own will. They are puppets of their creator. The Death uses his bones to create several dancers to watch for his own enjoyment.

⁹⁰ V. E. Schwab, *Gallant*, (London: Titan Books, 2022), 184.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁹² Karl Siegfried Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7-8, <https://assets.cambridge.org/97805215/91959/sample/9780521591959web.pdf>

⁹³ V. E. Schwab, *Gallant*, 191.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

He also created four shadow knights from his bones, who are devoted to him and protect him. With time they gained their own will and one of the shadows ran away with Olivia's mother, becoming her father.

This leads to a thought or assumption, that Death can be Olivia's parent or grandparent if Olivia's father was created from Death's bone. He even refers to himself as her family. It would provide an explanation for the unusual powers and abilities Olivia has, such as the ability to see the ghouls of dead people and the power of resurrection, which is shown when she brings dead animals and flowers back to life while she was in the shadow realm.

She sometimes feels like she belongs to the other world more than she belongs to the real world. "*Run*, says her blood. *Stay*, say her bones."⁹⁵ She is a child of both worlds. It gives her special powers and at the end makes the last Prior and the only person who can open the gate and free Death.

4.2.3 Ghouls

Ghosts are a typical paranormal element in fantasy and other stories. On the other hand, ghouls are much less common. These two terms, albeit used interchangeably sometimes, describe completely different beings. While ghosts are spirits of deceased people, ghouls are monsters that haunt graveyards and feast on human flesh. In every story, ghosts have various abilities and different appearances.⁹⁶

Here in this story, the author uses the word ghoul, but she talks about the souls of the people who died in that particular place. In Gallant, they are described as ghosts and floating pieces of what those people once used to be, weightless as shadows.

Ordinary people cannot see them. That is why they are only seen by Olivia and Death, as they are no longer part of the living world and belong to Death. Death and Olivia both also possess the ability to order them, but Death has control over the ghouls in his shadow world and Olivia over those dead at Gallant in the real world. Their purpose here is to guide Olivia and to help her in the final fight against Death when they push Death back into the shadow world.

4.2.4 Curse of the Family

The Prior's family duty to protect the gate to the shadow world does not come with an explanation. The whole story does not say why it has to be Priors to stay at Gallant. Mathew

⁹⁵ Ibid., 259.

⁹⁶ "Difference Between Ghouls and Ghosts," Difference Between.Com, last modified September 28, 2017, <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-ghouls-and-vs-ghosts/>

explains to Olivia that some invisible, unexplained power called their family to come to Gallant. “Some people are repelled by darkness. Others are drawn to it. To the static crackle of power in a place. To the hum of magic, or the presence of the dead. They can see these forces staining the world like ink in water. Our family was like that. I told you Gallant wasn’t built by Priors. The house was already here. Empty and waiting. And the Priors came. They felt called to the house, and when they arrived, they saw the wall for what it was – a threshold. A line between.”⁹⁷

Priors have never built Gallant, nor the wall in between the worlds, they were fixing cracks in it and when Death broke through it, they pushed it back, placed an iron door into the hole through which Death escaped, and sealed the door with their blood. After that, the door cannot be opened without Prior’s blood given up willingly. Mathew thought for a long time that he was the last Prior and that after his death there would be no one who could open the iron door, and therefore Death would be stuck in its realm forever.

Priors are not bound to Gallant, they can leave freely, they are just simply pulled toward the place by an invisible string. Ironically, they are the most vulnerable at Gallant, where the influence of the Death is the strongest. Therefore, it might lead the reader to think it is not a curse, and the force that makes Priors stay at Gallant is more likely to be Death’s doing and his attempts to escape, as the author does not offer any further explanation for this.

4.2.5 Dreams and Nightmares

The Death tries to escape its prison, but he knows he needs Prior’s blood to open the door. Therefore, he gets into the minds of Priors when they are asleep, tortures them in their dreams and tries to make them open the gate. He knows that they are the weakest in their sleep and that is where he attacks. In these nightmares, he causes them pain and other unpleasant things. And when they try to avoid sleep, their mind gets even weaker and is easier to control.

Through these dreams and nightmares, Death lured Mathew’s brother Thomas into the other world, made the boys’ father and Olivia’s uncle kill himself, he made Olivia’s mother mad, and tortures Mathew. The only dreams Olivia has, are about her mother or from the history of Gallant, all of them are supposed to convince her to come to the other world and to join Death and open the gate.

At first glance, dreams are not a fantasy element, as dreams are something we can experience in real life. However, these dreams differ from the normal dreams we have. These

⁹⁷ V. E. Schwab, *Gallant*, 231.

dreams are created by Death itself in order to take control over the sleeping person. Dreams and even nightmares in our real lives cannot physically hurt a person as they can in this fantasy story.

4.2.6 Resurrection

Another interesting fantasy element that can be spotted in the book is the element of resurrection. When Olivia goes over the wall to get her mother's diary, she picks up a small bone of a mouse. "She doesn't realize her hand has closed over the little tooth until it *jumps*."⁹⁸ She does not even realize she has brought the mouse back to life. The same thing happens to a dead flower she touches. "And then she sees the plant she touched, no longer dead, but blooming, wild."⁹⁹ There is very little mentioned about this power of hers. It is very rare and extraordinary, just like her ability to communicate with the ghouls. It might be that being the daughter or granddaughter of Death gives her these powers. She might also possess other superpowers besides the ability of resurrection, just like Death does, but it is never directly mentioned in the book.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 185.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 186.

5 VICIOUS

Vicious is the first book from the duology Villains. The second book of this series is called Vengeful and was published five years later after the first book, Vicious. There is supposed to be one more book added to this series, called Victorious.¹⁰⁰ This thesis deals with Vicious only, as it is the series' first book and serves as an introduction to this story.

A tale of two college friends, Victor and Eli, who are interested in ExtraOrdinary people with supernatural abilities to the point where they attempt to obtain these abilities by themselves through near-death experiences. A series of disagreements and betrayals turn them against each other, making them arch enemies playing a game of cat and mouse trying to kill the other. The story comes with questions of ethics, morality, and humanity, alongside blurring lines between what it means to be a hero and a villain.

The story fulfils the criteria for a superhero fantasy, as well as an urban low fantasy. It is also an intrusive fantasy, which happens in the primary world instead of a new fantasy world.

5.1 The plot

The story constantly jumps between the present time and the past, slowly uncovering what happened and what let all characters come to this point. Everything started ten years ago at Lockland University where Victor Vale and Eli Cardale became roommates and later friends. They are both brilliant and very ambitious students. Victor is an introvert and appears awkward at times. Eli on the other hand is very charming and quite popular. Opposite to Victor who questions everything, he has a strong faith in God and often prays. But underneath his mask of a perfect guy, Victor senses something dark and twisted. All of this makes Victor fascinated and jealous of Eli, plus Eli dates Angie, with whom Victor has been in love since freshmen year.

When it comes to picking up topics for their senior thesis, Victor decides to focus on adrenaline and fight-or-flight reactions. Eli comes up with a topic of EOs and their creation. EOs are ExtraOrdinary people with some special power or ability. As Eli dives deep into research, he finds a link between trauma, near-death experiences and EOs. He creates a theory that people who went through near-death experiences, died for a split second but a lot of adrenaline, fear of death and strong will to live turned them into EOs.

¹⁰⁰ "Victorious," V. E. Schwab, Accessed March 17, 2024. <https://www.veschwab.com/books/victorious-3/>

Victor is again jealous of Eli's progress and does not want to be left behind. At first, he doubts Eli's theory but then he suggests elevating his thesis from theoretical to practical and offers to be the first subject to testing. Eli refuses in the beginning but eventually relents. Therefore, Victor overdoses himself on painkillers and alcohol. But it does not work and Eli calls an ambulance before Victor dies. Eli is determined to try it too. He drowns himself in an ice bath and Victor brings him back with epinephrine pens (EpiPens), warming pads and chest compressions. That night when Eli accidentally cuts himself, they discover that their attempt to create an EO has been successful as Eli now has the power of regeneration.

Victor is eager to try again but Eli refuses to help him because Victor has just got back from the hospital. He turns to Angie for help. She does not want to, but he manipulates her into it. She takes him to her lab to electrocute him. The pain is horrific, and the only thing Victor can think of before he dies. Then he revives thanks to a chemical compound he took beforehand. As he regains consciousness, he does not realize the power he now possesses and accidentally kills Angie. After this, he calls Eli who calls the police on him. Victor runs away from his cell to talk to Eli.

But Eli cannot handle what has happened. He blames Victor for Angie's death, while Victor accuses Eli of reporting him to the police and accusing him of being an EO. He tells him about Detective Stell, who is hunting the EOs. After that, he stabs Eli and uses his power on him – causing him pain. Eli does not see Victor as a human but a monster in human skill, claiming that Victor is dead. He shoots him two times. Victor cannot feel the pain but is losing a lot of blood rather quickly. The last thing before he loses consciousness is another gunshot and Eli again calling the police. Later he is taken to a prison.

Eli tells the policemen that Victor has been acting strangely for the past few days and attacked him. When he hears about Detective Stell, he leaves. Eli goes to Professor Lyne who has a copy of his research which could turn out Eli incriminating. He destroys the copies, however, on his way back he runs into Professor Lyne. They have a small argument during which Eli pushes the professor down the stairs and kills him. After this incident, he leaves school and, with his newly found belief that all EOs are unnatural forces and should not exist, begins his search for other EOs in order to execute them all.

After many years he meets an EO, a young lady, he is unable to kill. Her name is Serena Clarke, a college student with an ability to make people do what she tells them, controlling others' will. He gets from Eli his real name and the reason why he wants to kill her. After that, she orders him not to do it and they even start a partnership and relationship. One day she secretly goes to a police station and gets Detective Stell and Officer Dane to help them

with their search for EOs. Eli does not agree, knowing Stell would be hunting him as an EO, but he is under Serena's influence, so he agrees and gets access to a police database making the tracking of EOs easier.

One of the names in the database is Sydney Clarke, Serena's younger sister. One day a year ago, ice on a frozen lake broke under them and they fell through into the freezing water. Both girls died and came back as EOs. Sydney now has the power to bring the dead back to life. One day Serena with Eli take Sydney into the woods, trying to kill her, but Eli misses, shooting her only in the arm. Sydney runs away and meets Victor, who broke away from prison after 10 years, with his cellmate Mitch.

Once Victor got out of prison, he began looking for Eli to take revenge on him. Sydney points out a picture in a newspaper, saying that is the guy who shot her. Victor recognizes Eli and the game of cat and mouse begins. Eli has police protection thanks to Serena. At first, Victor sends Eli a message that he is also in the town. And that he is with Sydney Eli thought he killed. With the help of Mitch, they found some potential EOs that Eli might be after. But they don't know who his next target will be. At the time when Eli kills another EO, Mitch has captured one of the police officers. Victor questions him and later tortures him by causing him unbearable pain. With the officer's ID, Mitch and Victor gain access to a police database. At one point, his phone starts ringing with an incoming call from Eli. Victor picks up the call and tells Eli he'll see him at midnight.

Eli wants to search for the last couple of EOs they have files on while he waits for midnight. One of the EOs, Dominic, is saved by Victor and Mitch. In return, he explains to them his power - the ability to walk through shadows, basically pausing time and becoming invisible as he travels through shadows. Victor takes his pain away in exchange for help during a 'fight' with Eli.

At a lonely construction building, Serena tries to use her power on Mitch, but Victor kills her before. They burn her body so that Sydney does not know and does not see her like that. When Sydney arrives there, she runs into Eli. She shoots him, but he immediately heals. Then she is taken by Victor and Dominic to the shadows and to safety with Mitch.

Victor comes back and fights Eli in a bloody battle with guns and knives. Eli uses knives similar to what Victor used on him in their college apartment 10 years ago, while Victor shoots Eli the same way he used to shoot him. Eli can heal but Victor bleeds out. He is dead before the police arrive. When the cops arrive, they are no longer controlled by Serena and arrest Eli for murdering Victor. The next night Mitch, Dominic and Sydney dig up Victor's body and Sydney revives him.

5.2 Fantasy elements

Fantasy elements in *Vicious* are the superpowers the characters possess. *Vicious* is one of the books belonging to the subgenre of superhero fantasy. Even though the main characters are no superheroes, it fulfils the criteria of the characters acquiring their powers through scientific means.

5.2.1 ExtraOrdinary

ExtraOrdinary is a term used in the novel for people with supernatural, extraordinary abilities. Eli is interested in them and writes his thesis on them. During his research, he finds a connection between ExtraOrdinary people, shorter EOs, and a traumatic near-death experience. Victor then comes up with a suggestion to test it in practice and try to turn themselves into EOs. They are successful and they gain some magical abilities. In order to gain them each of the characters needs to die for a little while and to be brought back to life. The ability they acquire depends on how they died and what were they thinking about and wishing for in the moment of dying. The supernatural abilities are not something flashy and magical, they cannot cast spells or anything like that. But they definitely can do things that are impossible for ordinary people and things that cannot happen in real life.

5.2.2 Self-Regeneration

The first to die and to get a superpower is Eli. He dies in his and Victor's apartment when he drowns in an ice bath and is brought back by Victor. He immediately feels quite well, definitely not like he was dead a few minutes ago. When they go for a drink, Eli stumbles, falls and cuts his hand on a broken bottle that lies there. Then they notice his cut starts to close and heal itself much more quickly than any other person.

Before Eli died, he prayed to God, to help him, to heal him. If that was his last thought before death, it could be the reason why he acquired this power. One of the side effects of Eli's healing ability is immortality. He can be fatally injured but he would heal and not die. He also did not age a day since the day he died and was reborn as an EO. This ability allows Eli to focus on his mission, which is to eliminate and execute all EOs. He knows he cannot be hurt and can't die, which enables him to stand against anybody.

5.2.3 Pain Control

Victor undertakes two attempts to die in order to become an EO. In his first, he gets drunk and tries to overdose on painkillers. His second attempt is successful when he asks his friend

Angie to electrocute him. He dies because of the electricity in him, and at that moment the only thing he is able to think of is the pain and how the dial and the pain were increasing.

After he is brought back and by mistake kills Angie, he begins to learn how to control pain. He is able to control his own pain, he can turn it off and not feel anything. In the upcoming years, he will learn how to cause pain to others, control the intensity of the pain and also how to turn off the pain of other people.

5.2.4 Resurrection

Sydney has died in a lake after a thin ice break under her and her older sister. When her lungs were filling with freezing water, she was reaching for her sister and wishing for her to come back. Therefore, she was gifted the ability to give second chances and to make people and animals come back to life.

Sydney and her power of resurrection create a few plot twists in this narrative. At first, she revives an EO that Eli killed, and most importantly at the end, she brings back to life Victor, who was also killed by Eli.

5.2.5 Mind control

Serena has died the same way as Sydney did. They died together, they suffered the same death, and both were revived. But Serena had a completely different attitude towards it. She refused to die and that formed her superpower of controlling the mind, the will, and in the end the actions of people around her. Everybody did whatever she told them to do, and regardless of how hard they tried or how strong their will was, they couldn't fight it.

With this power, she achieves anything she wants and even if people do not agree, they cannot fight it. She takes control over the police department which allows her and Eli to continue their hunt for EOs.

5.2.6 Shadows

In the end, Victor gets help from Dominic in the fight with Eli. Dominic is an EO, who survived an explosion in the mine. At that moment he felt enormous pain, but he didn't want to die, he just "wanted quiet and dark and...",¹⁰¹ so he was gifted that. He has received a peculiar ability of teleportation through shadows. "I call it walking in the shadows because I don't know any other term. I step into the darkness and can move from one place to another without being seen. Without time passing. Without anything. It looks like teleporting, I

¹⁰¹ V. E. Schwab, *Vicious*, (London: Titan Books, 2018), 340.

guess, but I have to physically move.”¹⁰² He describes his superpower to Victor with whom he makes a deal, that he helps him to fight Eli, and in return, he would take all his pain away. Dominic, who lives in severe pain, gladly agrees and helps everybody to get to safety using his special travelling method.

¹⁰² Ibid.

6 COMPARISON OF FANTASY ELEMENTS

V. E. Schwab has used some fantasy elements more than once in her books. But in each book, they are used differently and serve different purposes. Some of the similar or same fantasy elements repeatedly used by V. E. Schwab are curses, dark evil entities emerging from other realms, having special abilities or superpowers, one of them being the power of bringing people back to life, and then the author likes to use shadows and shady world.

6.1 Curse

The element of curse can be encountered in the *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* and *Gallant*. The principle of curse is simple, someone is bound to something or is stripped of some of his choices and possibilities, sometimes it is a form of punishment. In *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, the curse is the main theme and most significant element. A young woman is cursed for not listening to the warnings, her misjudgment and her faith in the wrong god. This ends up with her being cursed and forgotten, the curse making her life harder and more miserable. Later on, a young man has to face the curse too, giving up on his soul for a year when he won't be seen as he truly is. In his case, the curse does not create great problems in his life, but it does make living more uncomfortable rather than pleasant.

In *Gallant*, the curse is not so evident and not so strong. There was a calling when the Prior family arrived at Gallant and when it became their duty to protect the wall and the gate, but it was not a curse in the same sense in which Addie and Henry were cursed. However, it is again something that makes life more difficult. Priors have to take care of the house, and the garden, to protect the gate and the most horrific thing: they are attacked by Death in their dreams. However, they can leave the place as they are not bound to it by any means. They do not trade souls and do not make deals for any benefits, although they often pay with their health, both mental and physical when trying to resist Death.

6.2 Dark Entity and Death

V. E. Schwab has used in her two newest books the element of a strange entity. In *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, there appears one of the gods that answers after the sunset, in the dark. A similar thing can be spotted in the author's newest book *Gallant*, where the protagonist visits a different world, a world of Death.

One of the mutual things between these two elements is the relationship between the main character and these dark men. Addie forms a romantic relationship with the dark entity, the evil god who uses the appearance of her dream man. On the other hand, Olivia discovers

that she partly belongs to the shadow realm of *Gallant*, as she is the daughter or stepdaughter of the Death. So, she has a family relation to it. While Addie seeks Luc's attention and his company, Olivia tries her best to avoid meeting with Death.

As a mutual aspect can be seen their evil intentions, such as taking over the world, getting souls, and hurting people in order to achieve that. The god that Addie named Luc, is part of this world, while Death lives in a world different from ours.

6.3 Resurrection

This fantastic superpower was used by the author in *Gallant* and *Vicious*. Regardless of the differences between these two novels, this element is used the same way. In both cases, it is simply about bringing the dead back to life. Only small differences exist. In *Gallant*, Olivia can revive only small animals and flowers. Nobody knows if she can resurrect a whole person. In the other story, *Vicious* Sydney can revive people and animals. In her case, there is no certainty that she can make dead flowers alive again.

Interesting is the similarity of this power being given to young teenage girls in both these books. But while one of them had to die to gain this power, the other was most likely born with it, even though it is never explicitly mentioned.

6.4 Magic and Superpowers

The magic systems work in V. E. Schwab's works uniquely. Every book has different fantasy elements and works differently with magic. In *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, the magic is the side-effect of the curse. Addie does nothing, no spells or magic but people around her still forget her. The same goes with Henry, who does not want others to look at him differently, but they still do. The magic is not in their power.

Vicious approaches the theme and elements of superpowers in an opposite kind of way. In this novel, the characters actively work with their abilities, and it is as if they could cast some types of magic. What makes the story of *Vicious* pretty unique is the way of characters get these powers. It is not common for characters to acquire super abilities by themselves through near-death experiences and actual death.

6.5 Shadow realms

The world of shadows can be found in *Gallant* and *Vicious*, but they are very different in each novel. In the older novel, a character named Dominic acquires a strange power of transporting from one place to another by entering a world of shadows and walking through

it. That world is our real world but at the same time, it is not. It is an ability he could use after he died and was brought back to life.

Gallant contains a whole new world which also seems to be the same on the first sight but on the second everything there feels wrong. This world does not consist solely of shadows but is inhabited by Death.

CONCLUSION

Fantasy has been around since the beginning of the storytelling. It first had a form of myths and legends, later on, it shapeshifted into fairy tales and children's literature. But there is much more to it. Fantasy literature could be described as storytelling that breaks away from our real-world understanding of what is possible and presents impossible features in the narratives. This topic is covered in the first part of this thesis, which includes a detailed description of fantasy history and its division into different variations. Fantasy literature, even though a relatively young genre in terms of naming and establishing has a deep history and contains numerous sub-genres. It also points out the importance of fantasy literature in today's world and society, and why it matters. The next chapter focuses on V. E. Schwab, who is a many-time awarded best-selling author whose books have been translated into many languages worldwide and provides a tiny bit of an insight into other of her works.

The second part of the thesis analyses Schwab's novels *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*, *Gallant* and *Vicious*. Her books represent the genre of fantasy literature because they contain many elements that are typical for this genre. Some of the most prominent elements were picked, described and analysed to see how the author works with them. The last part presents a comparison of some of these elements to show if the author uses the same elements and if she uses them in the same way and how.

Even though the novels for the analysis were picked with little to no knowledge of the plot and fantasy elements they contain, a number of the same or alike elements were found in them. The author comes up with different ideas for plots and has different approaches to each story, yet she still recycles some of the supernatural items to create these fantasy stories. Each story shares a few elements with the other two books, but yet there is not one element all three novels would share together. So Schwab still does change the elements she uses in her books.

V. E. Schwab keeps certain originality in her books by converting the fantasy elements, even though she does not come with new ones in every single story. She reuses the same or similar fantasy elements, especially with the latest books (*Gallant* and *Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*). These elements are not completely the same, for instance, the curse plays different roles and serves divergent purposes in these two stories. However, the cause of the bad things happening in both books is some dark entity.

On the other hand, there seems to be a shift in the main elements she uses. Comparing her older and newer books, there is a pattern of a dark entity element in used in her newest

works, nothing like that can be spotted in her older work. Her older work is more focused on the supernatural powers, the magic and the characters' abilities. Plus V. E. Schwab appears to switch the genders of her protagonists. Her older works have male heroes but the newest contain strong female heroines.

Regardless of the repetitiveness of elements, V. E. Schwab is still an original author who can creatively work with various fantasy elements and use them effectively to bring interesting characters and stories to life.

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