



AN ANALYSIS OF QUEERNESS IN THE HOLLOW STAR SAGA BY ASHLEY SHUTTLEWORTH

Master Thesis



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Introduction

The movement for diversity in books has been very present in recent years through social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram. These movements all strive to fill the current gap of diversity that can be found in both children's and YA literature (Schmidt 90). However, this fight has been going on for quite some time. Back in 1988, the Young Adult Library Services Association saw the value and importance of YA books. Which is why they started the award for "an author's work in helping adolescents become aware of themselves and addressing questions about their role and importance in relationships, society, and in the world" (Carstensen). This originally helped spark growth and interest in the industry, and we can now see that even more books targeting young adult readers being released every year. This means that teens today now have a greater selection of books with different kinds of representation to choose from. The movement behind the hashtag #WeNeedMoreDiverseBooks is a great example of how we can encourage different kinds of representation like race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, geography etc. to be present in books. In addition to this, we can see that the movement inspired many teens to use their social media accounts to fight for inclusivity, finding their own voices, and standing up for their personal values to help improve the world they want to live in in the future (Carstensen).

The world we live in today can be seen as heteronormative, and diversity in YA literature can let young readers see characters who are different from themselves, which can help them understand how people act in certain situations. In addition to this, it is seen that books can make the reader feel heard and make it easier for them to navigate the world. I therefore found it interesting to see how a fantasy series might be able to create a homonormative world that is different from the heteronormative one we currently live in. To do this I decided to base my analysis on the *Hollow Star*

Saga by Ashley Shuttleworth, as it fits multiple of the different criteria of diversity. This leads to the following research question:

“How do the first three books in the *Hollow Star saga* by Ashley Shuttleworth showcase queer identities in a homonormative fantasy world?”

The research question will be answered by analyzing the different characteristics of homonormativity that can be found in the *Hollow Star Saga*. This will be linked to an exploration of the different fantastical elements found in the saga, and how they add to the world becoming more homonormative than not, while also making commentary on the Primary World and our society. In addition to this, the project will examine how queer identities are being portrayed. This will be done by analyzing the queer narrative structure, and the different types of LGBTQ+ identities we are introduced to through the characters in the saga. Furthermore, the project will use an intersectional approach to get a better understanding of how the identities of the characters affect how they view the world and those around them. Lastly, the project will go on to discuss the importance of queerness in YA literature and why the reader can use these books as a form of Escapism.

Literature Review

Before delving into the theory section of this project, I found it important to see what other critics in the field(s) have said about similar topics that are going to be covered in this project. The literature review will, therefore, go through different articles in chronological order, in terms of the date they were written, as concepts and views can have changed and adapted throughout the years. To begin the literature review I have decided to look at why LGBTQ+ literature can be essential for young adult readers, and what it can offer them. Furthermore, I have decided to look at how to recognize homonormativity. In addition to this, the literature review will delve into queerness in fantasy books,

as well as how many of the popular YA books being released in 2007-2017 had diverse main characters. Lastly, it could have been interesting to look at what other critics had to say about the *Hollow Star Saga*, as this will be the focus of the project, but as the saga is not finished, critics have yet to talk about or discuss it.

The Importance of LGBTQ+ Literature in the YA Genre

In the article “Literacy, Sexuality, and the Value(s) of Queer Young Adult Literature”, from 2009, William P. Banks uses his personal experiences, to explain why literature with LGBTQ+ themes and characters is especially important for young adult readers. As a kid, he grew up finding texts and books that represented him while visiting his brother at college, or when away on school trips. However, these books were always left behind, as taking them home would require hiding the books: “[Returning] with them meant hiding them along with all those parts of yourself you already hid, knowing that family, friends, and community did not value them” (Banks 33). While the books he found represented queer people in general, they were never targeted towards young or adolescent kids. As an adult, however, he has found that there has been an increase in LGBTQ+ texts written for and marketed towards younger readers. These texts can help kids find themselves, and see their lives reflected to them, while also showing alternative possibilities for a happier and more fulfilled life in the future (33).

Just having these texts available is often not seen as enough though. In schools, especially in the US, the teachers must find texts that they can ‘get away’ with reading in class, without causing too much trouble with the administration or parents, rather than focusing on which texts would be best, or have the biggest impact. Sexuality is central to the development of contemporary literacy, which means that the teachings of LGBTQ+ literature will aid students in learning more about the world around them, as well as the possibilities they will have in the world. Furthermore, language is what we use

to not only describe ourselves, but also help us narrate ourselves into existences, and articulate our needs and values in life (Banks 33-34).

While heterosexual adolescence receives copious treatment in social science, natural science literature, and the humanities, that is not the case for the experience amongst LGBTQ+ people. The lives of LGBTQ+ people are instead rooted in the narrative of ‘coming out’ being seen as a rite of passage (Banks 34). Most of the LGBTQ+ young adult literature out there is character-driven realistic fiction, and from 1980-1995, the characters who identified within the LGBTQ+ spectrum were secondary characters, killed off, or driven out of the narrative by their community, family friends, etc. During this period, it was especially clear that the message was that LGBTQ+ characters were the most useful if they were either dead or gone (Banks 34-35). While we can find some texts today where LGBTQ+ characters can live happy lives and are not othered when compared to heterosexual characters, many books still focus on the struggle of being different. This canon within the literature reinforces the fact that one’s sexuality is controversial if it does not adhere to societal norms.

Queer YA Books in the Fantasy Genre

In another article called ““Incloseto Putbacko:” Queerness in Adolescent Fantasy Fiction”, from 2012, the author Anne Balay discusses the increase of LGBTQ+ characters in YA fantasy books. Here she found that the queerness that exists within the genre is powerful both because of and despite the restrictions found in the genre. In many of these novels, queerness is expressed through a mix of rigid enforcement of invisibility and lifetime partnerships depending on the specific novel. In this article, Balay argues that the presence of same-sex couples and romances helps open the door to a wide variety of queer sexualities. She also adds that the fantasy genre celebrates these queer desires. At the same time, fantasy fiction is also seen as childish because it relies on rules and structures, and how it often takes place in a medieval world. Many scholars have agreed that fantasy books targeted

towards children avoid talking about sex and desire. However, this absence does not signify a total absence of desire, sexuality, or even perversion (Balay 923-924).

The biggest difference between adult and young adult fantasy fiction is that the main character is a child. Because of this, it is common for parents or guardians to be anxious about the prospect of sexual expressions being shown, especially in the queer variety. Furthermore, these parents and guardians also prefer for the books to have a happy ending. However, one of the purposes of fantasy books is to make new realities, while still referencing the world as we know it. While the number of queer books in the YA genre being released constantly increases, there has not been a significant increase of queer YA fantasy books. However, the concept of slash fiction is everywhere, and many teen readers are beginning to read an otherwise straight text as queer (Balay 925-926).

Representation in YA Books

In the article “Adolescent Minorities in Popular YA Literature – A Content Analysis”, from 2019, Morgan Lee explains that representation and diversity can make readers more interested in the act of reading. However, young adults sometimes still struggle with finding books that represent them. Because of this, Lee decided to conduct a study based on YALSA’s ‘Teens’ Top Ten’ list of books, to look at the portrayal of minorities in popular YA books, and how this changed over time (Lee 2). Through this study, Lee found that out of the 108 books featured on the YALSA list from 2007-2017, only 20 of them had a non-white protagonist. In addition to this, Lee found that in the years 2008, 2009, and 2013 none of the books on the list featured a non-white protagonist. The study also showed that only 5 of these books featured an LGBTQ+ protagonist, and in the years 2007-2014, none of the books had an LGBTQ+ protagonist. Lastly, Lee decided to look at how many of these 108 books had a non-white protagonist who also identified as LGBTQ+, with the answer only being 1 of them (5-7).

Recognizing Homonormativity

In the article “The Future is Queer Kids: Queering the homonormative temporalities of same-sex marriage”, from 2020, Callum Stewart explores the concept of homonormativity in the context of same-sex marriages. Here Stewart uses two different critics to define the concept of homonormativity and what it can mean. According to Lisa Duggan, homonormativity is seen as a new politic that does not contest the present heteronormative assumptions and institutions but sustains them while promising a future of depoliticized gay culture which is anchored in domesticity. Gavin Brown, on the other hand, argues for a move that should go beyond homonormativity and instead proposes a vision of queer spatial relations. Through these descriptions, Stewart uses this article to form an approach beyond the homonormative perspective and instead wants to form an alternative perspective. The reason for this is that he does not believe that Duggan and Brown considered the relational construction of time in their analysis of homonormativity. He therefore uses this article to repoliticize the construction of time in queer and homonormative imaginaries through the adult/childhood dichotomy of institutionalized marriage. Furthermore, he wants the article to highlight the unexplored queer potential within homonormativity after the legalization of same-sex marriage. He especially finds it important to include children and childhood in this, as this is something both Duggan and Brown had not included in their imagined futures of homonormativity (Stewart 266).

After exploring what these different scholars in the field(s) have said, I have been able to establish that there has not been written a lot of extensive research on the combination of queer fantasy books in the YA genre. This is likely because, as Balay explains, this specific category of books is developing at a much slower rate than YA books in general. As such, we can also see that literary critics have yet to talk about the *Hollow Star Saga* by Ashley Shuttleworth. A reason for this can be

how the saga is still being written, and the fourth book is going to be released in November 2024. Because of this, I can combine these categories and books in a way that has not been done before. This can be seen as both a strength and a weakness, as I might have been able to find other critics in the field who would have blended in more seamlessly with the purpose of this project.

Theory

The following theory section will attempt to define the terms that will be used as the foundation of the analysis, and the order in which the analysis will be structured. To start I will define the term homonormativity, which will lead to an examination of the fantasy genre, as these elements help make up the worldbuilding of the *Hollow Star Saga*. This will be followed up by an exploration of queer narrative theory, how it came to be, and why categories such as narrative, characters are essential in this field. Through this, the theory will go on to explore the theoretical terms female masculinity, tomboys, and inverts by Jack Halberstam. The theory will then explore the concept of intersectionality. Lastly, this section will explore what queer literature can offer young adult readers, and why people can use books as a form of Escapism.

Homonormativity as a term

As previously stated, this project will go on to analyze the *Hollow Star Saga* which is a queer fantasy series. Because of this, I found it valuable to look at the term homonormativity, as it can be used to see how the world in the *Hollow Star Saga* has been built. In the article “Heteronormativity and Homonormativity” from 2019 Brandon Andrew Robinson explains that heteronormativity is a hegemonic system that consists of norms, practices, and discourses that all construct heterosexuality as a natural and superior form of sexuality. The term heteronormativity was coined by the queer

theorist Michael Warner, to highlight the way sexual minorities have been relegated to a marginal status position. Furthermore, heteronormativity legitimates the irrational fear of LGBTQ+¹ people, which in turn discriminates against sexual minorities within a social structure. This type of discrimination can be found in multiple social institutions such as religions, education, the media, etc. An example of this can be how the media will underrepresent LGBTQ+ people or purposefully represent them in a stereotypical way (Robinson 1).

Homonormativity on the other hand can be described as a political strategy used within sexual minority communities. Here these individuals can stake a claim for their rights by asserting that they are just like their heterosexual counterparts, with the exception of their attractions and partnerships. These rights are sought after through marriage, monogamy, reproduction, and domesticity. Some of these relations and institutions are valued higher in the dominant society, which is why sexual minorities use these as a way to reach acceptance within these institutions (e.g. marriage equality). Additionally, it is seen that those people who can conform to congruent gender roles in our society receive more privileges and rights than those who neither can nor will assimilate, for instance how transgender people can get punished for not conforming to heteronormative gender roles. Heteronormativity must also be understood as a mix of white supremacy and social formations, as it both regulates LGBTQ+ individuals and legitimates discrimination against other non-normative people and lived experiences. Examples include single mothers and interracial relationships (Robinson 1-2).

A crucial example of radicalized heteronormativity is the concept of homonationalism, which was a term defined by Jasbir Puar, to mean “the granting of rights to homonormative sexual minorities within a nationalistic, ideological framework” (Robinson 2). Homonationalism views certain

¹ Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, etc.

countries as backward on women's and LGBTQ+ rights and believes that the Western nations should provide liberation and democracy for these countries. Homonormativity and racism are directly linked here when people of color in non-Western nations are constructed as intolerant of these issues when compared to those of the West and white communities (2). The concept of homonationalism can be useful in the analysis, as it can give insight into how the homonational identity comes across in the *Hollow Star Saga* compared to real life.

Fantasy

Fantasy as a Genre

After having delved into the term homonormativity, it can be interesting to look at the fantasy genre, and how these types of books can make a world more unique, and maybe add to or subtract from how queerness is shown in the *Hollow Star Saga*. As such it can also be valuable to see how these fantastical elements modify how the story is narrated. In 2008 Rosemary Jackson wrote the text "The Fantastic as a Mode" which explores the fantasy genre. In the text he explains that all kinds of imaginary activities can be seen as fantastic, and all literary works are fantasies. Because of this, it has proved difficult to come up with a satisfactory definition of what exactly literary fantasy is. As a critical term, 'fantasy' has been applied to any kind of literature that does not focus on a realistic representation, i.e. legends, fairy tales, myths, science fiction, etc. All these examples can be described as presenting realms 'other' than the human. The most frequently used characteristic of literary fantasy is the refusal of what defines the 'real' and 'possible', which can amount to violent opposition at times (Jackson 13-14). This means that "[a] fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into "fact" itself" (14). This disturbs the literature's reproduction of the real and the 'rules' of artistic representation (14). Jean-Paul Satre, a French

philosopher, writes that when religious faith prevailed, fantasy was able to speak of leaps into other realms. These stories consisted purely of human existences, and man strove to create worlds that were unlike our own, which meant that fantasy was able to fulfill a function of Escapism. Here the natural and Primary World gets inverted into something different and ‘other’. As such Satre believes that the function of fantasy is to transform this world (17-18).

Storyworlds

Continuing with the fantasy genre, we can look at how Mark JP Wolf explored the concept of storyworlds in a fantastical setting in the text “World Design” from 2018. Here he explains that every story occurs within some kind of setting, which becomes the world for both the story and the characters therein. Storyworlds are all developed to different degrees. Some have a minimum of development that only tells the world data which is necessary for the story to move along. However, many imaginary worlds will go beyond the world data needed for the story, to provide a considerable amount of detail about the world and its locations, cultures, inhabitants, technologies fauna and flora, etc. The world design is here used to make it distinct from the Primary World (the world we live in) and replace the default assumptions and structures with the invented material. This is necessary because it allows us, as the reader, to fill in parts of the world that have not been described, through our assumptions and beliefs about the Primary World. A world is typically designed as the backdrop of a story, which means that the world has been specifically developed out of the needs of the story and its audience (Wolf, *World Design* 67).

A storyworld can be described by the four characteristics of size, scope, shape, and boundaries. The size is dependent on the amount of data we have about the world and how it works. The scope covers the extent of the space covered by the world. This means that size and scope are independent of each other, as a short story could describe an entire universe, but a large amount of data could be used to

describe a world the size of a small town. It is, however, possible to combine the two characteristics to determine the level of detail that has gone into making the world. These details about the world help the reader immerse themselves in the story. The shape and boundaries of the world determine the reader's experience. Furthermore, the audience is usually only taken through parts of the world, leaving some of it unexplored, even if there are multiple books in the same series or universe (Wolf, *World Design* 68).

The inhabitants of these imaginary worlds tend to be humans or humanoid beings, to make them even more relatable to the reader. There can be a wide variety of creatures who in some ways resemble humans to make them more understandable. This is also why cultures are especially important for the design of the world as they can show a particular worldview and philosophies from a certain perspective. The cultures in the world can also embody specific ways of thinking, which will become prevalent throughout the story. Additionally, the world can have multiple opposing cultures, which can create conflict within the world (Wolf, *World Design* 68-69). All of this will become useful for analyzing the worldbuilding in the *Hollow Star Saga*, and in turn how queerness is shown in the world.

Narrative Fabric

After looking at how storyworlds can be constructed, it can also be valuable to look at the narrative fabric. To do this, the project will focus on the text “Narrative Fabric” which Mark JP Wolf wrote in 2018. A narrative thread is usually defined as a particular storyline, that either follows a character, place, object, or a chain of events through a set duration of time. Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish between a narrative fabric and a narrative braid. The narrative fabric can be defined as several narrative threads crossing each other and sharing moments in both time and spatial locations. The narrative braid, on the other hand, has multiple narrative threads which follow a similar trajectory

together. While multiple storylines do not need to overlap in the same world, most authors still tend to have some link between them, by showing shared assets that appear in both stories. Examples of this can be characters, locations, events, or objects. Each character's life can be seen as a narrative thread that gets woven through the world and can cross paths with other characters when they travel to new locations. These narrative lines can help the reader feel like the world is rich, interconnected, and sometimes even like a real place (Wolf, *Narrative Fabric* 45).

The narrative fabric can be extended in multiple different ways. In some cases, the fabric gets extended into space, which means that the author adds new locations and events to add to the history of the imaginary world. Another example is how the narrative fabric gets extended through time, as seen in sequels and prequels, which both help move the storylines in a new direction. Here sequels are more flexible as they only depend on the story that has gone before them, whereas a prequel must connect what comes after them, since the reader will know about some of the characters, locations, objects, etc. (Wolf, *Narrative Fabric* 46).

Furthermore, it can be valuable to understand how the narrative fabric can be measured and compared by describing it according to its size, scope, shape, and density. The size refers to the number of different narrative threads and narrative works, and the scope then refers to the amount of time and space covered by the fabric. Looking at the shape of the narrative fabric, it can be both synchronic and diachronic. A synchronic narrative fabric usually has multiple narrative threads that coincide at the same time and follow a chronological chain of events. The diachronic narrative fabric on the other hand can span across time and sometimes through very little space. The density can be divided into both high and low and describes how much information is given in the span of a novel. High density gives a lot of information and detail in a short amount of time, whereas the low density gives less information, but can span millions of years. Lastly, the narrative fabric can use weaves to measure

how much each narrative thread is dependent on each other. A tight weave can have multiple storylines running simultaneously throughout it. A loose weave on the other hand has few events coincide, and the events can take place far apart in both time and space (Wolf, *Narrative Fabric* 47-48).

Queerness in Books

Queer and Feminist Narrative Theory

While it is important to look at the elements which make up the fantasy genre, to see if they add to the world in the *Hollow Star Saga* being more or less homonormative, it is also valuable to understand how the different queer identities are portrayed. To do this, this part of the theory section will focus on the book *Narrative Theory Unbound*, from 2015, where the authors Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser go on to explain that queer and feminist perspectives are not the only sites for intervention in narrative study. However, they still aim to place gender and sexuality at the forefront of the “production and reception, forms and functions of narrative texts” (Warhol and Lanser 1). While terms such as ‘narratology’ and ‘narrative theory’ are used interchangeably in the field, the phrase ‘feminist narratology’ remains under pressure from two different directions. The first is narratology critics, who believe that culturally invested and category-resistant approaches cannot be defined as narratological. The second pressure comes from the scholars of gender and sexuality, who remain suspicious of the binary frames and formalist priorities in narratology. It is here interesting to note that the roots of narratology seemed to preclude a queer and feminist approach. An example of this can be how narratology depended on an either-or categorization in the 1970s and 1980s, where multiplicities such as gender and sexualities could be reduced to essential and universal generalizations. This has been a recurring problem for feminist narratology, which is why *Narrative Theory Unbound* attempts to loosen “the field to embrace multiple pathways by recognizing a

diversity” (2), such as feminist and queer investments in a narrative, in the hope that it can help gain a better understanding of the narrative itself. It is here valuable to embrace the capacious meanings and understandings of ‘feminist’ and ‘queer’. Feminism is designed to address the oppressive and repressive practices and systems that perpetuate limitations and or inequalities that have been rooted in the assumptions about biological sex and social gender. Queerness on the other hand is seen as the sign of the move(ment)s, that challenge and “aim to understand, analyze and rectify – heteronormative systems and practices and their attendant binary assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality” (2). While the two categories overlap in some instances, it is still possible for them to also have conflicting projects.

In the 1980s literary and cultural critics, in the US, decided to join forces to bridge the gap between feminism and narratology, when they became decidedly self-conscious about being able to articulate the theoretical principles that govern the critical practices. In recent years, these principles have become less distinct, and the ‘theory wars’ helped naturalize the critical practices. Today we still see some of the same criticisms as in the 1980s. An example of this can be how theories of gender and sexuality continue to bring attention to some aspects of the narrative that other narratologies have tended to overlook or underemphasize. The parallel between queer and feminist approaches is the commitment to regard both narrative and gender/sexuality as coequal terms. As such it is important to avoid having a hierarchy between feminist and queer, as neither queer nor feminist theory could exist in its current form without the other (Warhol and Lanser 2-3). For both feminist and queer narrative theory, gender becomes a central focus point, as gender makes a difference in the reception and production of different texts. Additionally, gender affects the writing and reading of a text, as it has a basis in the lived experiences of the material world. Today feminist and queer theorists generally have the same understanding of gender, that it is a cultural construct, ergo not a biological given, and that gender and sexuality exist on a spectrum that can shift across a lifetime. Through this framework

sexuality and gender becomes more of a question of ‘what you do’ rather than ‘who you are’, as they never fully settle into a coherent identity (7).

A Queer Narrative Voice

To dive further into queer and feminist narrative theory, it can be valuable to examine some of the analytical terms, which have become relevant within this field of study. To do this I have found some articles by the critics Susan S. Lanser and Shalynn Claggett, who both focus on different concepts, which explain how queerness can manifest in the narrative structure. It can therefore be valuable to first delve into the article “Queering Narrative Voice” by Susan S. Lanser, where she defines the word ‘queer’, and how the academic use of the verb could be defined as: “(1) to make a claim for the nonheteronormative sex, gender, or sexuality of someone or something; (2) to disrupt or deconstruct binary categories of sex, gender, and/or sexuality; and (3) to disrupt or deconstruct any entity by rejecting its categories, binaries, or norms” (Lanser, *Queering Narrative Voice* 924). She later uses these three meanings of the verb to transgress the normative sexualities and dismantle sexual (and all other) fixities, to understand what we can gain from bearing on fictional narrators. By doing so Lanser finds a predicament in a major assumption in feminist narratology, and also in her own work, that the binary of gender is necessary for the writerly and readerly engagement with the narrative voice. Here Lanser especially focused on what Gérard Genette calls the narrative ‘person’ (‘who speaks?’), as this aspect of narrative form has valuable mimetic investments when considering the queer terms. Because of this, Lanser wants to trouble the feminist narratology, that she has helped create while coming up with ways to address the mandate of ‘queering’ gender and simultaneously affirm the gender’s significance for the apprehending narrative. This leads to an interrogation between the authorial gender and the narrative voice (924-925).

Lanser focuses her attention on yet another ‘queer’ term, this time ‘voice’ since its use is almost always metaphoric even if it is not recognized as such. ‘Voice’ can have five different meanings regarding text alone: 1. the literal voice as the articulation of sound. 2. The expression of a certain attitude or position (could be the voice of reason). 3. A group identity or collective will, also known as the will of the people. 4. A lyrical voice. 5. The structural category that describes the textual narrators (also known as the narrative discourse) (Lanser, *Queering Narrative Voice* 926). The narrative discourse can then be put into the categories of order, duration, and frequency. Here the order covers how the story is told in either a chronological or anachroic order. The duration explores the amount of time covered in a story, and if a novel uses elements such as freeze frame and fast forward to enhance the reader’s experience. Lastly, the frequency explores how many times a certain plot event occurs or is recounted (Chatman 221-222).

All of the different meanings of the word voice often get intertwined when discussing the phrase ‘queer voice’, which is a phenomenon that has covered a multitude of diverse events and categories such as art exhibits, poems about men loving men, etc. Using these definitions as a jumping-off point, Lanser wants to figure out what it takes to form a narratological framework which explores the narrative circumstances that must occur for a text to be considered queer. This will also let us answer questions such as: Will a text that fits into the definition of queer tend to have a particular configuration of voice? What can we gain from studying queer narrative voices? Does the queering of the narrative voice square with the feminist concerns? (Lanser, *Queering Narrative Voice* 926). By combining the definitions of ‘queer’ and ‘voice’ Lanser has decided to look at a connection between the two. Here she goes on to explain that ‘queer voice’ has three meanings:

- (1) a voice belonging to a textual speaker who can be identified as a queer subject by virtue of sex, gender, or sexuality;

(2) a voice that is textually ambiguous or subverts the conventions of sex, gender, or sexuality; and

(3) a voice that confounds the rules for voice itself and thus baffles our categorical assumptions about narrators and narrative. (Lanser, *Queering narrative voice* 926).

All three forms of 'queer voice' have elements of the conventional narratological categories, where we will be able to distinguish between the two basic configurations of narrative voice from Genette. Here we have the "homodiegetic ('first-person') narrators who are participants in the story they recount and heterodiegetic ('third-person') narrators who are ontologically separated from the story world" (Lanser, *Queering Narrative Voice* 926). The most frequent meaning of 'queer voice' belongs to an identifiable queer-speaking subject. In this sense, the 'queer voice' is comparable to other markers of subject positions like gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc. These can diverge from 'degree zero' of cultural assumptions about the narrators and narratees. Queerness is historically complex, so it can be wise to distinguish between 'out' and 'closeted' narrative voices (927). Furthermore, a homodiegetic narrator who is sex/gender ambiguous can be easy to identify but is relatively uncommon to find in most language cultures, as nearly all cultures rely on binary genders of, he/she or the trinary grammatical genders of he/she/it (930). Lastly, the meaning of queer can encompass the deconstruction of any kind of binaries which are apart from gender and sexuality. The ambiguity that 'queer' can convey can help us recognize that nothing is simply one thing. It can therefore be useful to ask whether queer writers have been innovative in their deconstructive and transgressive forms (934).

Character

In the book *Narrative Theory Unbound* Shalynn Claggett wrote the essay "The Human Problem", where she explores how feminist and queer narrative theory must "take stock of extratextual

significance while at the same time distinguishing between real-world context and its representation” (Claggett 353). Character is the most undertheorized category in narrative theory since the concept is not specific to the discourse of literary theory, but it is dependent on the cultural schemata to define the nature of self. While characters are not real people, they still come into play for human subjects. People can cast themselves and others, as characters to fit their personal narratives whether that be in defiance of or following the social and cultural scripts. In addition to this, people can use books as a way to tell or identify with new stories. For queer and feminist studies this can mean that individuals of historically marginalized groups and communities can claim agency within the oppressive system. Furthermore, this narrative can be used as the tool through which self-actualization can be achieved. A ‘narrative identity’ mostly resembles a direct characterization of a character’s traits which have been stated by the narrator or the character themselves. Through the study on narrative identity, a critic named Adler observed that people usually like the realization that they can be both the main character and narrator of their own story. Because of this, it can be relevant to not look at how something real is represented or how the represented is like something real, but how the represented can become real in a direct and measurable way (355-357).

Female Masculinity, Tomboys, and Inverts

Furthering the theory on how to analyze queer identities, I will be looking at selected chapters from Jack Halberstam’s book *Female Masculinity*, where he tries to define the concept of ‘masculinity’ without having it be related to the social and cultural expression of maleness. While Halberstam does not have a definitive reason for this he still has a few proposals as to why masculinity neither could nor should be reduced down to the male body and its effects. However, while masculinity is hard to define, our society has still found ways to recognize it and spend both time and money on supporting the versions of masculinity that we trust and enjoy. These ‘heroic masculinities’ often depend on

alternative masculinities. Through this Halberstam argues that female masculinities are framed as “the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (Halberstam, *An Introduction* 1). Masculinity and maleness have therefore been seen as difficult to pry apart, which is why Halberstam wants to offer up examples of alternative masculinities in fiction, film, and lived experiences that are mostly queer and female. These are used to show the value of recognizing alternative masculinities, as well as taking note of when and where they emerge. In addition to this, Halberstam believes that a study of female masculinity can be crucial in gender studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and general discussions of gender in the mainstream society. The reason for this is the fact that modern masculinity is best showcased within female masculinity (2-3).

Tomboyism is generally found in an extended period in childhood within female masculinity. In childhood, it is often seen that girls deviating from the female gender are more tolerated than when examples of cross-identifications happen in boys, which can create quite a hysteria. Furthermore, tomboyism is seen as the ‘natural’ desire for freedom and mobility that has primarily been enjoyed by boys. Tomboyism is easily encouraged if it remains linked to the stable girl identity, as it shows a sign of independence and self-motivation. However, when there are signs of ‘extreme male identifications’, like refusing girl clothing, tomboyism is instead punished. It can also be said that tomboyism remains tolerated mostly in the prepubescent era and begins to digress as the child reaches puberty (Halberstam, *An Introduction* 5). The reason for this is that gender conformity is pressed onto all girls, and it is expected of them to uphold the notion “that male femininity presents a greater threat to social and familiar stability than female masculinity” (6). Masculinity among young women is seen visibly within the lesbian communities. Yet, popular cinema confirms the idea that a tomboy can only be tolerated within a narrative of blossoming womanhood, where the tomboy narrative is seen as a resistance to adulthood rather than adult femininity.

In the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, sexual identities ended up dominating people's thinking on sex and gender, which led to the idea of gender inversion. 'Inversion' was here the medical term used to explain the phenomenon of homosexuality. Female inversion, and in turn masculinity, was at this time considered by both Richard von Kraft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. In 1886 Kraft-Ebing wrote the book *Psychopathia Sexualis* where he identified four different types of lesbians: "women who were available to the attention of masculine inverters but not masculine themselves, cross-dressers, fully developed inverters who looked masculine and took a masculine role, and degenerative homosexuals who were practically male" (Halberstam, *Misfits* 76). Kraft-Ebing believed that each of these categories was fixed in place and that slippages did not occur. However, as Havelock Ellis built upon Kraft-Ebing's taxonomy of feminine and masculine inverters, he maintained the taxonomic structure while emphasizing the split between feminine and masculine inverters. The female invert was seen as a social deviant, rather than a sexual one, who had been rejected by men and was therefore pushed into the arms of the masculine invert. The masculine invert was then someone who was born to an essential, female masculinity. Ellis explains that the motivation for this study was to argue for the naturalness of these desires to achieve sexual tolerance to some degree. However, there was a bigger cultural imperative behind it, which was to reduce sexuality to binary systems of gender difference. In addition to this, female sexual and gender behavior is generally seen as a derivation of the male identity (76-77).

Intersectionality

Furthering the theory of queer narratology and how to understand queer identities, I will be looking at the essay called "Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology" by Susan S. Lanser, which was written in 2015 which is 3 years before "Queering Narrative Voice". Here she explains that narratology provides a valuable pathway to understanding not only how stories work, but also how

they ‘hold’ us. When narrative strategies function as narrative content, the stories can only be captured if we can read them as form. To the same extent, the narratives on gender arrangements are complex, subtle, and sometimes even elusive (Lanser, *Toward (a Queerer)* 23). Feminist and queer narrative studies are still viewed as an under-tapped form of narrative study, which means it can be useful to dive into the concept of intersectionality, which was coined by the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. The intersectional approach puts multiple identifiers such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, language, etc. at the forefront, as it can be used to converge and interact to create an actual or perceived experience and representation in a world that has a pattern of structural inequalities (26-27). Each identity category “produces and is produced within a set of social locations where “traffic” differentially affects the movements of individuals and groups and indeed where what even counts as traffic and movement is socially contingent” (27). No one can live every aspect of their existence within one specific identity category, as every person is characterized by multiple identities, allegiances, and identifications. Because of the widespread inequalities that have been brought on by global structures of power, the intersectional way of thinking would question all fixed categories, such as gender binaries, in the context of time and space. Furthermore, intersectional thinking demands that feminism does not try to predetermine patterns of fixed categories, or that they even exist at all (27-28).

When studying fictional narratives, the intersectional theory lets us observe the structural and circumstantial effects of a particular concurrence of people in a particular location rather than make assumptions that could previously have been seen as ‘common sense’. Intersectional thinking will here reject the approach to narrative, which would assume identities to be predictable or predictive, while also understanding that the way we think about narrative genealogies is shaped by an intersectional configuration. The intersectional approach also assumes that specific kinds of social persons can coincide in a way that complicates, enables, or prevents a certain action (Lanser, *Toward*

(*a Queerer*) 28). While an intersectional understanding does not explain all the narrative events in a novel, it can still be used to analyze “how individual narratives and groups of narratives work out the dynamics of identity (i.e., character) and movement (i.e., plot), and then map those dynamics across the vast field of the world’s narratives in a new kind of historicist project that would offer a “distant reading” of narrative form” (29). Additionally, an intersectional queer narratology, can also be of value to map out the free indirect discourse (FID) in the novels, and whether these novels actively attempting queer representation uses FID as a complex strategy of authorization, intimacy, and distance. Through this, it becomes important to think about whether intersectional or authorial axes can help us understand why a certain narrative strategy is used in a given context. In addition to this, Lanser adds that intersectional narratology should focus their attention on Latin, African, and Asian narratives, to achieve a more accurate depiction of the global and historical narrative (30-31).

Queerness and the Young Adult Genre

Through writing the theory of how queerness can be seen and manifest in books, I will now be looking at the article “Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers” by Mollie V. Blackburn, Caroline T. Clark, and Emily A. Nemeth. This article explores the different categories LGBTQ+ books often have in common, which can help create cohesiveness in what the previously mentioned critics have said. In the article, the authors explain that they believe in making LGBTQ+ literature available in schools to young adult readers. However, as many schools do not share the same belief, the group made an initiative to set up kids and their teachers, in the attempt to make LGBTQ+ literature more accessible, while also discussing what the reader will get out of these books. In addition to this, they found that LGBTQ+ inclusive discourses often reinforce heteronormativity and the binary constructions of sex and gender. This means that we socially see two distinct genders and sexes, male and female, and that the

expectation is for women to desire men both on an emotional and sexual level and vice versa. Furthermore, it is suggested to the reader that LGBTQ+ people are just like their heterosexual counterparts, which ends up erasing the things that make people different from each other. The alternative is however to do a queer approach which strives to suspend sexualities and gender identities rather than underscore them. This lets us challenge and interrogate heteronormativity by acknowledging the wide variety of genders, sexes, and sexualities and the desires that lie therein, while simultaneously challenging what is seen as normal (Blackburn et al. 11-12).

Blackburn et al. explore queer texts which can be put into the three different categories of HV (homosexual visibility), GA (gay assimilation), and QC (queer consciousness/community), from a study by Cart and Jenkins. HV refers to texts from the 1970s-1980s that deal with coming out or getting outed being used as a dramatic plot point. GA literature explores texts from the 1990s and has characters who just happen to be part of the LGBTQ+ community without it being seen as a big deal. Lastly, QC refers to texts in the 21st century that explore LGBTQ+ characters and their communities as well as the found families therein. In addition to this, the QC literature also allows readers to see LGBTQ+ people in worlds where their identities matter and it can connect with others who share these different identities (Blackburn et al. 14). In this context the word 'queer' does not cover the entire LGBTQ+ acronym. It does, however, still focus on different sexualities and gender identities such as these. Queer theorists recognize that sexualities and genders are a social concept that can be fluid, and by rejecting these categories of identity the queer theorists can disrupt the notions of what is seen as normal in terms of gender and sexuality (14).

The foundation of understanding the different sexualities and genders is to look at the belief that they are 'poststructural' instead of 'essential' or 'developmental'. Essentialism refers to a fundamental nature where sexuality is seen as a universal human trait. Identity is therefore seen in single and stable

terms and as essential to a person's being. While some people will have to come to terms with it or recognize it, the individual's identity has been there all along and will continue to be there throughout one's life. The developmental perspective exists as a complication of the essentialist perspective. In both of these approaches, it is understood that we gain our identities in a linear fashion, which leads us toward our true identity. The biggest difference between the two approaches is the emphasis. Embracing an identity in the essential perspective means emphasizing one's true, personal, core identity while not thinking about the process it took to get there. Embracing an identity through the developmental perspective on the other hand means that the opposite is true. Here the focus is on the process of figuring out one's identity, which is assumed but not seen as fixed. The developmental approach is often also discussed in terms of pubertal, cognitive, and psychosocial growth. Lastly, the poststructural approach is a rejection of the two previous approaches. The aim behind the poststructural approach is to provide an alternative understanding and ideas that go beyond the oppositional and the hierarchical. In this perspective, there are no assumed true identities. Instead, we see a person, or even a character, experience certain emotional and sexual desires, performing gender, etc., but all of these cannot be captured by one single sexuality or gender identity. Because of this, the sexualities and gender identities are seen as multiple and variable, and at times conflicting with each other (Blackburn et al. 15).

The disruption of norms is a key principle in queer theory. Here norms are defined as "standards of proper or acceptable behavior" (Blackburn et al. 15). In queer theory these norms are interrogated or even disrupted. This is especially seen with the disruption of sexual and gender norms, like the binary between man and woman, or between heterosexual and homosexual. Here the focus becomes to understand the sexualities and gender identities as social, shifting, and fluid where the expectation goes beyond what you would expect of these identities. It is, however, also possible to look at the disruption of norms when it comes to family, homes, and time (15).

To do an analysis of children's and YA literature Blackburn et al. decided to focus on books read by teens and adolescents instead of purely focusing on books in the YA category. This was done because kids can have multiple opposing identities such as: mature and immature, traditional and innovative, etc. Furthermore, they decided to turn to scholarships on children's and YA literature, to understand which literary elements they should focus on. Through this, they decided to focus on mode, focalization, naïve and unreliable narrators, metonymic configurations, and flashbacks and foreshadowing (Blackburn et al. 16). However, for this project I have decided to mainly focus my attention on what Blackburn et al. calls metonymic configurations, and flashbacks and foreshadowing, as well as unreliable narrators.

The metonymic configurations refer to a pattern of behaviors that have been marked by gender, sexuality, as well as other normalized constitutions, which have been built up by developing conflicts and/or thematic implications through interactions with contrasting and diverse characters (often character stereotypes) (Blackburn et al. 17). A character's behavior can here be seen as marked by different attributes which make the reader initiate a schema for hegemonic masculinity. In this case, a male character not only functions as a metonym but also for hegemonic masculinity in relation to other characters who instead perform different types of masculinity and gendered behaviors. Furthermore, it is seen that both feminine and masculine metonymic configurations are possible. Looking at flashbacks and foreshadowing, we can see that they were looked at as temporal disruptions, and how they affected the experience of a character either being or realizing that they are queer. A flashback can tell or show us what happened in the past, while foreshadowing can show what will happen in the future. These literary devices can therefore be used to disrupt time. Looking at these disruptions of time can help the reader's understanding of queer characters (17-18).

Through an in-depth analysis of five different books Blackburn et al. found that what distinguishes queer literature is how it is able to offer multiple and conflicting ideologies on gender and sexuality. This does, however, not mean that a book has to be LGBTQ+ inclusive, as things like the time period the book was released or takes place also play a role in the inclusiveness of the book (Blackburn et al. 41). In addition to this, they found that while some schools do not sanction books with LGBTQ+ representation, queer literature is still valuable for young adult readers as it can help counter some of the invisible ideologies of homophobia, misogyny, and heterosexism in their daily lives. By reading these kinds of texts kids will get to experience a narrative and characters who push against these normative ideologies. Furthermore, it is seen that these types of books can help alleviate some of the pressure of realizing you do not fit into what society views as the norm. Because of this LGBTQ+ books also serve as a window into the unknown for some people who have different experiences than the ones they read about (44).

Escapism

Many people use books as a way to escape from reality, and it can therefore be valuable to understand why that is, and what it can offer the reader. In the article “Escapism in Literature and Life” Warren L. Young defines the term ‘Escapism’. Here Young explains that Escapism has social stigmas associated with it and that it can now be described as an individual wanting to escape their current situation, and therefore creating a new imaginary world or situation to escape from reality. In addition to this Young explains that Escapism can be divided into two senses known as the traditional sense and the dynamic sense. The traditional sense of Escapism is the most commonly used form of Escapism, where the individual attempts to escape their current situation in the hopes of creating their own personal utopia. The public can view this attempt in three ways: 1. A weakness of the individual’s character. 2. A moral triumph where the individual can improve themselves. 3. Shows an intellectual

triumph by developing a transcendental or idealist thought, which leads to either a “scientific” discovery or the discovery of all illusive metaphysic systems (Young 377). The dynamic sense of Escapism can then be defined as an action that concentrates on our daily affairs, with an effort to better the entire human situation (380). The concept of Escapism will later be combined with the previous article from Blackburn et al. to help discuss why books with good queer representation can help a reader escape from their current reality.

Methodology

To answer the research question, this project will show a close reading of the first three books in the *Hollow Star Saga*. To do this, the analysis will first delve into the concept of homonormativity, as it was defined by Brandon Andrew Robinson and Jasbir Puar. Through this understanding, it becomes possible to see which characteristics of a homonormative world the *Hollow Star Saga* has, and what it means for how the characters in the world choose to interact with those around them. The next section of the analysis will go on to explore the fantastical elements in the story as they have been explained in the texts “The Fantastic as a Mode” by Rosemary Jackson, “Narrative Fabric” by Mark JP Wolf, and “World Design” by Mark JP Wolf. This will be followed by an in-depth analysis of how different aspects of queer narrative theory are used in the saga, to enhance the reader’s experience while reading the books. To do this, the analysis will focus on parameters such as character and narration. The foundation of this part of the analysis will be based on the texts: “The Human Problem” by Shalynn Claggett and “Queering Narrative Voice” by Susan S. Lanser. Directly after this, the analysis will explore the concepts of female masculinity, tomboyism, and inverts from Jack Halberstam, and how these characteristics show different types of queerness in the novels. Through this, the analysis will delve into the concept of intersectionality, to further explore the queer identities of the characters in the *Hollow Star Saga*. This will be based on the article “Toward (a Queerer and)

More (Feminist) Narratology by Susan S. Lanser. Lastly, the project will discuss how readers will possibly respond to these books, as they can be used as a form of Escapism. Through this, I will do a contextual analysis to explore why it can be important for younger readers to have books that feature LGBTQ+ identities. This will be done by looking at the texts “Escapism in Literature and Life” by Warren L. Young, and “Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers” by Mollie V. Blackburn, Caroline T. Clark, and Emily A. Nemeth.

I chose these methods and critics, as I felt they all spoke to the fields relevant to my research question. Additionally, this approach helped give my thesis a more direct focus, and helped me understand how Ashley Shuttleworth was able to write about multiple distinguished queer characters, who all identified across the LGBTQ+ spectrum without having to rely on stereotypes. Furthermore, the fantastical and homonormative world-building ended up adding to how these character’s identities were being shown, and which struggles they were going through. Lastly, this saga spoke into the discussion of why inclusion and diversity in literature are so important and valuable for readers.

Summary of the *Hollow Star Saga*

Before diving into the analysis, I will give a short description and summary of the first three books in the *Hollow Star Saga*, which will be the focus of the analysis. The *Hollow Star Saga* by Ashley Shuttleworth is set to be a quartet, with the first book being released in February 2021, and the last and final installment will be coming out in November 2024.

A Dark and Hollow Star (ADAHS)

A Dark and Hollow Star follows four queer teens, as they try to uncover the mysterious deaths of the ironborn children, i.e. people who have both a human and fae heritage. The reader is first introduced to Alecto, who we later come to know as Nausicaä or the Dark Star, as she burned down an entire ship to avenge her sister, Tisiphone's suicide 116 years ago. As this was against the rules in the Immortal Realm, Alecto thought and hoped that her punishment would be Destruction, but instead, she was sent to live out the rest of her life in the Mortal Realm.

During the present day, Arlo Jarsdel, an ironborn, and half-fae, is being called into a Weighing to determine her fae heritage. The outcome of this Weighing will establish whether or not she should submit to her human heritage and surrender her knowledge of the Courts' existence or remain a citizen in the UnSeelie Court of Spring. Here we see most of the people of the Fae High Council advocating against Arlo being able to remain part of the faerie world. However, Celadon, Arlo's cousin, is the leading force that makes them question their voting as Arlo's mother is the niece of the High King. This means that it is possible for Arlo to come into her fae powers later in life. Because of this, the Courts made a compromise where Arlo can defer the decision to a later date.

In addition to this, we also follow Prince Vehan and his guardian Aurelian. Through their perspectives, we hear about them finding a dying ironborn teenager on a park bench a few years ago. During this encounter, they saw that the ironborn boy had an alchemic array on his chest, which happened to match the one Vehan had been walking around with his entire life. This makes the two of them, but especially Vehan, curious, and the two of them continue exploring the deaths in the hopes of figuring out what the array on Vehan's chest means, and who put it there in the first place. Aurelian is, however, a little hesitant at first since that would be going against Vehan's mother, who is also the Queen of Seelie Summer.

During the mission of uncovering what and who is behind the ironborn deaths, we see how the stories of all four teens get interconnected as they all hold some valuable piece of the puzzle of what has been going on. Interspersed we also have alternating chapters of the character Hero, an ironborn, who was contacted by Lethe, a man Nausicaä knew from her time with the Hunt (i.e. a group of immortals who are at the High King's disposal to hunt down those who disobey any rules and orders), to kill these people and forge philosophers' stones out of the ironborn hearts.

Throughout the quest, Arlo quickly runs into the deity known as Luck, who tells her that she can: play out the role Fate had decided for her, be the hero, walk away and remain who she is, or lastly, tie herself to Luck and become their Hollow Star instead. Here Luck gives her a magical die, which she can take into use if she wants to take Luck up on their offer. This is also when Arlo meets Nausicaä for the second time. Here we see the two of them decide to team up and figure out why all of the ironborn are dying. Through this, they come into contact with Vehan and Aurelian, and the four of them decides to join forces. Together they finally figure out that Hero, and incidentally Lethe, were behind the ironborn deaths.

A Cruel and Fated Light (ACAFL)

The sequel picks up shortly after the end of the first book, where we learn that Lethe was the one to employ Hero to make philosophers stones, which was the cause of the ironborn deaths. The sequel starts with Arlo having to debrief the High King about what went down in the factory where Hero conducted most of his experiments. However, as she goes through the details, she purposefully leaves out the fact that she used alchemy to get in, as it is against the law that the High King set himself. Nausicaä however views this as important information to tell, as she wants the king to allow Arlo to practice her abilities in alchemy before she Rebounds, meaning her magic will kill her because it will not have anywhere to go. After a short deliberation, the High King agrees that Arlo can be taught the

basics of alchemy but nothing more. This leads Queen Riadne to invite Arlo, and in turn her cousin Celadon, to her Court of Seelie Summer, and practice there with a tutor of the High King's choosing.

While visiting Queen Riadne at the Seelie Summer Court, Arlo also continues her training as Luck's Hollow Star. At the same time, Aurelian and Celadon have a quest of their own, which is to figure out what exactly Queen Riadne has planned, as none of them believes Riadne's intentions to be pure. However, none of the five teens are able to figure out what Riadne's endgame is before it is too late. Nearing the end of the book she forces Arlo to play the pawn in her game and kills not only the High King, to gain the Bone Crown and the abilities it possesses, but also to become the new High Queen of all the Courts. In addition to this, Queen Riadne gives Arlo the chance to save one of her family members, which leads the rest of them to be killed. Here Arlo decides to save Celadon, which in turn reveals one of the most well-kept secrets in the Courts: that Riadne is Celadon's birth mother. This was purposefully kept as a secret for years, as the High Royals, who each possess different abilities, are forbidden from conceiving a child as this would result in the child being too powerful, which could cause a catastrophe.

A Grim and Sunken Vow (AGASV)

The third book takes place right after the end of *A Cruel and Fated Light* and shows the aftermath of Queen Riadne taking over the Bone Crown. Here she explains that her son Vehan can keep his title as the Crown High Prince of the Seelie Summer Court on the condition that he swear his allegiance to both Riadne and the Courts. Celadon gets a similar opportunity but instead gets to take over as the Head of UnSeelie Spring after his father's death.

Through the book, we see Arlo struggling with the grief of watching her entire family dying and feeling like she was responsible for her mother's death. At the same time, she is also forced to do

anything Queen Riadne asks of her. Because Arlo cannot leave the Seelie Summer Court, Nausicaä decides to swear her allegiance to the Queen, as a way to remain at the Court and be there for Arlo when she needs her. This means that Nausicaä will once again become an honorary member of the Hunt, where they have to do the queen's bidding and act as her assassins. While Arlo, Nausicaä, and Vehan are struggling with their new realities at the Seelie Summer Court, Aurelian and Elyas are hiding away from Queen Riadne, while trying to find a way to stop her from doing any more damage than she has already done. In addition to this, we see Celadon, and often Lethe, trying to remake the UnSeelie Court of Spring.

The book ends with Arlo trying to take her life into her own hands and create a destiny that is out of both Fate and Luck's control. She does this while using one of her wishes from her die, while also finally removing the alchemic array from Vehan's chest.

Analysis

The homonormative setting in the *Hollow Star Saga* makes it easier for Ashley Shuttleworth to show a wide variety of queer identities. Because of this, we see multiple examples of the faerie world actively being more accepting of queer identities than the humans. This illustrates a great contrast between the homonormative and the heteronormative. Furthermore, we see that the homonormative worldbuilding adds to how each of the characters acts and experiences their own place in the world.

A Homonormative Setting in the *Hollow Star Saga*

To begin the analysis of the *Hollow Star Saga* by Ashley Shuttleworth it can be of value to see if the fantasy world has characteristics of a heteronormative or homonormative worldbuilding. Heteronormativity is said to discriminate against sexual minorities within a social structure, which is

not the case in the *Hollow Star Saga*. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, the reader is introduced to the vigilante group known as the Assistance, which is committed to “support human protests for things like rights for women, BIPOC, and the LGBTQPlus communities” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 310). This shows that some of the people of the faerie world are actively trying to improve the human society. Furthermore, in *A Cruel and Fated Light* Aurelian explains that “the folk weren’t nearly as fussed about gender and sexuality as their human counterparts were” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFT* 398). This would mean that the faerie world has grown to accept more diversity among its people than the humans in the saga.

Another common aspect of heteronormativity is how it can underrepresent or stereotype people of the LGBTQ+ community. When looking at the first book in the saga, we get perspectives from the characters Aurelian, Nausicaä, and Vehan who all state on-page that they are gay, lesbian, and bisexual respectively. This suggests that the books are not underrepresenting different queer identities. This is further backed up in *A Cruel and Fated Light* and *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, where we learn the queer identities of Arlo and Celadon as well. Additionally, the saga shows side characters of various sexualities, genders, and people who use a mix of different pronouns. All of this lays the ground for the *Hollow Star Saga* primarily having a homonormative world rather than a heteronormative one. However, one could question whether or not this means that the book is just normalizing another type of reality. Throughout the saga, we see clear examples of different aspects of queerness being fully accepted in the faerie world, while other minorities sometimes still struggle with prejudice in the Courts.

As previously mentioned, homonormativity includes people who stake claims for their rights like marriage, monogamy, and partnerships, with some of these rights being valued higher within a society. The faerie world in the *Hollow Star Saga* shows that the Courts are accepting of same-sex

marriage, even amongst the royalty. An example of this can be seen in *A Cruel and Fated Light* when the reader learns that Queen Riadne actively believes Theodore to be the best match for her son. “He [Vehan] cut a sideways glance at his friend, at the fae his mother had made no secret over preferring over however many other suitors she no doubt managed behind his back” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 189). The Courts are still not perfect though, as Thalo, Arlo’s mom, is looked down upon for being a single mom within the UnSeelie Courts. “Thalo and Riadne – two extremely badass women, accomplished and formidable despite everything working against them. They were both single mothers, [...] both nobility of very old houses that wouldn’t let them come this far if it weren’t for their strength of character” (Shuttleworth 23). This shows that while the Courts are more accepting in some aspects, like supporting LGBTQ+ people without question, they still have room to improve and be even more inclusive.

In addition to this, it can be interesting to comment on how the Primary World and the fantastical one differ in terms of monogamy. In the Primary World, monogamy is valued highly within most societies. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, however, we learn that this is not the case for the folk. “Monogamy... the folk weren’t all that fussed about it, but the High Royals had to be careful about who they empowered with their affairs – and Urielle forbid, a *child*” (100). As the quote explains though, the royals especially have a set of ‘rules’ for who they are allowed to be in a relationship with. The reason for these rules gets explained when Celadon, figures out that Queen Riadne is his birth mother, which means that he is the child of not only one but two royals. This means that Celadon has been born with more magical abilities than anyone else in any of the Courts, which could quickly stir a lot of trouble with the magical community if they were ever to find out. In the following example, we see Celadon’s father explaining why he Celadon’s parentage a secret for so many years. “You are my *son*, and I wanted to spare you the cruelty of the people who’d see what you were capable of and either try to use it for their own gain... or kill you for the threat your very existence

poses to the natural balance of things” (470-471). While this does not specifically comment on queerness itself within the world, it is still interesting to see how some things, such as relations between royals, can create distrust within the Courts. As soon as people figured out Celadon’s true identity, the whispers began “[it’s] unnatural; he shouldn’t exist” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 10), and as Celadon is still dealing with learning this news he simply agrees “[they] were right - he shouldn’t exist” (10). However, Celadon’s reaction likely also lies in the fact that they have been told that a child of two Seasons, aka parents with two magical branches, would combust and break free by any means possible.

In a heteronormative society people who do not conform to the gender roles of society receive fewer privileges and rights. It is also common for transgender people to get punished or impacted negatively for not adhering to these gender roles. In the *Hollow Star Saga*, this is not the case. Instead, we see characters of all kinds of genders being treated equally and being respected by everyone around them. There are multiple examples of this throughout the saga. A smaller instance is when Arlo encounters a troll on the way to the Faerie Ring who explains that: “First of all, I’m no ‘Mister’. My genders may be fluid and many, but my identifiers are neutral” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 167). Arlo quickly accepts this fact and apologizes for her previous assumptions. Another example can be found in the character Vesper who uses xe/xis pronouns (369). This is mentioned in a casual way, where it becomes a fluid part of the story where the reader automatically learns something about xis identity, without having to be told what this means for the character. Another example can be found within the character Luck. When the reader is first introduced to Luck, alongside Arlo, we learn that they can change their appearance at will. However, it is Nausicaä who later informs the reader, Arlo, Aurelian, and Vehan, that Luck is genderfluid and goes by they/them pronouns (433).

The heteronormative society also uses a mix of social formations and white supremacy which discriminates against non-normative people and their lived experiences, which can include single mothers and interracial relationships. Looking at the social formations in the *Hollow Star Saga* we can once again establish that single mothers, as well as women in general, still have to work harder than the men in this world to become successful. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, it is explained that “the folk might value their women better than humans did, but they were far from lacking prejudice” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 41). However, as the saga continues into *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we learn that this only became a reality once the Courts decided to blend in with the humans. “When the faerie world started to take on human prejudice against genders, Arlo suspected it correlated with rooting their Courts in the hearts of human cities instead of keeping to the wild” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 529). This could also be one of the reasons for Arlo being mistreated multiple times throughout the saga, because of her ironborn status. An example of this can be seen in *A Dark and Hollow Star*, when Arlo’s uncle, Malachite, explains that he is ready to “do everything in my power to ensure that stain is removed. The ironborn... They should all be cast out, in my opinion” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 92). This means that the people of the Courts also have preconceived prejudices set against specific groups of people and are not willing to change these views if they cannot benefit themselves in some ways.

Lastly, we have to look at how white supremacy comes across within the saga. The first two books in the saga, do not show any particular discrimination against people of color, but in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we learn about one of the Indigenous gods known as Coyote. However, as the European humans and the sidhe fae, had participated in the slaughter and torture of the Indigenous people, we see that most of the history surrounding the Indigenous gods had been lost and glossed over through the years.

“It was something most sidhe didn’t think about, didn’t talk about. It made them *uncomfortable*, despite how much they pretended to be above caring. How the white European humans had treated the Indigenous people was horrible, vicious, disgusting - but how the sidhe fae treated them and so many others to get what they wanted... wasn’t much better” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 291).

This shows that the Courts are neither as perfect nor accepting as they want to seem. Instead, they seem to sweep things under the rug to be viewed as superior to the humans, even though they had just as big a role as the humans in this genocide. In addition to this, it can also be interesting to take note of the absence of people of color within the saga. None of the main characters within the saga are explicitly described as a person of color, but Nausicaä is repeatedly described as “blond and suntanned gold” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 54) and variations thereof. However, an explanation for the lack of people of color within the main cast can be because the author themselves are white and therefore want to stick to writing main characters that are similar to themselves, to ensure that the representation is good, and does not become stereotypical.

Applying the concept of homonationalism by Jasbir Puar to the *Hollow Star Saga*, it can be beneficial to take note of where the books take place. *A Dark and Hollow Star* primarily shows the characters in Toronto, Canada, and across all the realms. It can here be fascinating to comment on the reason why the UnSeelie factions of Spring specifically decided to set up their Court in Toronto, was because of the human diversity within the city. “[It] was one of the most multicultural cities in the world, people from all over could make home within its many pockets and retain some semblance of their roots” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 303). The many different types of diversity within the city are also used to aid the fantastical creatures and help them blend in when and if their glamours should malfunction at any point in time. It can here, also be interesting to point out that Ashley Shuttleworth themselves

are Canadian (Shuttleworth, *Fantasy Author*), and therefore has personal insight and views on the diversity and acceptance in Canada.

Homonationalism views certain countries as backward thinking when it comes to LGBTQ+ and women's rights, while also believing that the Western world should help provide democracy and liberation for these countries. Throughout the *Hollow Star Saga*, we see many main and side characters compare the human and faerie worlds. However, as Arlo is the only one to live her life in both places, her perspective is best used to establish whether or not the faerie world is as accepting as the folk make it out to be. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we see multiple instances where Arlo hints that some of the less favorable aspects of the faerie world are rooted in them moving to the human world. "When the faerie world started to take on human prejudice against genders, Arlo suspected it correlated with rooting their courts in the hearts of human cities instead of keeping to the Wild" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 529). This suggests that the faerie world is currently not as accepting as they like to believe. However, it can be difficult to know if the Courts were ever fully accepting of everything and everyone before settling down in the human world, or if this is a deflection of pushing the blame onto the human world without taking accountability themselves.

"In the Courts, however much they'd adopted certain human ways to survive in a changing world, gender and sexuality were free and fluid things. No one cared who you liked or didn't. No one cared who you were. But Arlo had spent the majority of her life more entrenched in the human world than any other – in their prejudices, in their culture, in their set ways of thinking" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 364).

While LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance are at the forefront of this saga, there are still a multitude of examples that show women not being treated equally to their male counterparts in the Courts. However, it becomes clear that there has been an evolution in the folk's views on women throughout

time. Before the Courts' descent into the human world the folk had higher equality between all the genders, but as time went on this started to change. An example of this can be found in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*. "Mab, the first faerie queen [...] before the Bone Crown and fear of what women in power could be - magnificent; competent; ferocious" (Shuttleworth, AGASV 529). As such it has become hard for women to gain power or leadership roles both in the human world as well as within the Courts. It is a well-known fact that men are behind most leadership roles in the real world, even if a woman has the same qualifications. This has meant that women have had to overcome a lot of different obstacles and struggles to be taken seriously in both worlds. Through the *Hollow Star Saga*, the reader, sees Queen Riadne putting herself in positions to help her reach her goal of finally attaining the Bone Crown for herself. These tactics included risking Vehan's life by having him marked by the alchemic array and letting Arina (Riadne's mother) kill Riadne's husband and then lastly herself.

"She's [Riadne] a single mother, a woman in a world that values her less all because of her gender. People have taken advantage of her; shamed her; ridiculed her - many of them actually *love* that she came into the Bone Crown the way she did because they get to turn around and point and cry *look what happens when a woman get too ambitious*" (Shuttleworth, AGASV 217).

Women's struggle for power in both worlds has also meant that there has been a severe lack of good role models for women or young girls to look up to in the faerie world. This also makes Riadne's actions even more noticeable. When Mab was reigning as the first faerie queen she had a lot of respect, but as time went on, she was instead seen as "the symbol of rebellion for much of the folk. This woman [...] who sought to *take up space* in a way that men would have them not" (Shuttleworth, AGASV 529).

Furthermore, it is seen that homonationalism and racism are directly linked, and people of non-western communities are being viewed as intolerant. Applying this to the *Hollow Star Saga* it can be interesting to look at how homonationalism and racism are linked through the faerie world vs the human world instead of through a Western lens. This is done because the folk repeatedly explain how they are superior to the humans and are generally more accepting. However, when they talk about this it is conveniently left out that they, like the humans, had a hand in the previously mentioned bloodshed and massacres surrounding the indigenous people in Canada. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we learn from Coyote that they purposefully avoid confronting the truths of the past. “My children fill the unmarked graves of schools designed to ensure you *wouldn't* know who I am [...] Your Court exists on my land, on the blood of my relations, but you won't find me in any of your lessons or textbooks” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 290). This is further confirmed when Arlo explains that: “Sidhe fae schools glossed entirely over that part of their past, and the human schools did similarly, but it was only through her studies at the latter that she knew Coyote's name at all” (290). What is especially interesting here is the fact that while both species and worlds would like to pretend this never happened, the humans are actually the ones who take what is the closest to accountability for their actions in the past. However, no one is comfortable with talking about what happened.

Fantasy, Storyworlds, and the Narrative Fabric as Seen in the *Hollow Star Saga*

After having analyzed the aspects of homonormativity in the *Hollow Star Saga*, it can be interesting to move on to the fantastical elements in the story, as all of these elements are used to enhance the worldbuilding. According to Rosemary Jackson, the term ‘fantasy’ can critically be applied to any type of literature that does not focus on a realistic representation such as fairy tales, legends, and myths. These examples can describe realms that present something ‘other’ that is not human. The

Hollow Star Saga has a wide variety of different creatures, abilities, and elements that can be seen as fantastical. However, it can be interesting to look at how Jackson specifically describes fantasies as “[representing] realms ‘other’ than the human” (Jackson 14), as the *Hollow Star Saga* repeatedly uses the term ‘realm’. Here we see that ‘the Mortal Realm’ covers both the human and the faerie world. Furthermore, we can see that the two worlds have been integrated and blended seamlessly throughout the years, and neither seems to realize how much their cultures have affected each other. An example of this can be found in *A Dark and Hollow Star*, when the reader learns that the different creatures of the faerie world also know about some of the more popular fantasy franchises from the Primary World, such as Harry Potter. The first time we see a reference to the Harry Potter series is when Arlo talks to the troll about how to enter the Faerie Ring. “Well, it’s not Platform Bloody Nine-and-Three-Quarters, so I don’t suggest you barrel off at it” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 169). This reference can be seen as jarring to some readers, as J.K. Rowling recently started to make transphobic comments on the app X and on her own website in an essay called “J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking Out on Sex and Gender Issues”. While it is clear that Shuttleworth wants to be progressive with their books, hence the homonormative setting and worldbuilding, some of the effects can get lost in transit, when the reader has to be reminded of an author who has publicly debated whether or not trans women are women. This can also be one of the reasons why we do not see any more references to the Harry Potter series in the sequels.

Furthering the analysis of the fantasy genre, we can see that Jackson believes that fantasy literature is a narrative result where the author has transformed the condition contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself. In the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can see clear evidence that what we perceive to be true in the Primary World is no longer the truth, or at least not the only truth. This aligns well with what the French philosopher Jean-Paul Satre believes about the fantasy genre, as he believes that the Primary World gets inverted into something ‘other’, which means that the fantastical world, therefore, starts

resembling a new reality. This concept comes across very well in the *Hollow Star Saga* as the faerie world slowly begins to become a new ‘Primary World’. The reason for this is that everyone in the magical community knows about the existence of both worlds, while the humans are living their daily lives none the wiser, even though they have interacted with magical creatures without their knowledge. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we see that the members of the Assistance purposefully interact with the human population to help them advance and become more progressive in their ways of thinking. However, as they are trying to stay under the radar from both the humans and the Courts they do not “have the means to do much more than support human protests for things like rights for women, BIPOC, and LGBTQPlus communities” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 310). This also enhances how much the fae, and other fantastical creatures, interact with the humans, and why they choose to do so.

Satre also believes that fantasy books are human-made stories, which often fulfill the purpose of functioning as a form of Escapism. The *Hollow Star Saga* can act as a form of Escapism in multiple ways. First off, one can look at the fantastical elements, which in itself shows the reader an entirely new world which they can immerse themselves into. Here the saga shows us both the real world, as it is seen in Toronto, Canada, but the saga also deals with real-life issues and struggles that the reader can relate to. Examples of this can be figuring out your sexuality, dealing with grief, bigotry, etc. Secondly, we can look at the homonormative aspect of the saga. Queerness is a part of everyone’s life to some extent, and where you live in the world can often affect how you view people who identify across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. When Shuttleworth showcases these identities in such an open way, it can lead to a more honest discussion about what kind of obstacles queer people face daily, while also helping normalize these identities for readers who are not familiar with people being anything other than straight in their own lives.

In the text “World Design” Mark JP Wolf covers the concept of storyworlds in a fantastical setting, and how this setting becomes the world for both the story and the characters. Furthermore, Wolf sees that many imaginary worlds will go beyond the world data necessary for the story to make the world more realistic and immersive. To do this, authors tend to make detailed descriptions of the world and its culture, inhabitants, and locations. The world design is also used to make the imaginary world distinct and different from the Primary World. In addition to this, the world is typically designed with a specific focus and audience in mind. As the *Hollow Star Saga* is in the YA genre, that also means that the books have been written in a specific way. When we look at the culture in the books, it can be easy to point out how often the books in the saga make comparisons between the human and faerie world. An example of this can be found in the first chapter of *A Dark and Hollow Star*. “Of all the races of folk, the fae were the ones who most closely resembled humans in their appearance (though they insisted it was the *humans* who resembled *them*)” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 20). This quote is one of the first things that introduces us to the fae, and it quickly makes the reader realize that the two species, and cultures, have blended together. While it can seem repetitive at times it can also help make more firm and distinct lines about what each world believes and how specific characters are treated because of it.

To get a better understanding of the storyworld, and how it has been built, we can look at the size, scope, shape, and boundaries that have been used to describe the world. Here the size covers the amount of data shown about the world and how it works. The size of the world in the *Hollow Star Saga* can therefore be seen as very large as it covers the human world and the Mortal and Immortal Realms. However, when we look at the scope, which shows how much space has been covered in the world, we can see that the saga mainly focused its attention on the human cities of Toronto and Las Vegas, as well as the Courts of UnSeelie Spring and Seelie Summer. The size of the world is quite extensive, and each new book in the saga broadens the scope of the world even further, as each book

explores a new place or territory at some point. When we look at the shape and boundaries of the world, we can see that these categories are both dependent on the reader's experience.

Wolf explains that most imaginary worlds focus their attention on humans or humanoid beings to seem more relatable to the reader. In the *Hollow Star Saga*, we follow Arlo, who is half-human half-fae, and Aurelian, Vehan, Nausicaä, and Celadon, who are all different fantastical creatures who can be described as humanoid beings in this context. This means that we, as the reader, can follow the story more seamlessly as we can imagine these characters looking and acting like us. As the characters in the saga are all so distinguished from each other, we are also shown a multifaceted worldview and insight into the clashing cultures in the novels. It is clear that the cultures of the human and faerie worlds can clash and sometimes have opposing viewpoints. However, there are also examples of the cultures within the Courts themselves being different. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we are told about how Aurelian grew up in the Court of Seelie Autumn, where he went to public school in Germany. However, through his move to Seelie Summer “[they’d] been quick to stamp out his German accent; quick to counteract the human public school education he’d preferred with enrollment in the Nevada Fae Academy” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 124). This shows that the faes bias about the humans runs deep in some courts, as what was seen as fine and acceptable in Seelie Autumn is not the same as in Seelie Summer. The scene also gives the reader insight into the class differences within the Courts, and how this sets a precedent for the world being less homonormative in this aspect. The royals, and other higher-ranking members of their society, automatically have a place at the fae academies, whereas the workers have a lower status in the world.

After having delved into the storyworld in the *Hollow Star Saga*, and how it has been constructed, we can now look at the narrative fabric. This will be done, by focusing on the text “Narrative Fabric” by Mark JP Wolf. Here Wolf defines a narrative thread as following a particular storyline that either

follows a character, place, or chain of events through a set duration of time. Here we can distinguish between a narrative fabric and a narrative braid. The narrative fabric is defined as several narrative threads crossing each other and sharing moments in both time and spatial locations, and the narrative braid has multiple narrative threads that follow similar trajectories together. As such we can establish that the narrative fabric in the *Hollow Star Saga* has been made up of a narrative braid, where the story gets told through a third-person heterodiegetic narrator, who focalizes the story through each of the main characters.

Each of the narrative threads in the saga are unique, as the characters all have different experiences and have been exposed to a set of distinctive encounters because of it. This shapes how they view the world and the people around them. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we see examples of how Arlo and Celadon grew up with very different views of the world, even though they both grew up in the palace to some degree. An example could here be when Celadon visits Arlo at her school, and her peers only take an interest in her because of Celadon being nearby. “Nobody sought out Arlo’s company without some ulterior motive. Rachael and Paige made it clear from their very first invitation it wasn’t Arlo they were out to befriend” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 65). Arlo has experienced feeling like she was not good enough in multiple areas of her life, whether that be from the people in school or the people of the faerie world.

Furthering the analysis of the narrative braid we can see that Shuttleworth uses flashbacks which are focalized through the eyes of Riadne and Lethe when they were younger. These flashbacks show a contrast in how the world currently is, and how some things in the faerie culture have remained the same. As all of these characters meet, interact, and form bonds together, the world begins to feel more real. While the storylines don't need to overlap Shuttleworth still made sure that everything in the saga was connected in some way. This even extends to the flashbacks where we see Lethe being

friends with the moon when he was young in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, to realizing that Celadon was the moon reincarnated. There can be found small examples of foreshadowing for this being true. When Lethe first connected with the moon, it (the moon) had been bored after being alone for so long. “The Moon though [...] had been so *bored*, it told him, and it wasn’t long before they’d realized their shared fascination” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 33). It is here interesting to pair this sentence the moon had told Lethe all those years ago, with the very first sentence Celadon ever told Lethe. ““Do you remember the first time you spoke to me?” Celadon frowned, because yes, he did – and it wasn’t until now that he remembered what he’d said. “*People bore me, Lethe*”” (176). The way both Celadon and the Moon introduced themselves to Lethe, makes it seem like this aspect is such a core part of their collective identity, that it stayed with them even if Celadon does not remember meeting Lethe as the Moon. This also sets up Celadon and Lethe’s blossoming relationship later in the book. In addition to the narrative braid following the cast of characters, the reader also follows a chain of events of how and why Riadne originally decided to mark Vehan with an alchemic array to later explain how this helped her gain the Bone Crown for herself. This is all done in an achronological order to keep the reader intrigued and invested in the story as we see the main characters investigating what is going on behind the scenes.

Lastly, one can analyze the narrative fabric by looking at the size, weave, scope, and density. The size of the narrative fabric depends on the number of narrative threads a story has. Here we can see that the *Hollow Star Saga*, has multiple narrative threads, and each of them adds to how the reader sees the fantastical world. This also affects the weave of the narrative fabric, as a tighter weave contains multiple storylines running simultaneously throughout it. However, it can also be interesting to see how the saga fits some of the characteristics of a loose weave as well. Here we can see that the chapters that show perspectives from Hero, Riadne, and Lethe, can be seen as distant to the story to some degree, as they take place in another time and space. The scope then depends on how much

time and space has been covered. The timeline in the saga is very large as it spans all the way back to when Lethe, one of the oldest characters, was a young mer to the present day. However, the scope of the story becomes smaller as there are quite large gaps that have not been filled out from Lethe's time as a mer to when Riadne was a teenager trying to navigate her life in the Courts. The density of the narrative fabric depends on how much information the reader is given about the world. Here we can see that *A Dark and Hollow Star*, the first book in the saga, is the book that sets up the worldbuilding and how the fantastical elements work. Because of this, *A Dark and Hollow Star* is the book in the saga that has the highest density, as it gives the most information in the shortest amount of time. However, the following two sequels also have quite a high density, as the world keeps getting expanded upon, and the reader keeps learning new information.

Queerness Manifesting in the *Hollow Star Saga*

A Queer Narrative Voice

After having analyzed the fantastical elements of the *Hollow Star Saga* it can be valuable to look at how different queer voices are shown in the saga. As previously stated in the article "Queering Narrative Voice", Susan S. Lanser believes there are three different definitions for the academic use of the word 'queer'. The first can be defined as: making a claim for the nonheteronormative sex, gender, and sexuality. Applying this to the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can see that the series has a diverse cast of main characters as well as side characters who identify across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The fact that all the books in the saga have multiple points of view, can also be seen as something queer in itself, with how they all view and experience the world they live in.

It is never assumed that any of the characters in the *Hollow Star Saga* would automatically be straight. However, as Arlo primarily grew up in the human world, her views and experiences tend to differ a

little when compared to the other characters. Before realizing that she is not as straight as she originally thought, we see multiple characters question Arlo and her relationship with Nausicaä. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light* when Arlo's mom teases her by saying "I wouldn't be *at all* unhappy to have your Nausicaä as my future daughter-in-law" (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 506). This shows that even if Arlo has not come out to her mom, Thalo is still accepting of her daughter's identity, and wants her to be happy. While many people in the Courts do not find it necessary to come out, Arlo had spent the majority of her life in the human world, which affected how she viewed herself. This can be seen in *A Grim and Sunken Vow* "while no one there had ever come out and said *thinking about girls is wrong*, Arlo, they'd never said it was right either" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 364). As such Arlo becomes slightly shocked to learn that Vehan, just like her mother, believes Arlo and Nausicaä to be a couple before the two have had a chance to talk about their feelings in *A Cruel and Fated Light*. "... well, I *am* planning on asking her to be, you know, a c-couple? I guess? Soon? Haven't quite worked up to that yet" (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 521).

The second way the term 'queer' can be defined is: to disrupt and/or deconstruct the binary of gender, sex, and sexuality. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we get told that Celadon has figured out that he is both asexual and genderqueer, as he is not only male. However, sorting out these identities while in the public eye has turned difficult as: "[all] of a sudden both of these things were up for public debate, something to dissect and hold up against others of the same identities, as though there was only one set of guidelines on how these identities were supposed to look and be" (Shuttleworth *ACAFL* 355). This mostly retains to his lack of exploration of his gender identity though, as Vehan explains, in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, that Celadon "had been open enough about his demi-asexuality [...] but it didn't mean he was clueless to how very much people wanted *him*, regardless" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 70-71). In addition to this, it is explained that Celadon's sexuality means he relies on boundaries and a deep and well-established emotional bond to feel any kind of attraction. Through *A Grim and*

Sunken Vow, we see Celadon developing this bond with Lethe, and how their conversations and time together have evolved into something more than basic companionship. “What was this relationship between them? Because Celadon *was* starting to feel it - not the curious strengthening of the bond between them, but the curl of actual desire for this man” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 507).

Throughout the saga, we also see a mix of disruption and deconstruction of Arlo’s sexuality after her first kiss with Nausicaä in the elevator in *A Dark and Hollow Star*. In the sequel, *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we see Arlo go from questioning her identity, to slowly realizing she is not only into boys but girls as well, to later coming out and asking Nausicaä to be her girlfriend. When Arlo first questions her sexuality she is confused and internally working through what she identifies as, since she previously had not put much thought into it. “[Was] she interested in girls? Was she *only* interested in girls, or did she like boys too? Did she only feel this for Nausicaä?” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 82). As time goes on she spends a lot more time with Nausicaä and begins realizing that her feelings for Nausicaä are not strictly platonic. “She could hear very loud in her head – *you like her, you like her, you like her*” (339). However, realizing and coming to terms with these feelings, and acting on them are completely different things to Arlo. Nonetheless, when she does come out, she also explains the process of coming to terms with her sexuality to Nausicaä. “I’ve never really thought much about it until meeting you. I’ve always liked boys, I know that, but it wasn’t until recently that I realized that I like more than this, too. [...] I’m pretty sure I’m pansexual. Gender doesn’t necessarily matter to my attraction, and this label just seemed to fit the best? So ... yeah, pansexual” (562). All of this shows the phases Arlo went through when her preconceived ideas of her sexuality were disrupted, and it shows how her sexuality was slowly deconstructed and split from the binary when she realized she liked not only boys, but people of all genders.

The third and last definition of the term ‘queer’ is: to disrupt or deconstruct any entity by rejecting binaries and norms. This aligns with Blackburn et al.’s explanation of how the disruption of norms (aka the standards of proper and acceptable behavior) is a key principle within queer theory. We can here look at the character Luck, who is genderqueer, and use they/them pronouns instead of the more ‘traditional’ pronouns of she or he. Because they use gender-neutral pronouns, they also prefer their descriptors to not be gender specific. “[Like] many of the immortals who are genderqueer and non-binary, don’t use ‘god’ – it’s too male a term” (Shuttleworth, *ADAMS* 433). While Luck does not identify with a specific gender, they still like to dress up and play around with their gender expression. This can be seen in multiple instances, and example can be found in the following quote: “Luck looked like a woodsy *teenager* – distinctly masculine-aligned tonight, though no matter what gender they visibly expressed (if any one at all), they were still only to be addressed as “they” and “them”” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 211). Another example can be shown a little further in *A Cruel and Fated Light*, when Arlo describes them as: “they were suddenly sitting on the bed beside hers, in a form that was no one gender but very distinctly many. [...] they seemed larger than life, every inch the titan they’d always been” (481). This shows that Luck’s ability to change their form makes it easier for them to express themselves, while also making people view them in the way that they want at any time.

By exploring these three meanings of the verb ‘queer’, Lanser found a predicament in not only the feminist narratology but also her own work. Here it is said that the binary of gender is necessary for both the readerly and writerly engagement with the narrative voice. The previous section of the analysis, which focused on the word queer, primarily relied on the character's voices rather than the narrator's voice. This was done to get a better understanding of the world, and how the characters' identities and upbringing shape their outlook on the world, which in turn shapes the narrative voice in the saga. In addition to this, it also spoke into the discussion on the importance of relying on the

gender binary for readers' enjoyment and engagement with the story. However, as the *Hollow Star Saga* has a multitude of different characters who identify beyond the gender binary, it becomes clear this is not as important as one originally would have thought.

After defining the word 'queer', in the text "Queering Narrative Voice", Lanser went on to do the same for the term 'voice', which can have five different meanings that all get intertwined when discussing 'queer voice'. However, the ones this project will focus on are the expression of a certain attitude (the voice of reason), group identity or the collective will, which is also known as the will of the people, and lastly, the category that describes the textual narrators (narrative discourse). As these categories all get intertwined when reading and analyzing the book, it can be valuable to first look at the textual narrators (narrative discourse), as this is how the story gets narrated to the reader. Looking at the textual narrators within the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can first establish that all the books have heterodiegetic (third-person) narrators who are ontologically separated from the storyworld. In some instances, this means that the reader will know more than the individual characters. This is especially true when we see Lethe erasing Vehan's memories. "How many times I've had to erase you figuring out your fate ahead of schedule... Tedious" (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 201). Here the reader learns that this has happened multiple times, and we are, therefore, left wondering why Lethe keeps doing this, and what other things Vehan might not be remembering anymore.

When looking at the narrative discourse, it is possible to distinguish between the categories of order, duration, and frequency. Starting, by looking at the order it can be interesting to first look at *A Dark and Hollow Star* which is the first book in the saga, and therefore also the book which introduces us, the reader, to the fantastical world. The book starts with a flashback in medias res, where we see Alecto, who we later come to know as Nausicaä, being punished for her crimes of murdering eleven mortals. "You are expelled from the Immortal Realm. You are expelled from the Sisterhood, and

from my favor, and from my heart. I banish thee to the Realm of Mortals and tether your eternity to its soil” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 5). This sets the tone for the rest of the book and makes the reader want to know what is going to happen next, and what exactly drove Nausicaä to murder these eleven people. The next scene in the book shows us a flashback from the side character Hero’s perspective. Here we see him going about his day-to-day life, and being introduced to a mystical person, aka. Lethe, who seems to know everything about him. “[There] have been other ironborn like you who’ve responded similarly to having their magic suppressed... to being Weighed by the Fae High Council and found wanting, power locked away, only for it to grow stronger just a little bit later than expected and *rebel* against its confines” (11). Generally, these flashbacks and chapters of Hero help create suspense for the reader, as we never fully know what he is doing and why. One of the reasons for this is that the reader is still being introduced to the fantastical setting.

After seeing these two flashbacks from Nausicaä and Hero, the rest of the story is primarily told chronologically through the main characters Arlo, Nausicaä, Vehan, and Aurelian. However, the book still has some achronological ‘chapters’ in the form of flashbacks from Hero. These flashbacks all explore how Hero goes from realizing who he truly is, to explaining why he begins experimenting on ironborn people in the quest for making a philosopher’s stone. *A Cruel and Fated Light* and *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, follow much of the same structure. However, instead of following Hero, both sequels make a substitution for which side character to follow. These side characters always give the reader more insight into what the focus of the new book is going to be. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we have flashbacks of Riadne as she grew up in the Courts and was never treated as an equal to Azurean, Celadon’s father. “Why do you think I could possibly want it – me the *daughter* of a woman with such strict standards that I might as well not exist for all I can ever do right by her. Me, a young woman in a world that only puts chairs at the table for *men*, why do you think *I* want the Bone Crown?” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 100). Because of this, she feels compelled to do everything in her

power to become someone the rest of the Courts will respect no matter what. This is also why she puts the alchemic array on Vehan's chest. To make sure that her own children will not be treated the same way she was. This expands the story even further, as the reader now gets to see more of what goes on behind the scenes in the Courts.

Lastly, *A Grim and Sunken Vow* substitutes the flashbacks from Riadne to Lethe back when he was a young mer. This is especially interesting as the reader has not heard much about Lethe's past in the first two books. In addition to this, the reader also gets a better understanding as to why Lethe was originally behind the plan for making philosopher's stones and why he decided to side with Riadne. In the end, it can be said that the achronological parts of the saga are all used to enhance the story and help keep the reader more engaged with the story and wanting to know what is going to happen next. Furthermore, these scenes also make it easier for the reader to follow along with how the plot is moving forward without being unnecessarily confused or blindsided by the plot.

The next category used to analyze the narrative discourse in the *Hollow Star Saga* is the duration. Here we can look at how much time the saga spans over, and what that means for the people reading the book. After having read the first three books in the saga we can conclude that the saga technically spans thousands of years, but the reader only gets to see some selected scenes that do not take place in the present time. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we see Lethe when he was a young Mer (mermaid) trying to learn more about the world. However, instead Lord Cosmin, one of the gods from the Immortal Realm, and also Lethe's father, exchange the lives of twelve human sons with Lethe's to the human king known as King Atlas "[to] secure Atlantis's place in legend" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 42). Because of this Lethe ends up going through years of torture trying to cling to his one ounce of sanity – the moon. As time passes though, Lethe is finally able to enact his revenge on the humans and his 'father', King Atlas. After this, Lethe wakes up at the Starpool seeing Lord Cosmin once

again, who offers him the position of General and the First of the Wild Hunt. This shows that Lethe has been alive and conspiring long before the present timeline in the book takes place. The chapters from Arlo, Nausicaä, Vehan, Aurelian, and Celadon all take place during the present day, which means these scenes are happening in real time. However, whenever Arlo uses her magical die from Luck the book uses a freeze frame, as time stops for everyone except her and the immortals, as time works differently for them. An example of this can be found in *A Dark and Hollow Star* “I’m an immortal. I don’t have any time for you to stop” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 411). However, the saga does not comment on whether or not Arlo stops time in general, or it only happens to those in her proximity.

Lastly, one can also look at the category of frequency, to see how many times a specific event has been told or shown through different perspectives. The reader generally does not see entire events being shown from different character’s perspectives. Instead, we can see small sentences getting repeated in multiple chapters. Examples of this can be found multiple times in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, when we see Arlo dealing with the aftermath of the slaughtering of most of her family. “*Your allegiance, Arlo [...] You, and your little die, and all that alchemy you just wished on yourself. [...] I demand all three*” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 77). These scenes are used to show how difficult it has been for Arlo to deal with the aftermath of her family’s death, while not having anyone to talk to about what she went through, as she believes it all to be her own fault. In addition to this, the frequency of which these types of scenes are used also helps show the reader the headspace and state of mind Arlo is in: “[her] brain could operate only in a feedback loop of words that were at once significant and completely meaningless” (77).

It has previously been established that most of the characters in the faerie world believe themselves to be more accepting of LGBTQ+ people than their human counterparts which plays into the

expression of a certain attitude when analyzing ‘queer voice’. While this has proven to be true in multiple instances, it can be valuable to find examples that show how this attitude is not black and white or a universal belief from all characters. “Aurelian might have liked [her] a bit more if she wasn’t all around awful and would accept that he was very gay and very much *not* into her attempts at “conversion to bisexuality”” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 144). This shows that while the faerie world likes to believe that they are accepting and open-minded, there are still people out there who make bigoted comments. In addition to this, it can also be interesting to look at how the faerie world's integration with the humans and their culture has made them use the same terminology when it comes to being part of the LGBTQ+ community. Arlo identifies as pansexual, Nausicaä as a lesbian, Vehan as bisexual, Aurelian as gay, Celadon as demi-sexual and genderqueer, and Lethe as somewhere on the spectrum of demi-romantic. Furthermore, we also see Aurelian’s brother Harlan identifying as a transgender man. When the book explicitly uses this type of terminology, it becomes easier for the reader to understand what type of representation the book actually has instead of only alluding to it. It also becomes easier to follow the story more organically as it resembles that of the Primary World.

Lastly, the ‘queer voice’ can also be described as a group identity, or the collective will. It is here interesting to see how the five main characters are all queer, which means they share a group identity in that sense. The way their stories all get intertwined and meshed together also adds to their collective identities, as they are able to explore themselves while being surrounded by other queer people. In addition to this, all five characters have a very similar belief system and a shared end goal for how the faerie world should be in the future. The perspectives from Hero, Riadne, and Lethe are, however, not part of this collective will, as they are not part of the group.

To further the analysis, it can be valuable to look at Lanser’s three meanings of the term ‘queer voice’ as a whole. These three forms can be described as a textual speaker who: is queer in terms of sex,

gender, and/or sexuality, subverts the conventions of sex, gender, and/or sexuality, and lastly, a voice that confuses the rules of voice and baffles the assumptions of both narrator and narrative. When combining the concepts of narrators with queer voice, we can also see that the most frequent use of queer voice is used to describe a subject or character who identifies as queer in some aspect. While the saga has a heterodiegetic narrator, who is separated from the storyworld, the books are still mostly through a queer lens. This is because the narrator knows how the main characters are feeling, and why they act in certain ways. However, some smaller chapters in *A Cruel and Fated Light* include flashbacks from Riadne when she was a teenager, and the books do not hint at her being anything other than straight. This means that while we mainly get to hear from different queer voices, they are not the only ones present within the world or the story itself.

Adding to the concept of queer voices, it can be beneficial to also delve into the cultural assumptions made about gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. As the saga mostly has a homonormative worldbuilding, we do not see a lot of assumptions being made about gender and sexuality. However, when they happen, like when Arlo assumed the gender of the troll in *A Dark and Hollow Star* it is automatically corrected. In addition to this, it seems that coming out is easier in the fantastical world when compared to the Primary World. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light* when Aurelian explains that “the folk weren’t nearly as fussed about gender and sexuality as their human counterparts were, so when Harlan came out as transgender, and transitioned a few years back, he hadn’t been met with any backlash from the people who’d known him before” (Shuttleworth, *A Cruel and Fated Light* 398). In addition to this, we can see that all the characters in the saga know other queer people, which makes it easier for them to know and learn about all the different queer identities that exist.

Looking further at the cultural assumptions we can make a comparison between how markers such as class play a role in a person's identity and when/if they want to come out in the Primary World. Sexualities and gender are often discussed and up for debate in the Primary World when it comes to public figures. As such it can be interesting to look at how royals are treated differently in the two worlds. In the Primary World, we rarely hear about royals who identify as queer in any way, and the reason for that is likely how it previously affected the monarchy and the rights of succession. However, in 2021 both Sweden and the Netherlands came out with statements that explained that a royal in a same-sex marriage would not hinder the rights of succession anymore (Theil). This is very different in the *Hollow Star Saga*, as everyone knows that Prince Vehan is bisexual, and the gender of whom he marries in the future does not matter. In fact, we see that Queen Riadne had invited Theo to their court for the specific purpose of having him court her son. As this is common knowledge, we also see Vehan and Theo being able to openly joke about their situation. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light*. ““As your possible future husband,” said Theo, his tone as dark as the day had grown, “if I die here today, you’re contractually obligated to rip out all your hair and wail through the streets in mourning”” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 49). This aligns well with how Robinson described homonormativity, and how markers such as specific marriages and partnerships are not being viewed as superior to others.

Queerness has a complex history, especially in the Primary World, so it can be important to distinguish between the out and closeted characters in the *Hollow Star Saga*. This will give us more insight into the characters and who they are, as well as a better understanding of the fantastical world. As previously mentioned, the characters Aurelian, Vehan, and Nausicaä all came out prior to the first book taking place. Throughout the saga, we can also see that all of them feel comfortable in their identities and talk about them openly. Looking at the ‘closeted’ characters it can be interesting to first look at Arlo, and how she goes from believing she is straight, questioning her sexuality, to realizing

that she has been pansexual all along. Arlo mainly began to question her sexuality because of Nausicaä and how she kissed Arlo near the end of *A Dark and Hollow Star*. As such most of her journey of discovering and coming to terms with her sexuality takes place in *A Cruel and Fated Light*. An example of this can be seen in the following quote. “Nice in a “hey, I think you’re becoming my best friend” way or “hey, I’d really like to kiss you again” way, she had no idea, but the fluttering had started up once more in the pit of her stomach” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 235). Figuring out her sexuality ended up becoming a longer process for Arlo, as she mainly went through the process alone. An example of this can be found in the following quote: “Google has been a very useful tool lately” (562). Here we can see that Arlo, like many people in the Primary World, decided to use the internet as a guide in understanding herself and her identity better.

Another closeted character in the saga is Celadon. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we learn that Celadon has come out before regarding his sexuality, but he is still trying to figure out and process his gender identity, while coping with his status as the High Prince, and wanting to avoid public scrutiny. “It was difficult being young and trying to sort out both his genderqueerness (he’d determined for now that he wasn’t only male, but that was still a pending subject for him) [...] *without* adding “High Prince” and “Court Idol” on the top of this” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 355). Here we see that it is a universal experience to feel vulnerable when sharing new and different parts of yourself, even if you will be met by acceptance.

Through the analysis of queer voices in the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can establish that Ashley Shuttleworth was able to write a very diverse cast of characters, and thereby deconstructed and challenged the socially accepted norms found in the Primary World. All of the main characters have different identities in both sexuality and gender, and none of them has been written stereotypically. Furthermore, all the main characters have distinct personalities, and have a wide variety of lived

experiences, and journeys for figuring out their identities, coming out, and having the people around them react to these identities. In addition to this, many of the side characters are also part of the LGBTQ+ community. This shows that Shuttleworth took on the challenge of not only writing characters that were accepted within the social standards of belief. Instead, she created a world where people in the LGBTQ+ community were present all across the entire spectrum of identities.

Character

Shalynn Claggett, who wrote the essay “The Human Problem”, explains that while characters in fiction are not real, they can still hold value to the people in the real world. A reason for this is that some people like casting themselves, and others, as characters that fit into their own personal narratives whether that be following the preestablished social or cultural script or in defiance of them. The *Hollow Star Saga* has a diverse cast of characters in terms of both backgrounds and identities, which means readers of all ages, and backgrounds will be able to relate to at least some aspect of the saga. One example can be how growing up, Arlo always felt like an outsider in her life, to later finding her own ‘found family’ in Nausicaä, Vehan, Aurelian, and even her cousin Celadon. However, the process of building these relationships was more difficult in the beginning, as Arlo had started to believe she did not have much to offer the people in her life. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light*: “[She’d] written so many drafts of texts over the past couple of weeks, wanting to check on him [Vehan], but awkwardness and anxiety refused to let her send a single one, because she was just Arlo... and Vehan was... well...” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 152). Here we can see that it is a universal struggle to feel like you are not fitting in with the people around you. Many people can therefore relate to feeling alone before they find the people they are compatible with.

Another example of the reader being able to cast themselves in the roles of the characters in the saga can be found in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, where we see both Celadon and Arlo struggling with the

grief of losing everyone in their family and having to deal with the aftermath thereof. “*Why* he’d decided to shower at all, fully clothed and dazed beyond the point of recollection, he couldn’t say, other than this ever-persistent desire to get clean. Clean, like he’d been filthy, sullied, covered in his family’s blood, which he couldn’t seem to wash off. But nothing he did seemed to make it any better” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 167-168). This shows one of the reactions people can have to grief. Both Celadon and Arlo almost shut themselves off from the world when they are grieving – especially since they both believe they are at fault for Riadne killing their family members. By showing this side of grief, the reader might be able to relate more to the characters and what they are going through if they have also lost someone important in their life.

Looking at how the reader can cast other people in the roles of the characters, one can look at how Malachite, Arlo’s uncle, tends to look at her with distaste. “[The] way Malachite treated her right to her face – as though she was less than nothing, and her humanity made her inadequate. His every comment was designed to fluster her too much to fight back” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 141). Many people will have encountered someone who does not treat them right, even if it is for a reason they cannot change, be that your sexuality or being ironborn like Arlo. However, Malchite’s opinions are obviously on the more extreme side of the spectrum as he previously said: “Not to worry, when her Weighing comes, I’ll do everything in my power to ensure that stain is *removed*. The ironborn... they should all be cast out, in my opinion” (92).

In feminist and queer studies, it is seen that diverse books have historically had the ability to help marginalized groups and communities be able to claim some form of agency in an already oppressive system. Furthermore, Claggett explains that these narratives can be used as a tool for self-actualization. A great example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light*. Not only do we see Arlo going through the phases of trying to figure out her sexuality, but we also see her go about the

process in a very realistic way. ““Google has been a very useful tool lately.” She choked a laugh, recalling how many nights she’d spent over the past few weeks researching various sexualities” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 562). The way this is written and represented makes the scene become real in a more direct way. When people in the Primary World are coming to terms with their own sexuality it is often a process, like it was for Arlo, and it is not unheard of for these people to use Google to research their own feelings, and which labels would fit them the best.

Female Masculinity, Tomboys, and Inverts in the *Hollow Star Saga*

Halberstam believes that masculinity should not be reduced down to the male body and its effects. Therefore, it can be interesting to look at how masculinity is shown in the *Hollow Star Saga*. Throughout the saga, we see Nausicaä acting more masculine than most of the other characters. One example of this can be found when she tries to act like a hero to impress Arlo in *A Dark and Hollow Star*. “Well, if one of us assholes is going to play your stunningly attractive defender, like hell I’m going to let it be fucking Thranduil over there” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 407). As Nausicaä spent most of her life as a Fury, she has gotten used to taking on these tougher roles of protecting others, and it therefore comes naturally for her to ‘show off’ this way. In this sense, Halberstam adds that female masculinity is often found in fiction that depicts experiences that are queer and female. “Listen, I have no idea if Arlo is even interested in girls, but I’ll be damned if I don’t try my hardest to find that out, and I literally don’t know any other way to woo someone than by showing off in front of them” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 133-134). This quote illustrates a great example of a queer female experience, where Nausicaä wants to show off her best side to impress Arlo.

Following the lines of female masculinity Halberstam believes it important to also look at tomboyism and how it is seen as a way for women to strive for the ‘natural’ desire for freedom and mobility. During the present day of *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we see that Nausicaä has lived in the Mortal

Realm for more than a hundred years, and during this time she has been free in the sense that she has the power to choose who she wants to be without having anyone looking over her shoulders. In addition to this, we also see that she is strong and independent, and therefore does not have to rely on a man to get anywhere in the world.

Halberstam has observed that tomboyism is largely accepted, and even encouraged when it has been linked back to the stable girl identity, as it can show both self-motivation and independence. However, when a girl shows signs of what is seen as too extreme male identifications, like rejecting girl clothing, tomboyism is instead getting punished. In *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we see an example of Nausicaä wearing a suit, which is traditionally worn by men. “Nausicaä, in a suit as weapon-sharp as her features, black as the dress Arlo wore, her blazer left open to reveal nothing but a black lace bra underneath, and shoes as liquid silver as the shimmer painted on Arlo’s skin” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 540). Instead of being chastened for this decision though, Arlo is more in awe when she sees her for the first time. In addition to this, we only hear one negative comment regarding this outfit, and it is from Nausicaä herself, as she is trying to fight Lethe. “It was very impractical to fight like this, shirtless with only a bra and open jacket for cover, both of which were oddly restricting for how little there was to either article” (605). This in itself could also be seen as a more extreme male trait as Nausicaä goes beyond ‘just’ being an independent woman and is instead ready to physically fight as she has been trained to do. Here it can also be interesting to comment on how Halberstam saw that female masculinity was often found in lesbian communities. Nausicaä fits this stereotype well as she identifies as a lesbian and likes to dress and act more masculine. However, while the fact that Nausicaä is wearing a suit can be seen as masculine, the lack of clothing (like her only wearing a bra) can also be seen as more feminine, and she almost becomes hyper sexualized like how female superheroes are often written for the male gaze. This can then explain that she is feeling more uncomfortable and restrictive in her clothing, than how they physically feel on her body.

While Halberstam saw that tomboyism could be accepted in some instances, he also believed that the opposite was true for male femininity, as it was frowned upon and seen as the greater threat. It has previously been established that the *Hollow Star Saga* has a homonormative worldbuilding, but there are still instances where male femininity is seen as something negative. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we see two very different reactions to Celadon wearing a more feminine outfit. “I supported the man who ruled this Court, not this painted-up doll playing king at his throne” (Shuttleworth, AGASV 238). Here Vrain, one of Celadon’s counselors, uses Celadon’s femininity as an excuse as to why Celadon cannot rule the Court, even though he grew up learning about all the inner workings from his father. When Vehan sees Celadon in this outfit though he is more impressed than anything else.

“He didn’t expect this young man in black leather trousers and open emerald silk robes that flowed so long the hems pooled like water at his feet [...] Glittering black makeup smoked around his eyes, one bright jade and the other shocking blue. A deep, sage matte painted his mouth. Rings on every finger [...] Celadon stood so out of place in this cave; he looked a bit [...] like a *god*” (Shuttleworth, AGASV 234).

In popular media, tomboys are only tolerated if it is in relation to a narrative of blossoming womanhood, where the tomboy narrative is seen as a resistance to adulthood rather than adult femininity. While this is not directly the case in the *Hollow Star Saga*, it is still possible to find examples that support this idea to some degree. “Riadne trailed silently after the Eight Great Courts’ Highest nobility, already envisioning her very first lesson with her present, and the way Azurean might look at her *then*, when she became the best swordswoman the Courts had ever known” (Shuttleworth, ACAFL 47). When Riadne was growing up she wanted to be the best in many areas to prove her worth. However, as she grew up, she learned how to appease the folk in the Courts by acting less on her more masculine abilities and therefore stopped training with swords. Once she

killed everyone Azurean, the High King, though she had to once again rely on these traits of the tomboy to be taken more seriously, in a world where women still are not seen as equals.

In addition to linking tomboyism to female masculinity, Halberstam also saw a connection to the concept of inversion, which was discussed by Richard Von Kraft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. In 1886 Kraft-Ebing identified four different types of lesbians. The two most prominent of these for the *Hollow Star Saga* would be the women who are available to masculine inverts but are not masculine themselves, and the inverts who look masculine and also take on that masculine role. While Arlo does not identify as a lesbian, we can still see characteristics of her being attracted to more masculine women. Before Arlo even knows she is interested in girls, she seems to show both an attraction and interest in Nausicaä when she first sees her. “This girl was strong, and she was beautiful, and most of all she was *frightening*” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 81). As previously mentioned, Nausicaä fulfills multiple criteria for being a tomboy, and can therefore be seen as an invert who looks masculine and takes on the masculine role. This is also seen in terms of her blossoming relationship with Arlo. “You’re smooth, I’ll give you that [...] but I’m definitely going to out-woo you!” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 340). This aligns really well with how she previously stated that she only knows how to impress someone by showing off.

While Kraft-Ebing believed that the roles of inversion were completely fixed, Ellis proved this was not the case. Furthermore, Ellis also saw that there was a difference between feminine and masculine inverts. Where the female inverts were seen as social deviants rather than sexual ones, the masculine inverts were instead seen as someone who was born to an essential female masculinity. When analyzing the *Hollow Star Saga*, it becomes clear that these categories are not as black and white as Kraft-Ebing had originally thought. While people, and characters, can fit some of the characteristics, that describe a certain person, people are also multifaceted which means they adhere to multiple

identity categories. This view also aligns greatly with the views of Susan S. Lanser, and how she explained the concept of intersectionality, as she believes that no one can live every aspect of their existence within one specific identity category. Instead, she sees that we are made up multiple identities.

Intersectionality within the *Hollow Star Saga*

In the essay called “Toward (a Queerer and) More (Feminist) Narratology” Susan S. Lanser explores the concept of intersectionality. This approach builds on some of the same concepts as the queer narrative voice. Identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, and language are all at the forefront of both of these approaches. However, through intersectionality, each of these categories is produced within a set form of social locations where both the group and the individuals are affected by each other. Throughout the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can see multiple examples of this. One example could be how Celadon’s identity gets explored in *A Grim and Sunken Vow* after the rest of the magical world learns that Riadne is his birth mother. This revelation comes as a shock to all, and almost immediately we see everyone in the Courts question whether or not Celadon had a hand in helping Riadne take the Bone Crown for herself. This idea is sealed even further by the public after he is the only one in his family to come out of the situation alive, and how Riadne immediately wants him to take on the title of king after killing his father. “Head of UnSeelie Spring? Riadne wanted... to make him *king*?” (AGASV 24). His identity as the queen’s son ends up complicating his life even further, as he does not know who to trust, especially as he plans to do everything in his power to do the right thing and undo his mother’s wrongs.

When Riadne appoints Celadon as the new King of UnSeelie Spring, she inadvertently helped add on new dimensions to Celadon’s character. Because of this, he undergoes multiple changes which helps

him gain new opportunities and alliances that will aid him in his mission to change the Courts and the systems for the better from within.

We belong to a system built on corruption and deceit, on blood and stolen land, a hierarchy designed to benefit the sidhe fae alone, often at the expense of our fellow folk and *certainly* of the ones who called our spaces home before we did. [...] We've progressed admirably in many ways, achieved much in our years of unity, some of it even good - but we are long overdue for change. Change, therefore, will be my aim (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 585).

This shows that Celadon is aware of the bloodshed it took for the faerie world to merge with the human world, and instead of sweeping it under the rug like his ancestors, he wants to own up to it and put a stop to the sins of the past. At the same time, this also conflicts with how everyone talks about the faerie world and community as progressive all the time, when in reality the generational system of the Courts in the human world started off so brutally. In addition to this, one could argue that Celadon wanting to change the Courts in this way also means that he wants to make the world even more queer. There can be multiple reasons for this being true. The first reason would here be how the faerie world will once again become more progressive. Another reason is how change is essential to our identities and understanding them, so by making the world more progressive it automatically also shows queerness in a freer way.

Another example of the group and the individual being affected by each other can be found in Arlo. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, Arlo is seen as an outcast in both the faerie world and the human world, and the only person who does not make her feel this way is her cousin Celadon. The reason for her feeling so alone in both worlds is mainly due to her ironborn status, and how the people in the Courts view her as dispensable because of it. It becomes clear that she has internalized this belief after being excluded from the faerie culture for so long and having been forced to spend most of her life not

fitting in with the people in the human world either. “School had never been her favorite place. She’d been terrified of letting something slip about magic and the Courts in case it hurt her chances with her Weighing” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 65). However, through *A Dark and Hollow Star* Arlo starts gaining new and real friendships in Nausicaä, Vehan, and Aurelian who see her for who she is and not what she can or cannot do. Because of this Arlo begins feeling more at ease with exploring her powers and trying to use her magical die from Luck. The die becomes a turning point for not only Arlo herself but also how people around her see her.

Once Arlo begins practicing her alchemic abilities she can finally shine. As such, she quickly becomes the one person that the other characters rely on and wants something from. This even extends to the other gods and deities which have been forgotten long ago. “You can choose to be anything with one of your four wishes, and that makes you special, makes you very important to the immortals, who will soon begin to present themselves to you in quest for your favor” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 484). Here we see Arlo going from being the outsider that most of the faerie community does not want anything to do with, to being more valuable and powerful than most people would have imagined. Because of this, we see how the gods and immortals start sharing their personal goals and agendas for contacting Arlo.

While it is interesting to look at intersectionality through the characters within the saga, one could also look at how the human and faerie cultures have intertwined and affected each other even if unknowably throughout the years. All of the faerie Courts have decided to integrate somewhere in the human world. As previously mentioned, the UnSeelie fraction of Spring purposefully set up their court in Toronto due to the already existing human diversity. This has meant that most people in the Courts have had to integrate with the human world to some degree. “The magical community – however much they grumbled about their growing reliance on technology and assimilation with

human culture, their love for human art was evident in the amount of times they referenced it in casual conversation” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 169). In addition to this, we also hear how High King Azurean was inspired by the human world to make faerie public schools in the Courts to make education more accessible to everyone. Furthermore, he also implemented free public health care in every Court.

However, it is not everyone who is happy with that last development, which can be seen in the following quote.

Yeah, it’s free because there’s double the tax on *us*. The fae are the ones who pay for it [...] And for what? [...] Faeries are forever going on about how unfair things are for them. They’re ungrateful. We let them live in a society *we* built, so of course they’re going to be expected to adapt to *our* ways – and I don’t know, maybe stop buying things you can’t afford if you’re too poor to pay medical bills? Like, get another job or something (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 149).

This is a clear way to illustrate how privilege is a universal experience in both worlds and cultures. Here the rich do not want the poor people to ‘take advantage’ of them. However, it is often not as easy as Fina tried to make it out to be in the aforementioned quote. If the faeries generally do not have much money, then they likely also do not have the capital to spend on unnecessary things.

When studying the fictional narratives of a story, it becomes possible to use intersectionality to observe the structural and circumstantial effects of how people act and behave in certain locations rather than make assumptions. While the reader is able to observe aspects of the culture and the fantastical world in the *Hollow Star Saga*, it can be difficult to form an unbiased opinion as we are constantly being told or shown these previously mentioned comparisons of the faerie/human world. Furthermore, we see how intersectionality rejects the approach to narrative where identities are seen as predictable, while also knowing that the narrative genealogies have been shaped by an

intersectional configuration. The reader does not have to assume the identities of the characters in the *Hollow Star Saga* as most of them openly discuss and use labels we are familiar with in the Primary World. “He hadn’t been Vehan’s bisexual awakening (even Aurelian didn’t possess that “honor”)” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 122). These labels help the reader get an immediate understanding of the characters, instead of having to guess at an implied sexuality like other fantasy books might do.

Intersectionality also shows that no one can live their lives and existence by only adhering to one identity category, but we are instead made up of multiple identities, allegiances, and identifications. While it is possible to find examples of this in all the characters in the saga it is most apparent in Celadon. His position in the Courts has made him able to shift his personality to fit whoever he is talking to and what will give him the results he seeks the quickest. Because of this, it can be interesting to look at how the other characters view Celadon, as well as how he views himself, and how this affects his different identities. This becomes especially interesting to do as Celadon’s identity is fluid and always changing, which is part of his queer identity.

In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we see how Celadon almost acts like Arlo’s protector even though they are nearly the same age. “Please allow me to take care of this. You’re my family, my best friend, and I love you like a sister [...] So let me protect you as I’ve always protected you... as I’ll continue to do” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS*, 157-158). While Arlo might sometimes view Celadon as overprotective, she still accepts that it comes out of love, since no one besides Celadon and her other cousin Elyas views her as an essential part of the Viridian family despite her lack of powers. As such Elyas and Celadon, are also the only ones in her extended family who actively seek her out wondering if she is okay after witnessing the death of an ironborn girl at the café with her father. “Elyas and Celadon were the only Viridians, apart from her mother, who cared enough to check on her” (105).

While Celadon evolves throughout the story, it is especially clear in the first book how much both Arlo and Celadon had to rely on each other while growing up. “I’m closer with you than anyone else. We’ve spent almost all our time together since you were born” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 110). This has made them very dependent on each other during their upbringing. However, it also meant that the two were able to form a genuine connection where they were able to tell each other about all their struggles in their daily lives.

Celadon’s identity gets another layer when we look at it in relation to Vehan. Through the first two books in the saga, we hear how Vehan had grown up idolizing Celadon, and even being part of the fandom known as ‘the Celadom’. This admiration for Celadon has grown throughout the years and he now “completely worshipped the youngest son of the High King - he had been Vehan’s first crush” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 292). Because of this Vehan is very eager to form any kind of friendship with Celadon and get to know him better. “Do you think she’s given High Prince Celadon an invitation? [...] to the open season on my hand in marriage” (122). However, nearing the end of *A Cruel and Fated Light*, we learn that Riadne is both boys’ birth mother. This complicates things, and we therefore see Vehan struggling and spiraling with the realization that he is Celadon’s brother. “Celadon was his brother [...] and every time Vehan’s brain kicked up the unhelpful reminder that he’d had some pretty explicit wet dreams about [Celadon] [...] Vehan wanted to be sick all over the floor” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 62). Celadon, on the other hand, has had time to come to terms with this reality before it was public knowledge, and therefore already views Vehan as part of his family. “I’d appreciate it if everyone stopped trying to murder what’s left of my family tonight” (68).

The road for Celadon and Vehan to get closer is long for many reasons. One being, how difficult it is for them to even keep in contact while living in different Courts, and how each of them have important things to deal with. However, both of them quickly realize that they have a unique

opportunity to form an alliance against their mother as she trusts them more than anyone else in the Courts. The first step in this direction takes place when Vehan visits Celadon in the Courts of UnSeelie Spring and pledges his allegiance through his meeting with the Elder Dragon Gwyrdd. This situation settles two separate issues for both characters. The first being, whether or not they could trust each other. “There it was at last. Confirmation. They served the same side” (Shuttleworth, AGASV 245). By finally knowing that they are on the same side, Vehan also feels comfortable in his belief that Celadon will do the right thing if Riadne were to escalate their current situation even further. “She expects you’ve inherited a great deal of power. She doesn’t expect that of me. Not yet. If it comes down to war, I *will* be a valuable weapon to you” (246).

The second thing that gets settled through the aforementioned interaction, is one of the biggest hints that Vehan has come to terms with Celadon being his brother. “He’d always wanted a sibling, back when he’d been *so alone* [...] “I’m still going to do it. What’s a little healthy competition between brothers?”” (240). This quote also illustrates a great example of why Riadne later gets the three of them transported to the top of Toronto’s city hall to test both of her sons' abilities in controlling lighting. While Vehan had grown up training and practicing this specific craft, Celadon had yet to master the many different magical abilities besides wind. However, as Vehan had predicted, Riadne expects more from Celadon at the moment and therefore does not notice when Vehan uses his abilities to impress Riadne in Celadon’s stead. “My son [...] From day one I knew you’d be different. That *you* would be the one to take this realm by storm – I’m just setting things up for you” (266).

The relationship between Celadon and Vehan is ever-evolving, and we see multiple examples of them finding it difficult to interact without a common goal. Because of this, it can be very interesting to look at how Celadon uses clothing and fashion as a way to show his love for his friends and family.

One example of this can be found in the following quote when Arlo explains why Celadon wants to help them pick out their outfits.

“You never have to wear anything Celadon picks. It’s just... I mean, *I* didn’t really understand it until recently – like, the reason he’s so into clothing. I think it’s how he protects himself, you know? His armor against the world [...] knowing how much he associates his outfits with security, I think it’s more... this is how he protects the people he cares about as well” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 343).

This knowledge helps bridge the gap between the two brothers. “[To] know that his [Celadon’s] assistance had been an olive branch of sorts” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 343). In addition to this, it also gives Vehan insight into who Celadon is underneath all the confidence he has had to portray to the outside world since he was a kid. All of this ends up creating a found family dynamic between the two characters, where they find common ground and goals in a tumultuous time in their life.

Finally, it can be valuable to look at the many layers of Celadon’s identity when he interacts with Lethe. Throughout *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we see a push and pull between both characters as they evolve from acquaintances to something resembling lovers. The two of them had always been drawn to each other for some unexplained reason. However, as the saga continues, we learn that this is likely due to how they both feel a strong connection with the moon. In fact, Celadon’s father believed that Celadon was the moon reborn and would therefore be destined for power and greatness. “Father always said I was the moon reborn. [...] I didn’t ever actually believe him [...] I’m not the moon reborn. After all, I don’t exactly consider this life to be particularly blessed, do you? But still... I always liked it. The thought. The *moon*” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 175). Celadon’s upbringing, and hearing about his father’s beliefs multiple times, were likely some of the biggest reasons for Celadon finding comfort in knowing the moon would always be there. “The moon [...] It’s... a constant. It

never leaves the sky – day and night it’s always there – and... I don’t know [...] the moon was sort of like... not a friend, really, but just... familiar” (174). This creates a queer kinship between Celadon and the Moon in a non-sexual way, where he almost becomes friends with the Moon, even if he is not able to communicate with it.

Much like Celadon we also see how Lethe found solace in the moon. However, for Lethe the moon was his only friend and the thing to light the darker days while he was being tortured and was forced to be away from the sea when he was young. Because of this, Lethe still thinks back on the friendship he once shared with the moon and is, therefore, able to find the similarities between Celadon and the moon. This leads Lethe to believe that Celadon’s father was right. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow* Lethe explains that: “You could live a thousand lives, be reborn a thousand different people; take countless lovers and forge endless friendships. You could have everything, and then it all stripped away, again and again and again... and still you will never know what it felt like. To just once be the one to lose *you*” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 467). Here it becomes clear that Lethe is starting to feel something for Celadon, like he once did when he was the Moon. Because of this Lethe also purposefully takes a punishment on Celadon’s behalf. “*If you so much as raise that whip to him, I’ll end your life where you stand*” (465). This makes a role reversal in what Celadon is used to. Normally he can act as the protector for the people whom he loves and cares about, but this time it is Lethe taking on that role. This makes Celadon feel weird, as he believes it to be his fault that Lethe is now hurt.

The romantic part of Celadon and Lethe’s relationship takes a while to develop. As previously mentioned, Celadon is demi-sexual, which means he must form a strong emotional bond with someone before wanting to enter a relationship. “He enjoyed looking at him, [Lethe] always had, and on the very, extremely, *incredibly* few occasions they’d held meaningful conversations, he’d enjoyed that too – it was far from what made a couple, though” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 170-171). In addition

to this, Lethe identifies somewhere on the demi-romantic spectrum and therefore does not feel the need or pull for a romantic relationship. “Romance is not my particular forte, and I can’t say I’ve ever felt moved to it. But you do have my attention. Quite a... bit of it now, as much as you will wish you didn’t. They always do” (176-177). While the two of them never fully discussed what a relationship between them would entail, they both still feel comfortable with their strong connection to each other. “He had no idea what they were becoming, what Lethe truly wanted from him. [...] this feeling, a sureness, that whatever they were growing into, they’d once been quite a lot to each other. Lifetimes ago. Whole *people* ago” (465). From Celadon’s perspective, this certainty in their relationship likely also stems from how he is starting to notice how it feels like he has known Lethe in a different lifetime and therefore seems to automatically trust him more than he would have someone else.

Through this, we can see that Celadon has multiple identities and personality traits, which come out when he interacts with different characters. This can be seen as queer in a way as people on the LGBTQ+ spectrum often act a certain way so as to not seem different from their peers and those around them. In addition to this, we also see that all of our identities also affect who we are as people, and the people we are close to. This is also why Celadon’s relationship with Arlo and Vehan is inherently queer, as they act as his found family when compared to the siblings he grew up with and felt like he could not trust. While he feels the need to put on a protector role for both Arlo and Vehan, he still has the ability to be himself without fear of any outside judgment.

Lastly, there is the relationship between Celadon and Lethe. Their connection is pretty immediate from the start, but it is only in *A Grim and Sunken Vow* that it gets explained why. Celadon being reborn as the moon, Lethe’s long-lost friend makes their connection, and to an extent, their romantic relationship feels close to inevitable. Furthermore, we see a difference in how Celadon acts with Lethe

compared to everyone else. While he wants to shelter Lethe from the bad things in life, it is actually Lethe who ends up taking on the role of protector, which has traditionally fallen on Celadon.

Furthering the concept of intersectionality, Lanser explains that it can be difficult to not assume fixed identities and categories as they have already been established, even if feminism demands that we do not try to predetermine them. Because of this, it can be a compelling idea to further the analysis of the intersectional approach by looking at how the *Hollow Star Saga* shows examples of questioning fixed categories such as the gender binary in both time and space. As previously mentioned, in *A Dark and Hollow Star* Arlo assumes the gender of the troll, as well as Luck when she first meets them. However, once she realizes her assumptions are wrong, she immediately uses the correct pronouns. This shows that Arlo has grown up in a culture in the faerie world where other pronouns have been normalized, and people are having an easier time learning and correcting themselves.

Along the same lines, it can be especially interesting to look at the character Vesper and the use of pronouns. When the reader is first introduced to xim, it is through Nausicaä's point of view, and as she has been friends with xim for years it makes sense that she knows xis preferred pronouns. They are therefore used very organically in the story without any explanation which was done with both Luck and the troll. However, when Arlo meets Vesper for the first time, she immediately knows which pronouns to use.

“This wholly unfamiliar person mused on what she was, drawing back to consider Arlo at a more comfortable distant angle. Very long and lean and disturbingly wraithlike with xis too-sharp features, golden-starlight shimmering skin, ivy-green hair, and eyes that were all electric iris and no pupil at all. Arlo didn't need the distinct tone of rotting in xis aura *or* the black cloak xe wore to tell her xe was one of the Wild Hunt” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 477).

One could here argue whether or not this was done to show that Arlo does not make the same assumptions anymore. However, Shuttleworth likely did this on purpose to not confuse the reader, as we had already been told which pronouns Vesper uses. In addition to this, one could argue that it is compatible with the narrative level as well. As previously mentioned, the saga has a heterodiegetic (third-person) narrator, which means that the narrator already knows what the reader has been told. Therefore, it would feel unsatisfactory for the reader to read about the same thing twice if it does not add something new or different to the story.

Lanser goes on to explain that the reason we should be questioning these aforementioned fixed categories, is because they have been linked to the global structure of power, and how it has brought on a number of widespread inequalities. In the *Hollow Star Saga*, the reader repeatedly gets told two facts: 1. The faerie world is more accepting than their human counterparts. 2. Women are not treated as equals to men in the faerie world. An example of this can be found in the following quote: “the folk might value their women better than humans did, but they were far from lacking prejudice” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 41). When these comparisons happen, the humans are almost always described as less evolved and in need of help from the faeries. While the faeries might be doing better in this aspect it is still clear that men and women are not treated as equals in either world. “Gossip had labeled Riadne many things over the years. Ambitious, intelligent, *talented* – the praises varied, but what folk tacked on at the end of these words was always the same, the condescending “for a girl” that implied that nothing they’d so graciously attributed her would ever be taken seriously” (179). The inequality in the faerie world is also one of the reasons why Riadne grew so bitter and wanted to do everything in her power to get the praise she deserved.

The previously mentioned global structure of power goes against the otherwise homonormative worldbuilding Shuttleworth has built through the saga. As such it can be interesting to comment on

why they did not decide to write an LGBTQ+ utopia where inequality did not take place. However, a reason for this can be how some of the most common traits in the YA fantasy genre, is having obstacles which the main characters should overcome and fight against. As such Riadne almost acts like a scapegoat for the other characters.

The intersectional approach assumes that specific social persons can coincide in ways that is able to either complicate, enable, or prevent certain actions. It is possible to find multiple examples of this in the *Hollow Star Saga*. As such it can be interesting to apply these parameters to Aurelian, as he spent much of his life under Riadne's thumb and has therefore not been able to make any true decisions regarding his own wants in life. In *A Dark and Hollow Star*, we see how even Vehan realizes that his mother ended up affecting his relationship with Aurelian. "It was right after his mother proclaimed Aurelian as Vehan's steward, turning their friendship into a shackle – and never mind that the role was far from what Aurelian wanted for himself" (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 115). Aurelian knows that the reason he got the position as Vehan's retainer, was to be used as a puzzle piece in Riadne's long game. "Aurelian hadn't yet known the worst threat to Vehan was anyone the prince was fond of, hadn't known that Vehan's own mother would take those people and turn them against her son's throat" (37). This is also why Aurelian purposefully keeps his distance from Vehan, even if it hurts both of their feelings to be so distant from each other. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, we hear about how Aurelian and Vehan's friendship also ended up complicating Aurelian's relationship with his brother Harlan, when he explains: "I didn't understand your obsession with weird science things, and you always made me participate in experiments and they were stupid, but it made you happy, so it made me happy too. Then Vehan happened" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 548). Here it becomes clear that Aurelian had built so much of his life up around Vehan, even if it was hesitantly because of Riadne, which ended up affecting everything else in his life.

The distance Aurelian keeps from Vehan can almost be seen as irrelevant, as everyone picks up on their feelings for each other. An example of this can be found in *A Dark and Hollow Star*, when Nausicaä explains the following to Arlo. “I feel like Aurelian doesn’t like most people, so I wouldn’t take that to heart. Maybe if you were a handsome, black-haired, blue-eyed prince of the Seelie Summer Court” (Shuttleworth, *ADAHS* 403). However, it seems that everyone, but Vehan, is able to pick up on these feelings before they get together in *A Cruel and Fated Light*. Their relationship brings its own challenges though, as Riadne never wanted the two of them to end up together. “Oh, for *goodness*’ sake, you ridiculous child – he’s just a boy! There are countless others in this Court who’d be more than happy to have your attention” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 65). This shows that Riadne is not opposed to their relationship because of their genders, but it is likely that she does not deem Aurelian worthy because of his background and lack of status.

It is seen that intersectional queer narratology can be used to map out the free indirect discourse, meaning there is a combination of a third-person narrator who shows the inner thoughts of a character. The *Hollow Star Saga* uses this form of FID, to create more intimacy with the characters and what they are going through. The reason for this intimacy is that the reader gets to hear a character’s thought process when they are going through something, which shapes the way we view a certain situation. Examples of this, can be found in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, when we see Arlo getting triggered by Fina, a faerie girl at a party, making fun of Thalo’s death. This leads Arlo into a frenzy where she does not completely understand what is going on around her, as she just keeps hearing her mother’s last words “*Arlo - Survive*” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 357), while beating Fina. This almost becomes Arlo’s breaking point in the book, as she is would have killed Fina if Nausicaä had not stopped her.

The third-person narrator on the other hand makes for a more authoritarian narration as the narrator is impartial and can distinguish between the character’s feelings and how the other characters are

reacting as well. In addition to this, we can see that the free indirect discourse can open the narratives while also purposefully leaving gaps between what is said and what is not. Much of the relationship between Celadon and Lethe is left between these lines. We know that they are developing some kind of romantic attachment, but their relationship is mostly undefined, as they never fully disclose what their intentions are with each other. Which is very different from how we saw the relationships between Aruelian and Vehan, and Nausicaä and Arlo develop, as all parties here explicitly stated that they wanted a romantic relationship with the other. With Celadon and Lethe though we mainly see their relationships and feelings being explored by the third-person narrator.

Lastly, intersectional narratology should focus on BIPOC narratives to achieve a global, more well-rounded, and historically accurate narrative. When looking at the *Hollow Star Saga*, we can see that the first two books rarely make a point of focusing on giving voices to these BIPOC narratives. However, a reason for this is explained in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, when Shuttleworth incorporates a historical narrative of how the Canadians took over the land from the indigenous people, and how both the human and faerie world likes to pretend this did not happen. By incorporating this type of narrative, which likely also has a tendency to be brushed over in the Primary World, the reader gets insight into the Canadian culture, and how they got to where they are today. However, even though there is an explanation for the lack of BIPOC narratives, that does not mean that Shuttleworth is able to fulfill this part of the intersectional narratology if they want to be more inclusive when building their fantastical world. This effectively means that the BIPOC voices are being erased from the story, especially in the first two books in the saga. This seems to have the opposite effect of what Shuttleworth was trying to do, as they likely wanted to create awareness of how the indigenous people were treated.

In the article “Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers” Blackburn et al. found that categories such as metonymic configurations, unreliable narrators, flashbacks, and foreshadowing were all useful for analyzing YA books which focuses on LGBTQ+ identities. The metonymic configurations here refer to a pattern of behaviors that have been marked by normalized constitutions such as gender and sexuality, which have been built up by developing conflicts or thematic implications through interactions with contrasting diverse characters (often character stereotypes). The homonormative world in the *Hollow Star Saga* makes it easier for the people of the faerie world to avoid any conflicts regarding normalized constitutions such as gender and sexuality. However, as previously mentioned, Arlo partly grew up in the human world, surrounded by their culture more than most of the other fae, which means she was the one to encounter the most negative discourse surrounding queer people in her daily life. This is likely also one of the reasons why she never sat down to fully think about her own queerness before she met Nausicaä. This goes to show how the culture and people around us can affect how we view ourselves. Another interesting in the saga is how much of the culture is filled with acceptance for queer people and their identities, which in turn means the saga does not have to rely on stereotypes like we are used to seeing in the Primary World, and the people are free to be who they are without facing any kinds of negativity.

Furthermore, we see that the metonymic configurations can describe how a character’s behavior is marked by different attributes, which makes it easier for the reader to initiate a schema for hegemonic masculinity. Here we can look at hegemonic masculinity in relation to other characters who perform masculinity and other kinds of gendered behavior. This means that feminine metonymic configurations can take place as well. Applying this to the *Hollow Star Saga* we can see examples of how Celadon performs his identity and how it defies the traditional gender norms found in the Primary World. Throughout the entire saga, we see examples of Celadon wearing outfits with elements that

would traditionally be seen as more feminine. “His [Celadon] chosen outfit for the night was cosmic-black trousers, a matching, high-necked black shirt, and ebony boots that rose to his knees with heels like five-inch daggers” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 534). In this example, Celadon is wearing not only heels but also makeup: “with his avian-sharp features and all-consuming jade eyes, with greens and blacks and silver paint and shimmer around his eyes and cheekbones” (534). This shows that he is not afraid of dressing up and playing around with his gender expression, which gives him more feminine features. However, we still see examples of Celadon relying on other masculine traits throughout the saga as well. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, the reader learns that Celadon’s father had taught him how to fight with a sword when he was growing up. While Arlo and the people knew of this arrangement, none of them had ever seen Celadon in action. This is also why Lethe is close to impressed with how well Celadon is doing in their very first sparring match. “Lethe’s grinned spread even wider, as though his face might split in two” (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 316).

Furthermore, we can see that the heterodiegetic third-person narrator shows perspectives from the five different main characters, and one side character in each book, which means we get to see the world through the eyes of people with different backgrounds and upbringings. This means that the reader does not have to be actively aware of any unreliable narrators, as all these perspectives can give a more rounded overview of everything going on in both worlds. However, we also see instances where the readers are purposefully left in the dark alongside some of the characters. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light*, when Nausicaä is hiding information from Arlo. “I will tell you, but there’s a difference between spouting off immortal secrets to the High King versus to someone I actually care about. I want to make sure the things I tell you are actually *true* before I paint an even bigger target on your back than what I expect is already there” (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 80). This creates intrigue for the reader, as we know this secret that Nausicaä is keeping is going to come to light later in the book and is likely to play a bigger role once it has been revealed.

Lastly, we can look at how flashbacks and foreshadowing have been used in the *Hollow Star Saga*. Traditionally, these categories can be used to show how a character's past experiences either being or realizing that they are queer. When Shuttleworth disrupts time in this way it can help the readers get a better understanding of the characters and how they came into their queer identities. A great example of this can be found in *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, as the flashbacks from when Lethe was younger, show how he started to see potential for more than a platonic friendship with the Moon. This experience ended up shaping his queer identity throughout the rest of the series, while also foreshadowing why he has been so drawn to Celadon.

In their article, Blackburn et al. found that it would be essential to understand sexualities and gender identities through a poststructural approach. This provides an approach that goes beyond the oppositional and hierarchal. When analyzing the *Hollow Star Saga*, it becomes clear that the faerie world does not have a hierarchy when it comes to people of different sexualities as they have been able to build what is mostly seen as a homonormative world. However, as previously mentioned, the faerie world still has room for improvement in making equality between the genders to destroy the current gender hierarchy which has been ingrained so much in their culture after settling down in the human world. Furthermore, it is seen that the poststructural approach does not assume people's true identities. This aligns with how Robinson describes a homonormative world, however, as Lanser explains it can be quite difficult to get out of the mindset of assuming a fixed identity. As such, it can be interesting to comment on how these assumptions are still made in the *Hollow Star Saga*, but the people of the faerie world are quick to accept that these assumptions can be wrong. An example of this can be found in *A Cruel and Fated Light* when Aurelian explains how people responded to his brother coming out as transgender. "[He] hadn't been met with any backlash from the people who'd known him before" (Shuttleworth, *ACAFL* 398).

Lastly, the poststructural approach sees that people, and characters, can perform gender and sexuality, but that these identities are not captured by one single thing. Instead, our identities are seen as multiple, variable, and sometimes they are even conflicting with each other. This lines up with how Lanser explains the concept of intersectionality, as this approach explains that we are made up of multiple identities and identifications. In *A Grim and Sunken Vow*, Lethe is described as demi-romantic and never felt the desire to pursue a relationship with anyone. However, in the flashbacks from when Lethe was a young mer, we see how Lethe's bond with the Moon, made him crave this connection. "The Moon, and Lethe. Friends. Lovers, in the sense that their souls had been bound, would forever be bound and known with an intimacy by each other that Lethe couldn't imagine anyone else ever knowing the same way" (Shuttleworth, *AGASV* 376). This also explains why he decides to enter into a 'relationship' with Celadon even though it might not be in the traditional sense that most people are used to.

Escapism and the Importance of Queer Books

The last chapter of the analysis will focus on the connection between Escapism and the importance of having queer stories marketed toward young adult readers. According to Warran L. Young, Escapism can be described as a person wanting to escape from their current situation by creating a new imaginary world to escape from their current reality. In the traditional sense, a person will use Escapism in the hopes of finding or inventing a personal utopia, which in some cases can create a moral triumph where the reader can improve themselves. Fantasy books are classically used as Escapism because of the intricate world design and fantastical elements that make the world different from the Primary. However, even though the readers are not constructing the world themselves, they can still use it as a personal utopia that they can rely on to escape from reality. In the article "Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can

Offer Young Adult Readers” Blackburn et al. explain that they believe, a queer approach should help the reader challenge the preestablished ideas of heteronormativity we are all used to, and instead acknowledge and celebrate people of different identities to create a new normal. This aligns well with how Robinson describes homonormativity, and how these characteristics were shown in the *Hollow Star Saga*.

Throughout the entire saga, Shuttleworth authentically showcases queer identities instead of relying on outdated stereotypes, which can be very valuable for readers who identify somewhere on the LGBTQ+ spectrum or are questioning their identities. Furthermore, it can be interesting to comment on how Blackburn et al. found that most of the LGBTQ+ books being written, try to show that the queer person is just like their heterosexual counterpart instead of showing the differences and why they should be acceptable as well. However, this is not the case in the *Hollow Star Saga*. Here we see that each of the characters' identities creates nuance and becomes an integral part of who they are, but it does not become the only unique marker of their identity. In addition to showing different types of queer representation, we see the homonormative world in terms of on-page representation, where the main characters use labels, which we as the reader, most likely already know (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, etc.). This is not a common factor in fantasy books, as these labels are from the Primary World. Furthermore, it can be interesting to comment on the homonormativity in the saga can help add to the Escapism from the daily struggles people go through. Depending on where you live in the world queer people are treated differently, so if someone lives in a place where they are discriminated against, this saga can show that there is hope for something better out there. In addition to this, we see that the characteristics of homonormativity can add to the experience when reading the book, and how Blackburn et al. believe that queer books should challenge the heteronormative world we live in.

According to Young the traditional sense of Escapism can help people gain moral triumph and improve themselves. This aligns very well with how Blackburn et al. found that books with characters who do not adhere to societal norms, can alleviate some of the pressure young people face when they do not fit the norm. Through reading the *Hollow Star Saga* people can learn about multiple identities and see how these people are comfortable in their own skin, which can help improve how they see themselves, or even those around them. In addition to this, it is seen that queer books can help counter the invisible ideologies in society, where people meet homophobia and misogyny in their daily lives. At the same time, the books can also help the readers gain empathy for those who are different from them, as they become exposed to these new characters and situations.

The dynamic sense of Escapism aligns with some of the same characteristics as the traditional sense of Escapism, as it concentrates on how we can use our daily affairs to improve the human condition. The idea of having a homonormative world can be seen as essential to improving our society. Because of this, we can use the *Hollow Star Saga* to show some of the areas where the Primary World could be in the future. However, while the faerie world is ahead of the Primary World in terms of acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities, the saga also shows struggles for women and other minorities, which is not part of the homonormative setting.

Conclusion

After having analyzed the *Hollow Star Saga* we can conclude that the faerie world mostly has a homonormative world, with some criteria not being met. Throughout the saga, we see that almost everyone in the faerie world is accepting of people of different LGBTQ+ identities. Examples are here all the main characters being on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, a wide variety of side characters of different genders, and sexualities, and a usage of neopronouns. Here we also see that the trans people in the saga are being treated as equals and not punished for their queer identity. Shuttleworth clearly took their time creating a fantastical world where LGBTQ+ people are not being discriminated against. However, we still see acts of discrimination happening with Arlo because of her ironborn status. Furthermore, it is also clear that women are in no way treated equally to their male counterparts. This is also interesting, as we learn in *A Grim and Sunken Vow* that this was not always the case. When Mab, the first faerie queer, reigned she was cherished, but in the present chapters she is seen as a sign of rebellion instead and is an example of what women should strive not to be.

Through the analysis of the homonormative world, the analysis also focused on the concept of homonationalism, which showed that racism and the homonational identity are closely linked. When the faeries first decided to move to Toronto, Canada it was because of the city being multicultural, and their ability to blend in with the humans. However, through the saga, we learn that the people of the faerie world did not care about the cost of merging the two worlds. The faerie world therefore actively participated in genocide to take over the land from the indigenous people. In addition to this, I found that the BIPOC narratives were close to non-existent in the first two books, which goes against the homonormative setting, which Shuttleworth was establishing.

The analysis of the fantastical elements in the saga showed that the merging of the human and faerie worlds has made their two cultures clash and affect each other in multiple ways. Examples here range

from the Assistance trying to advocate for women's and LGBTQ+ rights in the human world, to Aurelian noticing how the high fae look down on him for going to a human public school. The latter example shows the difference between the classes in the faerie world, which goes against the concept of having a homonormative world.

The analysis of the queer how queerness manifested within the saga was partly focused on the characters themselves, as these identities shape how the reader sees the world. Here we can see that Ashley Shuttleworth was able to write a diverse cast of characters, which challenged and deconstructed the social norms traditionally found in the Primary World. In addition to this, we can see that Shuttleworth did not rely on stereotypes when creating these characters, as all of them have distinct personalities and experiences related to their identities. Furthermore, the analysis showed that many of the side characters are part of the LGBTQ+ community as well. An example could here be how Luck, and it is especially interesting how they are able to change form, and thereby express their genderfluidness without effort, and always be perceived how they want at any given time. This shows us that the binary of gender is not as important for the readerly engagement as critics had previously believed.

Lastly, the project found that it is possible for readers to use the *Hollow Star Saga* as a form of Escapism, as it can help them create a personal utopia, where queer identities are positively put in focus, by normalizing their place in society. The homonormative setting added to this and helped create more diversity within the saga. In addition to this, we can see that the characters are all open about their labels and queer identities even if they do not fit into the societal norms of the Primary World. This can help queer readers feel heard and comfortable in their own skin while they have to navigate the world.

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Thesis Summary

This project investigates how the first three books in Ashley Shuttleworth's *Hollow Star Saga* (2021-2023) showcase different queer identities in a homonormative fantasy world. This is done through an in-depth analysis of the different characteristics of homonormativity that can be found in the saga, and how the fantastical elements help the world become more homonormative than the Primary World. In addition to this, the project examined how the different kinds of queer identities were being portrayed in the saga. This was done by analyzing the queer narrative structure in the novels, and how we saw the world through the eyes of the five main characters, as well as understanding how their identities affected their view of the world. Lastly, the project went on to discuss how the reader can use the *Hollow Star Saga* to escape from their current reality, and why the saga can be valuable for young adult readers.

The analysis showed that the *Hollow Star Saga* has characteristics of a mostly homonormative world, however, there are still signs of inequality. One of the biggest areas of inequality is found in how women are being treated within the faerie world, as the folk often rely on being 'better' than their human counterparts. However, almost everyone in the faerie world is accepting of people with different LGBTQ+ identities, and we also see a vast variety of different identities, sexualities, genders, and even the use of pronouns throughout the saga. Furthermore, we see that the queer identities in the saga helped challenge and deconstruct the social norms we normally see in the Primary World, and Shuttleworth did not rely on stereotypes when creating these characters.

The analysis of homonationalism in the saga though showed that the faerie world actively participated in genocide to merge with the humans and become part of their culture. In addition to this, the analysis also showed that narratives of BIPOC characters only showed up in the third book of the saga, which goes against the homonormative setting the author was trying to set.

Lastly, the project found that the *Hollow Star Saga* can be used as a form of Escapism as it can create a personal utopia for queer readers, as all of the queer identities were normalized in the faerie world. In addition to this, we saw that all the characters use labels we are familiar with to describe their identities, which can make queer readers feel more comfortable in their own skin when they navigate the world.