

The Metamorphosis of Empowerment to Enslavement:

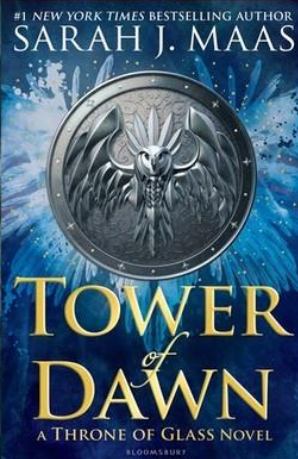
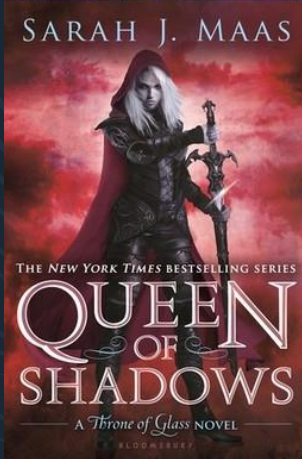
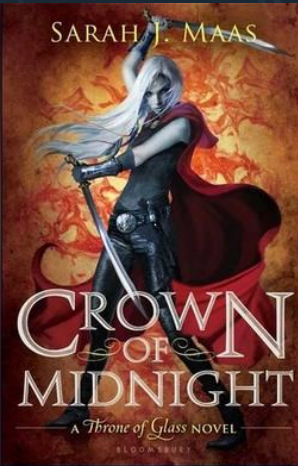
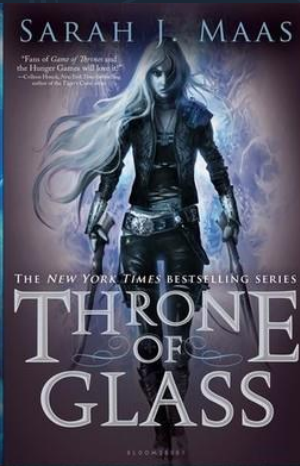
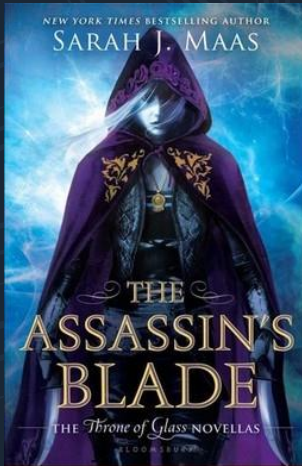
A Nonconsensual Conflation of Bodies and
Identities of a YA Female Hero

Samia

Supervisor: Dr. James Allard

Second Reader: Dr. Anne Howey

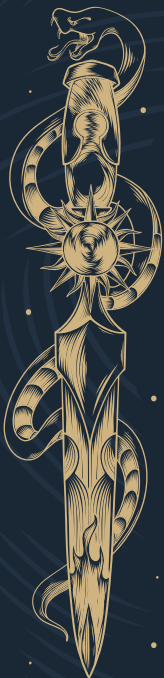
April 25, 2023



She'd only been eight when Arobynn Hamel, her mentor and the King of the Assassins, found her half-submerged on the banks of a frozen river and brought her to his keep on the border between Adarlan and Terrasen. While training her to be his finest and most loyal assassin, Arobynn had never allowed her to return home to Terrasen...Arobynn had never said it aloud, but if she'd refused his offer to train her, he would have handed her to those who would have killed her. Or worse. She'd been newly orphaned, and even at eight, she knew that a life with Arobynn, with a new name that no one would recognize but someday everyone would fear, was a chance to start over. To escape the fate that led her to leap into the icy river that night ten years ago.

- Sarah J. Maas, *Throne of Glass* (Chapter 5, pg 29)

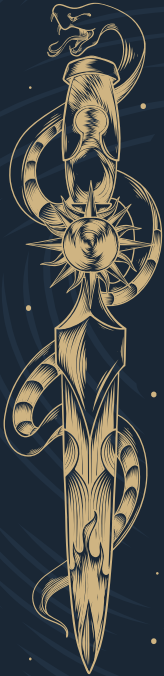
Overview



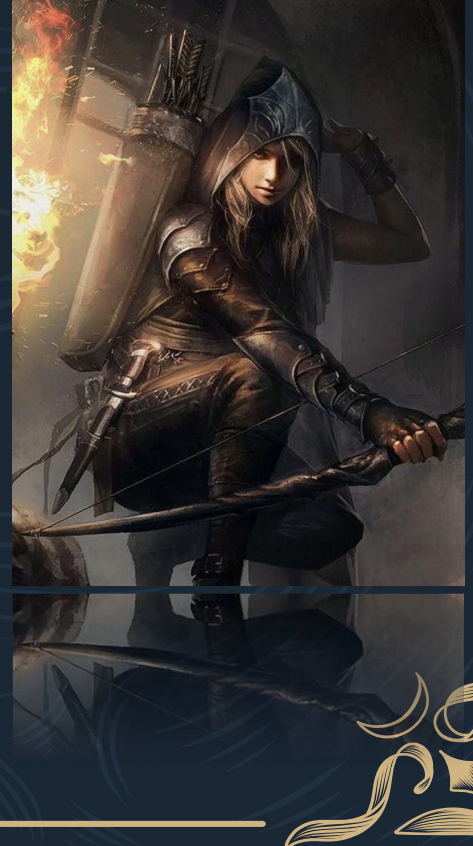
Sarah J. Maas's young adult high fantasy septet *Throne of Glass* (2012-18) is set in the fictional world of Erirea. The series follows Celaena Sardothien (later Aelin Galathynius), introduced as an assassin turned slave, who is engaged in a quest to claim the throne of her lost kingdom as the rightful heir.



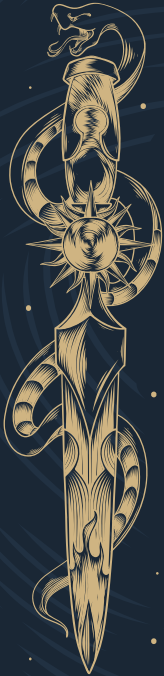
Overview



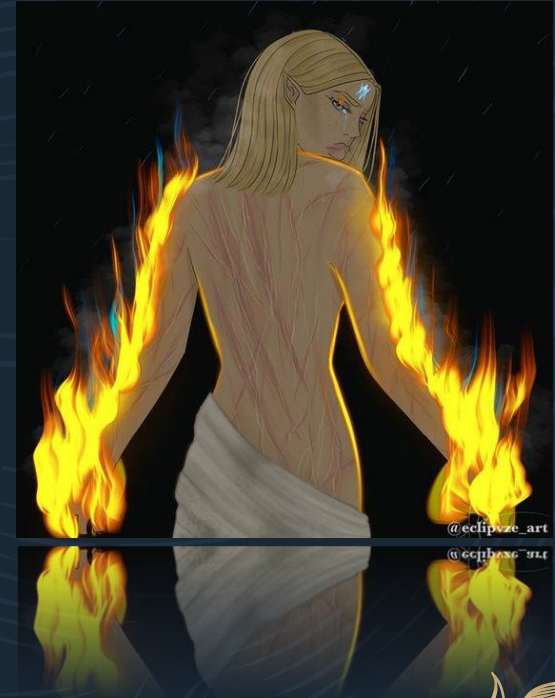
The series features a recurring motif of characters surviving sexual trauma of various kinds, who then overcome their trauma by exerting and exhibiting mental or physical strength that overthrows their abuser(s). While this narrative may intend to emphasize their ultimate empowerment, the consistent linking of sexual trauma to empowerment for Maas's characters dismantles that very narrative.



Overview

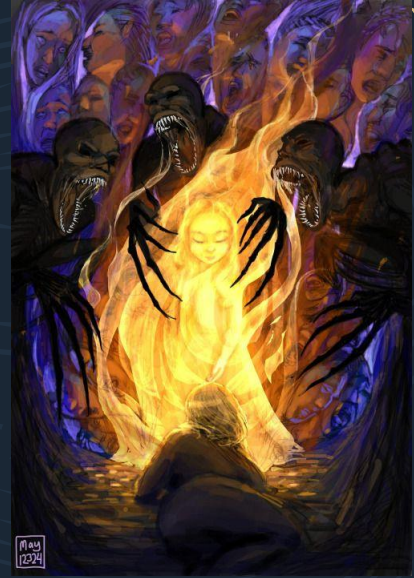


Thus, it can be claimed that sexual terrorism in the story takes the form of a disciplinary tool that exerts mobile - and nearly invincible - power on both the male and female bodies. These trauma-filled bodies are then forced to adapt identities that are supposedly the **empowered** versions of the characters. On the contrary, this adaptation can be perceived as a form of physical and mental violation as the characters do not choose to wear any of the identities out of free will.



Research Questions

- To what extent is empowerment in the texts always marked by sexual terrorism and enslavement?
- What is the significance of the instances when Celaena's empowered body becomes an enslaved body in the story?
- What does it mean to have these themes explored in a fantasy fiction primarily intended for teen readers?



Literature Review

Bodies, Identities and Sexual Terrorism

- According to Heather Brown, the female characters “are socialized into a position of fearfulness” (111), just like their real-world counterparts. Carole Sheffield writes that “the way in which males frighten and, by frightening, control and dominate females is equivalent to **sexual terrorism.**” (qtd. in Brown 111)



Literature Review

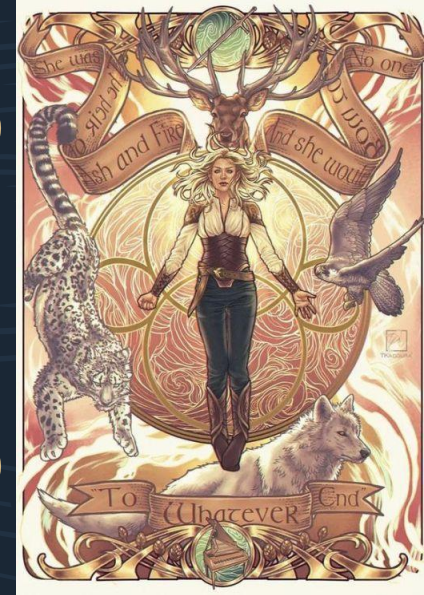
- In *Throne of Glass*, Celaena is terrorized by her master Arobynn, who subjects her to his sexual harassment in addition to physical and psychological abuse. Arobynn hires a mercenary to drug and kill Celaena's boyfriend, Sam, another victim of Arobynn's violence:
"Aelin/Celaena's memory reminds her (as it is intended to do) of the power of the person behind the act. Remembrance and fear of reputation is the hallmark of sexual terrorism."
(Brown 251)



Literature Review

Weaponization of Imprisoned Body for Empowerment

- Maas uses Celaena's body as an investment for those in power around her. The constant use of her body as an object for violence to push her agency eradicates the illusion of Celaena having control over her body or narrative at all as an "empowered" figure. To support this claim, I appeal to Foucault's notion of body as a political investment: "the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it" and "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body." (100)



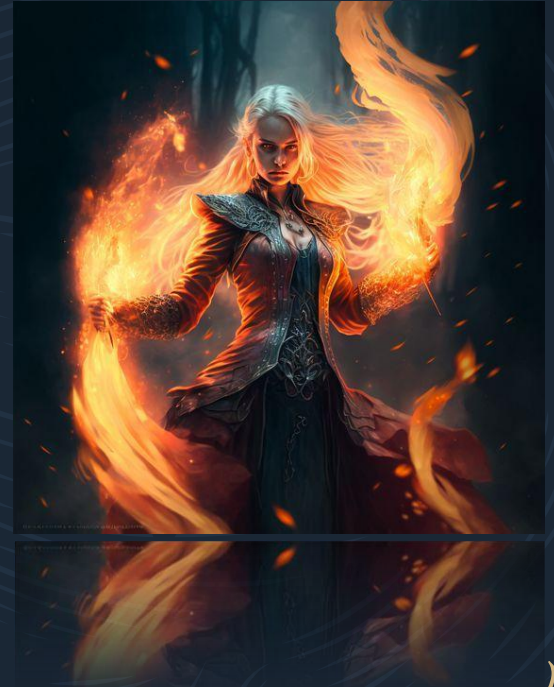
Methodology



My project explores the fine line between empowerment and enslavement by close reading Celaena's character. This focus will help me to understand the narrative space her character development created when empowerment transfigures into enslavement.



I intent to investigate the way a body adapts while wearing certain identities - and the body's relationship with those identities. For example, I will trace the difference between Celaena as a contracted Assassin and Celaena as the King of Adarlan's personal Assassin.



Methodology



I aim to analyze how the illusion of free will is exercised in this text through sexual terrorism and suspended violence. For example, when Celaena is first encouraged to recover her identity as a Queen, it comes with an underlying threat of being sold as a sex worker.



I also seek to deconstruct Celaena's character as a female hero to investigate the nuances that transform her from an empowered hero to an enslaved hero.



Moving Forward

My proposed research focuses on the narrative of a young adult female hero, and how she navigates through new and unfamiliar identities to ensure her body is empowered. Often in this narrative, sexual violence is a familiar and powerful motive, one ultimately tied to empowerment. The *Throne of Glass* series invites us to consider this phenomenon in young adult fantasy fiction.



Work Cited

Ahmed, Sara. "The Orient and Other Others." *Queer Phenomenology*, Duke UP, 2006, p. 109-56.

Brown, Heather. "Sarah J. Maas's *Throne of Glass* series: A Postfeminist Fantasy of Emancipation." *Children's Literature*, vol. 50, 2022, p. 248-68. *Project MUSE*, doi: 10.1353/chl.2022.0013

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage, 1979.

Maas, Sarah J. *Throne of Glass*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

Razack, Sherene. "A Hole in the Wall. A Rose at a Checkpoint." *Apartheid in Palestine*, U of Alberta P, 2016, pp. 199-210.

