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Performativity of gender roles in Kiersten White's *And I Darken*

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Abstract

The roles of strong and independent female protagonists in Young Adult literature have been debated in the past two decades. One assumption is that female protagonists can suggest to girls that they can do whatever they aim for and develop their own voice. Kiersten White's *And I Darken* (2016) demonstrates that strong and independent female protagonists are needed and the protagonist Lada Dragwyla demonstrates the strong and independent female protagonist. It is also important that the characters of Young Adult literature are relatable for the intended reader in order to captivate them. In order to make pupils at upper secondary school read *And I Darken* the teacher has to find protagonists who function as a role model for the pupil, but for teenage girls in particular since a strong and independent female protagonist will function as an empowerment to them. Representation of strong and independent female protagonists in Young Adult literature is important, and it is important to show that women are not dependent on men to take action.

This thesis will develop a close analysis of the novel *And I Darken* by Kiersten White within a feminist framework, and this thesis will explore how gender, performativity and expectations are executed in the novel. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Judith Butler (1990) are the main theorists I will use in this thesis. Critics such as Dennis Altman (2015), Toril Moi (1989) and Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg (1984) will be highlighted in the discussion of the novel. Further, I am going to analyse the characters and the historical context in *And I Darken* and through a close analysis of the characters and the historical context I will discuss how the novel can be used in the classroom. In addition to close reading I will use reader response and cultural studies approaches to consider how the novel can be used in the classroom. I am especially interested in how the novel can help upper secondary pupils develop self-confidence.

Preface

During the two years of history in the Norwegian upper secondary school pupils learn about topics from ancient history and its civilisation to modern history and its social structure. From my own time as a pupil in upper secondary school I remember taking history classes, and often the main focus in class was on the male narrative, and there was almost no talk about women holding positions of power. For example Elizabeth I was never mentioned in any of the history classes, and if women were mentioned it was in relation to the witch trials. The only time Elizabeth I was mentioned was in English Literature and I found it odd that she got more attention in English literature class than in the history class. Of course, there are limited amount of information a history teacher manages to go through in a two year period, but I still found it odd that few to no women got the attention they deserved. When I finished upper secondary school I was left with an impression that females was married off and was expected to be at home. Until a few years ago when I stumbled upon an article in a newspaper about archaeologists finding a Viking burial site with what was most likely a female Viking warrior just outside of Stockholm (Karen O. Setten 2017, Dagbladet.no). From the perspective of a future teacher I am interested in exploring the novel's potential to teach upper secondary school pupils how to read literature in a historical context, especially considering the importance of both history and literature as subjects where women should, and need, to be given more space in society, and it is important to start in the classroom.

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Introduction

The central aspect I wanted to explore was the path a person takes to get to the point where they can justify doing terrible things in the name of good.

White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 483

The chosen novel for my thesis is *And I Darken* by Kiersten White, and the reason for choosing this novel is because the novel deals with a strong and independent female protagonist, Lada Dragwyla. Visibility and representation of female protagonists in literature is important for teenage girls because through strong and independent female protagonists teenage girls are shown that they can achieve anything they put their mind to. It is also important to note that giving teenage girls strong and independent female protagonists teenage girls are given characters they can look up to. Not only is visibility of strong and independent female protagonists important, but the visibility of the LGBTQ+ community is important too. *And I Darken* opens up for readers who identify themselves within the LGBTQ+ community by having characters who identify, or struggle with identifying, themselves within the LGBTQ+ community. The struggle to accept themselves for who they are is something a reader who tries to identify themselves within LGBTQ+ community can relate to. The fear, shame and doubt of being accepted for who they are is something that stand strong among those who struggle with their sexuality.

Through its LGBTQ+ representation *And I Darken* can help its readers vocalise their sexuality and even help those who struggle finding confidence to be open about their sexuality. What I am going to do with my thesis is to have a close analysis of the novel, the characters and the historical context, and through a close analysis of the novel I will discuss how *And I Darken* can be used in the classroom in terms of relevant didactic approaches. The relevant didactic approaches are reader response (where the pupils will respond to the text they read and analyse the text from their point of view) and cultural studies (from the cultural standpoint of the pupils). The reason for choosing the two approaches is because the classroom has become more diverse with different cultures, but it is also important to make the pupils reflect about the text they read and make them debate if they connect to the character, or characters, in the novel.

For psychological reasons it is important to focus on the topic of strong and independent female protagonists in literature. According to BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) "Teen Girls are significantly less likely than Teen Boys to describe themselves as '**confident**', '**brave**', and '**heard**'" (4). My thesis will have a focus on *And I Darken* because

Lada Dragwyla gives the female reader, especially the teenage female reader, empowerment and Lada Dragwyla is the representation of what teenage girls need. Lada Dragwyla does not want to conform to her society's cultural expectation and uses all her strength and will to defy them, and Lada is not scared of other character's opinion of her. Teenage girls need a protagonist such as Lada to show that other people's opinion of them should not define them to become who they want, and through Lada's bravery and outspokenness teenage girls can attach Lada's traits to themselves and achieve much in this world.

Bringing literature with a strong female protagonist to the classroom gives teenage girls a boost in their confidence and the teenage girl will understand that she can be brave, confident and heard. Not only do girls need more literature with strong female protagonists, girls need it in the media too. BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that "2 in 3 girls agree there are **not enough** of the following in Film & TV: **Female Role Models (63%), Strong Female Characters (65 %)** and **Relatable Female Characters (65%).**" (7). Further in their article BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that "Mirroring the gender preference for role models overall, both Children and Teens demonstrate a clear preference for sci-fi/superheroes who are the same gender as themselves" (5). This phenomenon can be extended to literature too, by giving pupils novels with a protagonist with the same gender as themselves the pupil will identify themselves easier with the protagonist and the protagonist's narrative. Through Lada the female teenage reader can identify herself and feel more empowered through Lada's action and attitude of not giving in to the society's gender expectations. Whereas the male teenage reader will recognize himself in Radu or Mehmed II in the sense if they are unsure of their own sexuality or if they feel alone in their environment and the male teenage reader will recognize the two character's desire to belong and be accepted; either to someone specific or as a part of a group.

The second issue why I have chosen to write about *And I Darken* is because of the queer aspect of the novel. There have become more queer studies in literature, and bringing *And I Darken* to this field is important, especially considering the connection of literature and the classroom. Teachers have to remember that they teach a classroom with at least 30 pupils and each pupil is different and unique, and the teacher has to remember that they have to include the pupils at all times. This is a challenge for the teacher, and including all pupils in each class is difficult, but making the pupils comfortable of each other and the teacher is a good steppingstone of having engaged pupils in every class. Introducing *And I Darken* to the classroom gives the queer community visibility and Radu becomes an example that teenagers can identify themselves within the LGBTQ+ spectre. The third issue to highlight is the

importance to read, and introducing *And I Darken* to the classroom gives the teacher the opportunity to make the pupils compare and contrast the characters and the society of the novel with their own contemporaries and themselves.

Reader response and cultural studies are valuable didactic tools in the classroom, and by using reader response in class the pupils have to do a close reading of a text or a longer work of fiction. Reader response can help pupils understand what they feel and think about the characters they read about. With the use of reader response I want to explore how the characters in *And I Darken* can affect teenage readers, especially in terms of recognizing themselves in the characters when looking for value and moral that reflects their own. The character might have values, moral and attitude that the teenage reader feel is missing in their community, and thus they feel a strong connection to that particular character when they search for a character in literature to look up to.

Lois Tyson (2006) defines reader response as something which focuses on the reader's response to literary texts. Further, Tyson (2006) argues that reader response is "(...) a broad, exciting, evolving domain of literary studies that can help us learn about our own reading processes and how they relate to (...) specific elements in the texts we read (...)" (169). While Yu Ren Dong (2005) debates that the cultural study is defined as something that challenges the pupils preconceived notions about other cultures by expanding the pupil's cross-cultural understanding. Using cultural study in the classroom is an important tool when using fiction or texts based or inspired by other cultures or historical events in the classroom. But, it is important for the teacher to explain the historical or cultural context of the text or fiction before the pupils are going to work on the text or fiction. If the teacher does not give any explanation of the historical or cultural context to the pupils, the pupils will find the text or fiction they read difficult to relate to and they begin to question the relevance of the text or fiction they read in class. My thesis will not do an empirical study of reader response or cultural study with *And I Darken*. I have done an unofficial survey in an upper secondary school in Norway, but it was mostly for my own record to see what the teenagers answered to my questions.

In connection to *And I Darken* my thesis will look at gender, performativity and the feminine in the novel's narrative and the characters in the novel, but the main emphasis will be on Lada and Radu. Toril Moi (1989) defines feminine as a structure which is social and culturally constructed; she argues that one is not born a woman, but one is taught to become a woman. Feminist critics have a long history, but in the 20th century feminist critics and feminist theory got an upturn. Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler are among the feminist critics of the 20th century who have highlighted the issue of gender and the perception of gender in

society. Gender, identity and sexuality have also become a topic of discussion and Dennis Altman is one of many critics who debates the issue of how gender, identity and sexuality are perceived and received in society. In *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir mentions nature in connection to women and she highlights that nature which is attached to women is a cultural and social construct from men in order to mystify and eroticise women. Nature can be instincts and how genders are understood from a cultural perspective: what is natural for genders (in particular behaviour) in their respective societies. Judith Butler (1990) defines gender as a distinction and “(...) the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of “the body” that pre-exists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This “body” often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as “external” to that body” (175). Regarding performativity and gender Butler (1990) defines performativity as acts, gestures and enactments as generally constructed and performative, but it is produced on the surface of the body. These definitions by Butler (1990) will be the foundation in this thesis when applied in the analysis of the novel.

Often when searching for the definition of ‘literary’ online many of the definitions are simplified or generalized in order to make them understandable for the searcher. In this paragraph the definition of hero, antihero, villain, protagonist and antagonist are given and the definitions are simple without being oversimplified in their language. In literature an antihero is defined as a protagonist of a drama or narrative who lacks the conventional heroic qualities (The Editors at Encyclopedia Britannica, *Antihero*, 19 February 2020). The common definition of a villain is that the villain is evil and plots sinister plans in order to cause harm or ruin the hero’s quest, and the villain might believe that he or she helps society, but instead they cause harm in the process (Literary Term, *Villain*, 24 February). A hero is often the major character in a literary work, and the hero is after an ultimate object and has to overcome obstacles along their narrative, and the hero’s ability to stay true to themselves during their trials is what makes them heroic (scribendi.com, *Hero*, 24 February). The protagonist is often a main character in a story, but it does not necessarily need to be so, and the protagonist can also be the villain of a story. What the protagonist does is that the protagonist gives the audience someone to focus on and directs the narrative forwards (Literary Term, *Protagonist*, 24 February). The antagonist is often the character opposing the protagonist, and the antagonist does not necessarily need to be a villain; the antagonist can be the protagonist and facing internal conflicts such as facing difficult decisions within himself (Literary Term, *Villain related terms*, 24 February).

And I Darken is the first novel in a trilogy and the main characters are dynamic, they change throughout the trilogy and the dynamic between the characters change throughout the

narrative. In the trilogy there is a shift in the relationship between Lada and Radu (the shift is visible in the first novel too), Radu becomes more independent from Lada and he becomes more bold to make his own decisions, but Radu's decisions is still coloured by how other characters perceive him, especially Mehmed II. In the novel *And I Darken* Vladislava Dragwyla (Lada for short) is the protagonist of the story, she grows up in a man's world where she feels underestimated and undervalued, and she feels she needs to be extra brutal to be seen and heard. With the belief that she is equal to her brothers, Lada yearns to impress her father regarding her capacity of ruling her motherland Wallachia. Lada feels overlooked by her father and her brothers, except from Radu (her younger brother) who fears her because of her temper, and thus she evolves a fierce and loud personality. It is important to mention that Vladislava Dragwyla is inspired by the real life Vlad Dragwyla, and other characters in the novel are based on real life historical figures too (such as Radu, his father, Mehmed II, etc.), while other characters have been made up for the story. Kiersten White argues that the reason she chose to make Vlad Dragwyla a girl was because it was a more interesting lens for her as a storyteller. White's states in the author's note of *And I Darken* that

My goal with this book was to carve out a middle ground. In my research I set aside accounts that skewed too far in either direction and tried to focus on the truth: They were men [Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II] who were born into great power, and they both did what they thought necessary to maintain and expand that power. The central aspect I wanted to explore was the path a person takes to get to the point where they justify doing terrible things in the name of good.

(483)

Kiersten White states that the novel is a work of fiction, even though she has based the novel on actual historical figures and events; she has taken her liberties in making the novel which include changes such as Vlad Dragwyla's gender, shifting timelines, creating characters and many events in order to make a captivating story. The challenge White has met is how to take liberties and make it interesting for the teenage reader, but in the same time be true to the real story of Radu, Vlad Dragwyla and Mehmed II.

The novel *And I Darken* is set to 16th century Wallachia and Ottoman Empire. The reader follows Lada's journey of a harsh Wallachian climate and society to the Ottoman Empire where the culture and society is foreign to Lada and Radu. The siblings try to survive in a foreign country with a foreign language and culture, but the reason for being brought to a

foreign country is because their father brought them as 'taxes' to the Ottoman Sultan. Lada opposes all attempts from the Ottoman society and culture to make her more feminine and obedient. She often experiences a patronizing attitude from the men of the Ottoman Empire, such as women do not, and cannot, bear intelligence enough for education. Lada does not desire to define herself as someone who needs to be married away in her teenage years and become a silent wife. In truth marriage scares her, and when she tries to picture her future wedding she fails to do so. All Lada desires is to become one with her homeland Wallachia and defend it from who she perceives as her enemies, the Ottomans. The novel reverses the gender roles in such a way that Lada is described as something less pretty as expected for a woman, bad tempered and a tomboy who turn to violence when she feels to, while Radu is the feminine one, shying away from violence and being easily frightened. Lada has no desire to be a wife and mother; she wants to rule and be as much equal to her brothers, while her brother Radu does not want any power positions whatsoever.

Teenagers are in an important transitional period of their life and having a focus on representation is crucial for them, especially in terms of sexuality and the feeling of being different than the 'norm'. Acknowledging the need for representation is important for teachers and recognizing the issues the teenagers face are the most important job the teachers need to keep in mind when teaching. Teachers have to ask themselves how does the character reflect the society where they are brought up? Can the pupils recognize the social issues Lada and Radu are going through, even though the narrative happens in the 16th – century? An important issue to consider is that Lada and Radu are complex characters with emotions and thoughts that might appeal to the teenage reader. Giving teenage readers novels with complex characters is important and will give them the joy to read, but also by giving teenagers someone they feel they can relate and look up to. The aim and goal for characters is to reflect real human beings in emotion, attitude and action, and through their actions the characters show that there is more to people that meets the eye. Both Lada and Radu have different personalities and neither of them can be defined as purely villains, heroes or antiheroes and it is important to remember the pupils of this when they read the novel and create their opinions of Lada and Radu.

The reason for focusing on Lada as a character and her journey in a male dominated society is because she does not want to conform to the expectation set for her by her contemporaries. Lada is expected to behave according to her gender and think and feel in a way that is socially expected by her gender. Introducing *And I Darken* to the classroom, the pupils can make up an understanding why Lada behaves the way she does, and this novel will show the pupils that not all characters can easily be labelled as a hero, villain or antihero, and that is

important. Characters can be used as role models, and the teenage reader will recognize themselves in many characters, and they will enjoy the characters which values aligns with their own values. A good job Kiersten White has done with *And I Darken* is to make her characters more humane in terms of giving them multiple sides and depth, such as Radu with his fear of violence and uncertainty of his sexual preferences, Lada with her violence, anger and fierce personality and Mehmed II for feeling alone and his journey to becoming a fierce leader of the Ottoman Empire.

In connection to the analysis of the characters in the novel *And I Darken* by Kiersten White, I will focus on gender and gender issues in the novel. Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler will be my main theorists, and I will use Dennis Altman as my major critic. Besides de Beauvoir's and Butler's work (*The Second Sex* (1949) and *Gender Trouble* (1990)) there will be a few chapters from other articles and books too. While using *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, this thesis will focus on the myth and women, while in *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler has a look at gender and performativity and how it correlates between the genders, and if the genders always perform accordingly to their exterior. Dennis Altman (2012) has a focus on gays and society, and how society treats gays and their sexuality.

In this thesis I want to explore the relation between the characters in the novel *And I Darken* and that being female, Lada needs to make harder and tougher decisions than her male counterparts (her brothers and Sultan's son Mehmet II). The attention is drawn to her attitude, decisions, action and personality. The reader also needs to consider that the characters reflect the environment and society in where they belong. Lada does not feel the urge of conforming to the society's expectations.

Theoretical Framework

Before she had striven to prove herself the fastest, the cleverest, the most ruthless. But after Ivan's lewd attack and Nicolae's protective response, she had seen that none of it mattered. She would never be a Janissary. She could never be powerful on her own, because she would always be a woman.

White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 217

In the introduction of *The Feminist Reader* (1989) Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore claim that feminist criticism in a sense has no beginning. Belsey and Moore (1989) claim that in the 17th century Esther Sowerman and Bathsua Making was pointing out that many of the text they read identified powerful deities and influential muses as women, and thus Sowerman and Making read from a feminist perspective. In addition, Belsey and Moore (1989) claim that in the 18th century Mary Wollstonecraft argued that through the sentimental novels women were encouraged to view themselves as silly or helpless; and through her argument Wollstonecraft practiced a form of feminist criticism. Further, Belsey and Moore (1989) do take a look at females who perform early forms of feminist criticism, but they also do discuss how the feminist reader perform their criticism through reading.

In relation to the feminist reader reading texts, Belsey and Moore (1989) claim that the feminist reader do not want to praise, blame, judge or censor a text, but the feminist reader wants to assess how the text invites the reader and how the text make the reader reflect of what they have read. Belsey and Moore (1989) claim that as a member of a specific culture the feminist reader wants to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and further encourage the feminist reader to reaffirm or challenge existing cultural norms. Another claim Belsey and Moore (1989) present is that history has always been important to feminism because history provides evidence that things have changed.

A topic Belsey and Moore (1989) present is that of the feminist reader's process of changing the gender relation in regards of the practice of reading as one of the sites in the struggles for change. Belsey and Moore (1989) claim that "For the feminist reader there is no innocent or neutral approach to literature: all interpretation is political" (1). The feminist reader will not have a neutral or innocent approach to literature, and all texts are interpreted to have political layers (undertone, theme, plot, etc.). Another issue Belsey and Moore (1989) emphasize is "(...) the feminist reader might ask, among other questions, how the text represents women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual difference" (1).

What does the novel which is being read say or implicate about the gender representation of the characters in terms of gender relation in the story? For instance, how does *And I Darken* represent women? What does the novel implicate about gender roles and sexual difference? Females reading a particular novel will interpret the representation of gender in the novel from what kind of representation the novel gives; but also in terms of how the novel is written.

The idea of the feminist reader which Belsey and Moore (1989) present can work with teenage girls too. The teenage girl does not necessarily define herself as a feminist, or perhaps the teenage girl does not know the concept of feminism, but she can still read from a feminist perspective. Boys can also read from a feminine perspective, and this applies to boys who do not want to define themselves with the masculine culture, or it can apply to boys who support girls in their fight for equality. The teenage reader might take a feminist approach when analysing and having discussions when reading and discussing *And I Darken* in class. While teenage girls and boys do not necessarily take a conscious or active role as a feminist reader I will have an active role as a feminist reader when analysing and discussing *And I Darken*, the reason for doing so is because I want to look how power is generated in a text and in an empowering novel as *And I Darken*. But, it is important to note that there are no objective approach to literature when teaching and reading novels.

Toril Moi (1989) claims that 'feminist criticism' is a specific kind of political discourse; it is a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. Taking this into consideration then *And I Darken* can be used in the feminist criticism discourse by watching how Lada is brought up in a patriarchal society. "I am your father. But that woman is not your mother. Your mother is Wallachia. Your mother is the very earth we go to now, the land I am prince of. Do you understand?" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 12). Moi (1989) states that 'femininity' is a cultural construct; which means that one is not born a woman, but becomes a woman. This would mean that Lada is not born 'feminine', but from a cultural perspective her upbringing is constructed to make her feminine, which Lada resists and does not desire to take a part in. "Already Lada understood, in a vague and fearful way, that her own future revolved around marriage. (...) Sometimes she imagined a shadowy figure standing at a stone altar. She would hold up her hand, and he would take everything she had for himself" (26). Lada understands that the path is made for her, but she does not manage to picture becoming a wife and thus she does not conform to the cultural values which exists at her time. Moi (1989) defines 'feminine' theory as "(...) in its simplest definition would mean theories concerned with the construction of feminism" (131).

Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg (1984) define feminist framework as a system of ideas and conceptual structures that feminists can use when explaining, justifying and guiding their actions. In the introduction of the second part of *Feminist Framework* (1984) Jaggar and Rothenberg refer to multiple different fractions of feminist framework and how these different frameworks connect their main objectives to the root of oppression of women. Jaggar and Rothenberg (1984) write “This latter point brings out the fact that talk of roots or origins should not be understood only in a historical way. ‘The roots of women’s oppression’ may also refer to those conditions, biological or social, that are the most important in continuing women’s subordination today” (82). Looking at ‘women’s oppression’ through time, it is easy to brush it off as something historical and not existing in one’s own contemporary; one has to remember that the oppression of women still exists in modern times. In connection to *And I Darken* Lada feels that she is oppressed by not being given the equal opportunity to inherit the throne from her father. Lada desires to be equal to her brothers when inheriting the throne.

In ‘Myth and Reality’ from *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir discusses the different kinds of myths surrounding women and their role in society. de Beauvoir (1949) argues that mythical thoughts oppose the eternal feminine, which is unique and changeless. She states that “If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine” (283). de Beauvoir (1949) also stresses that to pose as a woman is to pose as the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject and a fellow human being. de Beauvoir (1949) gives women more depth, which women often are not credited for and she argues that women are unique, but each myth builds up around the subject of women which seems to sum up her as a whole being. In the light of de Beauvoir’s (1949) argument that women are unique and have more depth to them, then Lada is unique and she has a depth to her character. The challenge is that Lada feels that her depth and uniqueness to her character is ignored by the male characters, and that the male characters understand her from their point of view and their dominant positions.

Another issue de Beauvoir (1949) presents is that men have shaped their own great virile heroes, such as Prometheus, Hercules and Parsifal, whereas women only play a secondary part, such as a ‘helper’ in these heroes narrative. In the novel *And I Darken* the roles are reversed, and the male figure (Radu) becomes the side-kick of the female character (Lada). The novel shows that men do not necessarily need to be the focus of the story and women can do equally fine, or perhaps even better than men.

Further, de Beauvoir (1949) points out the paradox of men; men desire to understand the true woman, but they do not have the tools for understanding women and thus dooms women to artifice. de Beauvoir (1949) argues that when a woman becomes, or is, an associate of the man (or his 'better half'), the woman is endowed with a conscious ego (or soul). During the process of understanding women, women becomes less mythical and something artificial. The irony is that Lada does not want to be understood by men, but she dearly wants to impress her father and she wants her father to understand her. Lada believes taking actions that feels right for her is the best and wisest, and she does not want to take actions based on what people feels is right for her.

She did not care about any of them – she wanted to tell her father how she had felt up on the mountain, how her mother Wallachia had embraced her and filled her with light and warmth. She was filled to bursting with it, and she knew her father would understand. Knew he would be proud. (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 25)

A reason for Lada's grand desire to impress her father is that she feels she is forgotten and undervalued. She longs for attention and love, and in a one-sided relation to her father she wants him to see what she can do and acknowledge her. In the friendship between Lada and Mehmed II, Mehmed II desires to make Lada his wife and 'better half', but Lada feels that she would be tied with hands and legs to something she does not see a personal value to. Lada feels, and believes, she has an ego (or a soul) and she is afraid of losing that ego if she marries. Getting to know Lada Mehmed II recognizes the male in him, which Lada has awakened through her puberty, but Mehmed II does not fully understands her even though he thinks he does. "Marry me, Lada. It is the perfect solution." Lada laughed. Mehmed's smile grew, until he realized her laugh was not a sweet breeze of delight, but a brutal desert wind carrying stinging sand in its wake. 'I will never marry.' 'Why? Stand at my side! Rule my empire with me!'" (467).

Judith Butler (1990) claims that feminist theory for the most part has assumed that there are some existing identity, which is understood through the category of women. She argues that politics and representation are both bold terms; which representation serves as an operative term within a political progress which seeks to extend its visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects. Butler (1990) argues that feminist theory is a development of a language that fully or adequately represents women, and she argues that the political assumption that there has to be a universal basis for feminism which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally. Butler (1990) further underlines that the political assumption is often

accompanied by the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form in the universal structure of masculine domination, or patriarchy.

Butler (1990) raises the questions of what identity is and what makes identity. What makes identity, and is identity cultural or biological? In *Gender Trouble* Butler (1990) emphasizes that “The psychoanalytic theory suggests that multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations” (91). Lada is a good example of the question of what makes an identity. By looking at her exterior she is a girl and therefore expectations of her behaving accordingly follows her gender. On the contrary, Lada behaves anything like her exterior self and act as she pleases and is instilled on being treated as one of the boys, even though Lada herself claims that she has no desire of being a man.

“I have no desire to be a man,” Lada snapped, coming back to herself.

“And yet you wear trousers and train with the Janissaries.”

“Yes, when otherwise I could be sitting in this room with you, invisible, sewing and growing old. How strange I should choose something else.”

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 212)

Butler (1990) points out the issue in the debate of identification (meaning or subversive possibilities), and the debate is still unclear because where can identification be found? According to Butler (1990) coherence is something that is desired, wished for and idealized, and this idealization of coherence is an effect of corporal identification. In addition, Butler (1990) argues that acts, gestures and desire are generally constructed and are performative, which means that they involve expressed fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

According to Butler (1990), Mary Douglas suggests that all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and all margins are considered dangerous. Thus, Butler (1990) argues that if the body is the symbol for the social system, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Another statement Butler (1990) makes is that Foucault and Nietzsche argue that cultural values emerge as a result of an inscription on the body, and the body is understood as a medium of the cultural values. Butler (1990) debates that in order for this inscription to have any significance the body must be destroyed, which means that whatever acts, ideas and meanings attached to genders are cultural values which have emerged from society and in order to have it lose its significance, it must be

destroyed. Connecting this argument to *And I Darken*, Lada's contemporaries try to inscribe the cultural values of its time on Lada; but Lada's instincts push back the thought of the cultural values her contemporaries try to instill in her. One example is when Lada tries to break the cultural significance on the body, such as dressing up as a Janissary, but Lada is met with a patronizing attitude that she cannot be a Janissary because she is a woman.

In relation to LGBTQ+ and *And I Darken* there are not many critics, but Dennis Altmann touches upon sexuality, society and the gay's feelings attached to their sexuality in his book *Homosexuality: oppression & liberation* (2012). Altmann (2012) argues that "(...) the very concept of homosexuality is a social one, and one cannot understand the homosexual experience without recognizing the extent to which we have developed a certain identity and behavior derived from social norms" (21). An example Altmann (2012) gives is the conventional definition which claims that "homosexuality always has been a behavioral one: a homosexual is anyone who engages in sexual acts with another of his or her sex" (21). Altmann (2012) underlines the uncertainty and fear of "coming out" and the idea to live one's sexuality open for the whole society to see, which will seem frightening if the person who identifies themselves as gay are not open about their sexuality. What Altmann (2012) debates can be tied to how Radu feels about his own sexuality. The uncertainty and fear of what others might think of him, and the possible repercussions is what keeps Radu from not telling anyone what he feels. Altmann (2012) argues that "To be a homosexual in our society is to be constantly aware that one bears a stigma" (20). Radu comes to understand his feelings, but he feels his sexuality as a stigma. He understands that if he is open about his emotions he will meet no acceptance, and thus has to carry his emotions by himself. But, there are a few characters that see his true emotions, and those are his sister Lada and Lazar, a Janissary soldier.

"There are some things it is not acceptable to want, but there are ways around it, and those who will look the other way. And then there are some things that it is impossible to want. Even the mere act of wanting, if noticed by the wrong people, can get you killed." He gave a heavy, meaningful look at the spot Mehmed had been. "Be more careful." (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 225)

Altmann (2012) claims that "The oppression of homosexuals has often taken very blatant forms. In the Middle Ages homosexuality was regarded as 'the unspeakable crime'" (52). Further, Altmann (2012) argues that in order of coming out it "(...) involves the homosexual in a process of developing some way of dealing with his or her sexual identity" (53). This is something Radu

struggles with for a long time, and Radu finds it difficult to admit to himself what he feels, but he understands that what he feels will not have a positive outcome for him if he is outspoken about it.

Chapter 1: How have female protagonists been portrayed in literary history?

“I have no desire to be a man,” Lada snapped, coming back to herself.

“And yet you wear trousers and train with the Janissaries.”

“Yes, when otherwise I could be sitting in this room with you, invisible, sewing and growing old. How strange I should choose something else.”

White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 212

Throughout time there have been multiple portrayals of women in literature, yet women have played a secondary role in the male hero's narrative, but slowly women have gained more visibility as characters in literature. In *Literature and Gender* (1996) Lizbeth Goodman argues that “All writing is gendered in so far as all authors use language, and language is created and spoken and written in culture, where each of us has a sex and a gender, just as we have race and class” (25). Goodman's (1996) main focus is on children's literature where she observes that an inequality between the genders can be seen. In addition, she claims that studies have found that not only literature but also cartoons on television the ratio of female to male characters is uniformly low. She claims that “The search for role models is a real conundrum for children, and it gets more complicated for girls if we consider a range of representations of domesticity in popular (...) versions of ‘children's classics’” (12). Howard B. Parkhurst (2012) claims that in Young Adult fiction the “(...) realm of fiction for adolescent male has been an underpopulated subgenre (...)” (19), and it might indicate that in Young Adult literature, at least, have more female protagonists and female targeted novels than for the male protagonists and male targeted novels. Yet, from the Greek drama and tragedy to the ‘canonical’ works of Shakespeare, Dante, Dickens and Tolkien, men have played a bigger part in the narrative than women. The female characters are often lovers, wives, some sort of helper or they play other second or minor roles in the narrative of the male character.

Goodman (1996) argues that even non-humans (animals, technology, etc.) can be assigned genders, she further highlights that “(...) gender representation in literature for older readers is not much better” (17). She uses the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Kenneth Graham and A.A. Milne as examples where there is a dominate ratio of male to female characters in their literature. Although, Goodman (1996) gives Lewis Carroll credit for being ahead of his time and having a female protagonist in his novels, she highlights the issue that Alice is in a male dominated narrative. She points out that, besides Alice, there are only two other female character in *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). Those two characters are Dinah the cat and the Queen

of Hearts (who she labels as an extreme 'evil stepmother/mad monarch' stereotype). But, she praises *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) for being "(...) written in a previous generation in which the central female character is active, inquisitive, intelligent and engaging in her own right" (17). She observes the male dominance in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), where she points out the issue that all the main characters are male, despite being elves, dwarves and hobbits, with some female characters as wives or lovers. Goodman (1996) points out that later in the series a female character has an active role in the story, and the character is Galadriel, also known as the 'lady of light', but still Galadriel is outnumbered by the male characters in representation.

In contrast to Tolkien and Carroll, Goodman (1996) makes Ursula K. Le Guin an example of a writer creating fantasy worlds with women as active and powerful characters and where women are given more visibility to their narrative. She argues that "The legacy of each generation of authors and readers is what gets adopted and adapted in the next. Major metaphors can be traced through literature from period to period, though writing styles and cultural context change" (25). The cultural, cultural ideas and the linguistic attitude of the author are found in their texts and is a helping factor when looking for the cultural and linguistic attitude in the author's work when watching how these characters are perceived in their work of fiction. Many of the next generation of authors will bring their ideas from previous authors and these ideas will be adapted and adopted to fit with their own contemporaries and the metaphors used in many of the novels can be found throughout literature despite the cultural change. Goodman (1996) gives one example of the caged bird, where the caged bird can be a metaphor for 'cages' "which blocks women off from public life" (25).

If we were to compare Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* and Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* to Young Adult literature today there is a big difference of how the female protagonist are portrayed. Lada Dragwyla in *And I Darken* series, Paige Mahoney in *The Bone Season* series, Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy and Beatrice Prior in the *Divergent* series are few examples of how female protagonists have become more independent and strong in literature targeted towards the teenage reader. Alice and Dorothy are the frontiers of the female protagonist, but they are coloured by the time they have been made, and when Alice ends up in Wonderland there are more male characters than female characters, and in Oz the female characters are either angelic or evil and nothing in between. Goodman (1996) argues that "(...) when Dorothy wants to go home to Kansas, she is instructed to click her heels three times (...) And female characters within the story are depicted as either evil or angelic" (14). Even wearing shoes with heels is considered feminine, though high heeled shoes were originally made for

men to show status, but over time women began to wear high heeled shoes, thus making high heeled shoes feminine.

Girls need strong and independent female protagonists who they can recognize themselves with and build their own traits and character from the inspiration of these female protagonists. According to BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) teen girls are less likely to describe themselves as confident, brave and heard and BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that for girls of colour the challenges are even bigger, "(...) with a majority saying they are not listened to when they speak (...)" (4). Having a strong and independent female protagonist who shows teenage girls that they can be brave, heard and confident is important. What binds Katniss Everdeen, Beatrice Prior, Paige Mahoney and Lada Dragwyla together is that they "(...) achieve their goals through intelligence, courage, and creativity, although not without suffering loss and without successful allegiance" (Lindow, Sandra J., 'To Heck with the Village', *Fantastic Heroines, Journey and Return*, 2014: 19). Sandra J. Lindow (2014) argues that "The positive difference today, however, is that (...) female protagonists are rewarded with certain important freedoms; primary among them is the right to be angry, the right to act assertively and fight for a cause (...)" (19). Katniss Everdeen, Beatrice Prior, Paige Mahoney and Lada Dragwyla all take action and allow themselves to show anger when they feel provoked and act from a point of view they believe is right for them.

An important factor to mention is that neither Katniss, Beatrice, Paige or Lada wait for a male character to save them. They take action from their needs and belief, and through their action they show teenage girls that they should not let gender expectation define them. For teenagers it is easy to forget that they can make individual assessment and action because of the heavy use of photoshop and face tune influencers and celebrities use it is hard for teenage girls to remember that nobody are perfect and it is their actions that matters. Wonder Woman is also a female character who is a strong role model for teenage girls, and in the questionnaire BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) had teenage girls answer, Wonder Woman topped the list of the role model as the same gender as themselves. Representation of strong and independent female protagonists is everything and this is what teenage girls need.

The female protagonist from Alice and Dorothy to Katniss Everdeen, Beatrice Prior, Paige Mahoney and Lada Dragwyla has changed; from being in a male dominated narrative with few female characters to becoming an independent and inquisitive female character has changed a lot. Alice does show traits of being outspoken and inquisitive, but she is still in a male dominated narrative and Dorothy too finds herself in a male dominated narrative, and the female characters she meets are often described as evil or angelic. The difference between Alice

and Dorothy and Katniss, Beatrice, Paige and Lada is that Katniss, Beatrice, Paige and Lada are not in a male dominated narrative and they fight, get provoked and are outspoken about their goals. The male characters play a second part in Katniss', Beatrice's, Paige's and Lada's story and the teenage girls will recognize themselves more in Katniss, Beatrice, Paige and Lada than with Alice and Dorothy. Alice and Dorothy can give an understanding and an eye-opener to girls on differences, and provoke deep thoughts and meaning to their lives, but it is fair to say that there have been changes to the female protagonists through time. It is also important to remember that Alice and Dorothy should not be written of just because they are written in a different time. Both Alice and Dorothy might give something to the teenage reader, but perhaps not the affirmative attitude that the teenage girls need.

The reason for the importance of more representation, visibility and strong and independent female protagonists in literature is because strong and female protagonists are needed among teenage girls. BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) argue that "Despite the underrepresentation of female sci-fi/superheroes, 9 in 10 Girls say that sci-fi/superheroes are positive role models for them. And representation is empowering" (9). The empowering representation also extends to Young Adult literature, and in the last 15 to 20 years more female protagonists have seen the light between the pages and more of these female protagonists help teenage girls feel empowered. Giving teenage girls a strong and independent female protagonist, which the teenage girl can recognize themselves in is important and the teacher has to acknowledge this importance. Representation of strong and independent female protagonists in Young Adult literature has a great impact to teenage girls, and representation is everything.

For the teacher it is important to be aware of, and choose, literature which include characters pupils can recognize themselves with. It is also important to give more room to strong and independent female protagonists in the classroom, but characters who identifies themselves within the LGBTQ+ spectre are important too. Finding characters pupils can recognize themselves with is important because when they read literature, pupils will mimic or take traits from the characters they admire and carry these traits with them into the future. The pupil wants to become who the character is, and the pupil strives to become equally good, brave, confident and just as the character they recognize themselves with. Giving the teenage pupil literature with a recognizable character who reflects much of their nature or reflect someone the teenage pupil desires to become is important and increases their motivation to read more. Seeing an opportunity and giving the teenage pupil inspiration that they can do anything, and become anything they want through inspirational characters is an important tool a teacher have.

***And I Darken* terminology and definitions**

As stated in the introduction there are literary definitions of hero, antihero and villain, and these definitions will be kept in mind in this thesis, but I will also give my own definition of what hero, antihero and villains are. Other terminology and definitions will come to light here too, such as antagonist, protagonist, LGBTQ+ and gender; and nature will, in short, be introduced.

In *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir introduces the term nature when discussing the role of the female in connection to the man, but it is important to emphasize that she critiques the view of nature being socially constructed. Nature is an attached trait to gender, and nature is a social and cultural construct from man in order to be superior to women. de Beauvoir (1949) compares men and women to nature, and she argues that women sums up nature as an idea such as Mothers and Wives. Rather than focusing on nature connected to gender my thesis will look at how culture norms is reflected in the natural, and I will emphasize the natural in this thesis in the connection between culture and natural. Similar to nature and its connection to gender, natural in connection to society is a cultural construction, but natural can be tied to gender, but it can also cover all genders in society. The natural can be argued as a sum of a society, and it is shown through society's attitude, language (through a particular slang, undertone and meaning), belief system, view of the world and the society's expectation to gender and gender roles. In other words, nature is a force in society and it makes the sum of the cultural construction in society, and nature should not be confused as a source of the cultural construction in society.

Society divides gender into a binary system, which is the male and the female. This is a more conservative view of gender, and in this conservative view there is no room for a broader gender spectrum. This thesis will have a broader view of what gender is, and often gender is connected to the discussion of the LGBTQ+ community. The broader view of gender includes individuals who defines themselves as something other than the binary gender system, and what this means is a gender system where transgender male and transgender female, non-binary (gender queer), gender fluid and gender neutral exist. There are more gender identities in the world but for simplicity the genders listed in this thesis are the most relevant to deal with in terms of the novel. My thesis will treat gender and the LGBTQ+ as a related definition, especially when discussing how *And I Darken* can be used in the classroom and how the LGBTQ+ characters in the novel can affect the pupils reading the novel.

According to gaycenter.org LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning and they argue that the term LGBTQ+ is used to describe

a person's sexual orientation or gender identity (Defining LGBTQ, 28 February 2020). The LGBTQ+ definition for my thesis will include the idea of identity influencing one's sexuality, but identity is also connected to a person's sexuality. The reason for choosing such a definition is because I will focus on the connection between gender, identity and sexuality and that identity and sexuality are intrinsic. Identity and sexuality influence each other, and if the identity is confident in itself, the identity will not be afraid of its own sexuality. If the identity is not confident in itself, the identity will be afraid of its differentness and the identity desires to hide its sexuality. My thesis will have more emphasis on sexuality than the identity aspect of the LGBTQ+ when analysing the novel *And I Darken*.

In the theoretical framework Toril Moi's (1989) definition of feminine were introduced, and this sub-chapter will have a look at her definition, but at the same time introduce its own definition. Toril Moi (1989) argues that feminine is a cultural construct and she argues that the feminine represents nurture and that the "(...) patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*" (122-123). She questions the challenge of giving femininity a less vague definition without falling into the patriarchal idea of femininity. I will define the feminine similar to Moi's (1989) definition, that feminine is culturally rooted and one is learned to become feminine, and that one is not born feminine. Radu is an example of the feminine by appearance such as having big eyes and soft curly hair and that he is easily frightened of other characters, yet he is not born feminine.

In the introduction of my thesis the antihero is defined as a protagonist who lacks the conventional trait of heroic qualities (The Editors at Encyclopedia Britannica, *Antihero*, 19 February 2020). My thesis will have a similar definition with the Encyclopedia Britannica's definition of antihero, but my thesis will also focus on the antihero as a character who is not tied to the same role as the hero or the villain. What I mean with the same role as the hero or the villain is that the antihero is not pure good or pure evil, but the antihero has more room to act out as both good and evil. The antihero is more complex in the sense that the antihero is given more room to act on his or her own, which means that the antihero does not need to be brave, good-hearted, sinister or plotting an evil plan, but they can bend the traits to what fits them the best in their narrative.

Often the hero is regarded as the major character of a story, but the major character does not always need to be heroic. In order to be considered a hero, the hero has to be after an ultimate object and he or she has to overcome obstacles and their ability to stay true to themselves during their trials is what makes them heroic (scribendi.com, *Hero*, 24 February

2020). The hero is seen as a character with good intention, with a pure heart and innocent, and perhaps even naïve at the grave situation they are in. If the hero is lucky he or she have other characters to help them out from dangerous situations. My thesis will emphasize that the hero might show signs of bravery and good intentions in their actions, but the hero does not necessarily need to show heroic traits at all times, and there might be a trace of less sincere intention from the hero. It is important to remember that the modern hero might be given complexes that make them feel vulnerable or uncertain of themselves in order to make them more relatable to the reader, and the same goes for the villain.

The protagonist is often regarded as the main character of a story, but the protagonist can also be the villain of a story; the protagonist gives the audience someone to focus on and the protagonist directs the narrative forward (Literary Term, *Protagonist*, 24 February 2020). In a story there can be more than one protagonist, but it is important to keep in mind that towards the end of the story, the narrative of the characters have to be weaved together. In my thesis I will emphasize that the protagonist might show both heroic and villainous traits. The protagonist is a complex character who can doubt themselves and their decisions, and the protagonist makes choices from what they believe is the right thing to do.

The villain is often regarded as an evil character that wishes to harm the hero of the narrative, and the villain believes that he or she helps the society but they actually make more damage than good. The focus on the villain in this thesis is that the villain does not necessarily needs to be a character or something physical, but the villain can be an idea, feeling or what the hero or protagonist consider foreign to them. The unseen villain is perhaps the most frightening villain, because this kind of villain is something that the character cannot see, touch, control or understand. Another definition this thesis will add is that the villain can be a character too, and that the character who function as a villain bases their action on fear or desire which keeps the interest of the villain at heart.

The most common definition of an antagonist is that the antagonist is the opposing force of the protagonist in a narrative. Often the antagonist is confused with the villain, but the antagonist and the villain are very different to each other. The antagonist can be good and have the best intention in mind, but is often a misunderstood character that does not understand that he or she opposes the protagonist, while the villain actively and knowingly destroys or hinder the hero in order to get their will. The antagonist, in this thesis, is a character who is misunderstood by his or her contemporaries, but the antagonist is aware of his or hers intention and use it actively, either good or bad, to get their will.

What makes a character a hero, antihero or villain?

An author's challenge is to make characters dynamic and believable to the reader, but in order to make a character relatable and memorable the author needs to make the character humane. Characters do need to be dynamic and have a recognizable personality to be likable, but the actions, decisions and emotions the characters make, and have, are factors of how they are perceived. Often characters are labelled as either heroes or villains, and few or no characters have been regarded of something in between, as the antihero. The debate of labelling a character as purely hero or villain have been quite black-and-white, with no thought of the character's complexity. Heroes have often been regarded as the main character in a narrative and the hero is young and beautiful with a pure heart and a good intention. In their narrative the hero is going to save the world, but the villain is often regarded as something old and ugly with mean intentions and hindering the hero's narrative. Antiheroes have got a stronger position in the debate in the literary and the media, but it has not been until the last decade they have been given more attention in the literature discussion.

In order to make a story evolve and captivate the reader, there must be an outstanding hero, a cunning villain, or a recognizable antihero. Not all heroes are great and outstanding nor is all villains cunning or manipulative in regard to the hero. Heroes, villains and antiheroes are given complexes to their characters, and these complexes will colour how the reader views the hero, antihero or villain. The complexes can be a physical complex or it can be an introspective complex, the hero can doubt him- or herself at times and make awful decisions from time to time and the villain can make noble choices and actions. It is important to remember that in literature characters are there to reflect humanity and human's emotional spectrum. While heroes and villains are easy to remember, antiheroes are not as easy to remember. An important question to ask oneself as a reader of a literary work is: is this particular character necessarily a hero, villain or antihero? To label a character makes it easier for the reader to understand the character, but perhaps being too concerned in labelling the character the reader forgets about the dynamic and human aspect of the character?

Gender and femininity do have a correlation with being a hero, villain or an antihero, because for a long time men occupied the role of being a hero and women had to be assigned the role as side-kicks or as damsels-in-distress, unable to fend for themselves. This is an issue that has slowly begun to shift, and women are capable of making their own story and control the outcome of their own narrative. Women have not been the hero of their own story, nor have they been given a better position in their story to evolve in a positive way on their part. In their

article of strong and independent female protagonists, BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) have looked more in-depth at the sci-fi and superhero genre, and found that women are often hypersexualized, brutalized and objectified in this genre. This is not different from other genre, such as fantasy, Young Adult Fiction, dystopia etc. where women have been positioned as a 'weaker' character and proven that they are dependent on men to fix the problem at hand.

As mention earlier in my thesis, Toril Moi (1989) defines femininity as something that is social and culturally constructed; she argues that one is not born a woman, but women becomes more feminine. On gender Judith Butler (1990) defines gender as "(...) the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of "the body" that pre-exists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This "body" often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural sourced figured as "external" to that body" (175). In terms of performativity and gender Butler (1990) defines performativity as acts, gestures, enactments and generally constructed which are performative, but it is produced on the surface of the body.

Considering Butler's (1990) definition of gender and performativity, how genders act is influenced by how culture and society have decided genders to act and perform. Butler (1990) claims that "According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, (...) it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification" (185). What people see externally is what people expect someone to behave and feel internally; and with this particular expectation the exterior and interior have to correlate and this correlation has been unconsciously given to the gender from society. Reflecting on Lada's gender she is automatically limited to someone who cannot be a hero, thus she is given a role from what people perceive her from an external point of view. When Lada is first introduced in *And I Darken* she seems more like a villain, or an antihero, than a hero, and it is also important to consider the perspective of the other characters (especially the Ottomans and the Sultan), where she might be perceived as a villain. But, to the female reader (and when Wallachia is conquered by Lada) they see Lada a hero. One last argument is that, from a cultural point of view, females cannot become a hero even from a modern society's perspective. Females are only regarded as the helper and someone who needs to be saved and are not 'strong' enough to help themselves. Through literature, showing that gender and femininity are a factor in the major heroes, antiheroes and villains is important, and showing the nuances of the hero, antihero and villain is important too. Making the reader aware that the hero, antihero and villain is not static is a great importance, because becoming stuck

with what makes a hero, antihero or villain is not good, and makes the reader forget that the hero, antihero or villain can change throughout the narrative.

The social context of Lada's gender

In theory it will be easier for Lada if she was born a boy since she will face less pressure of marriage and to have children at a young age. The social and cultural pressure will still exist if she were a boy, but preparing for marriage will not be the main focus in her life. Another reason for being born a boy would be easier for Lada is that she would be the next in line to inherit the throne after her father and her older brother Mircea, thus she does not need to fight with fists and teeth to inherit the throne. But will Lada act different as a boy versus as a girl? Most likely yes, she will. Everything Lada desires will be handed to her if she is a boy, and she would not act the way she does because being a boy amongst her contemporaries will be different in a cultural and social sense. Technically Lada would have it easier in both the Wallachian and Ottoman society by being born a boy, but she would not be the important voice that she is to teenage girls if she were born a boy. Lada would not be able to shed a light on how girls at her time has it, and the challenges she faces from society and its cultural values, she plays an important part of being a female who is reluctant to conform to the social and cultural values of her time to the teenage female reader.

From her father's perspective it matters, in the beginning, that Lada is born a boy instead of a girl, to him it is an embarrassment that he got a girl. "VLAD DRACUL'S HEAVY BROW descended like a storm when the doctor informed him that his wife had given birth to a girl. (...) He had not thought his seed weak enough to produce a girl. (...) "Ladislav," he declared. It was a feminine form of Vlad. (...) If Vasilissa wanted a strong name, she would bear him a son" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 1-2). The time change and when Lada grows up, her father gets a different viewpoint of her. After the forest lesson when Lada beats the Danesti brothers, her father boasts of her fighting skills. "(...) Rather than scolding Lada, their father laughed and boasted of his daughter, as wild and fierce as a boar" (White, Kiersten. 2016: 17). The disappointment of having a daughter has diminished and Lada's father does not voice his disapproval of having a girl when he sees what Lada is capable of and that she even "outpaced the boys her age with riding skills and demanded to be taught everything her brother was (...)" (17). If other characters in Lada's narrative thinks she should rather be a boy than a girl they never voice it out loud, perhaps because they fear her and her reaction to such a statement and they know they should rather be quiet than voice such an idea out loud.

Most likely it does not make much difference for Lada's contemporaries that she is a boy or a girl, the most difference would be for Lada herself. There will still be social and cultural expectations if Lada were a boy, but the expectations would be different and not defined in Lada's life to the same extent as to a girl's life. Being a girl Lada is constantly reminded of marriage and being a dutiful wife to her future husband, but if she were a boy she would be encouraged to train to become a soldier and a future voivode. When she tries to picture her future with a potential husband she falls short. "Sometimes she imagined a shadowy figure standing at a stone altar. She would hold up her hand, and he would take everything she had for himself. She burned with hatred at the very idea of a man, waiting, waiting to make her crawl" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 26). Lada has only her parent's marriage as a framework of how marriage is, and observing how her father has treated her mother she is afraid that she will be treated the same when she marries. When Lada grows older she has Mara and Halima in the Ottoman Empire as a framework of how marriage works, but Mara and Halima have two different approaches to marriage, where Mara is the pragmatic one, Halima sees marriage as something more romantic.

In *And I Darken* Radu's role in Lada's narrative is more of a supportive and serving role, but it is important to remember that *And I Darken* is the first novel of a trilogy and both Lada's and Radu's narratives change drastically through the three novels. In the first novel Radu is more dependent on his sister, but in the second and third novel he becomes more independent from her, yet he still has his doubts from time to time when making decisions without his sister. Without knowing it Lada is also dependent on her brother; she is aware that she wants to protect him from the world, but it never occurs to her that without her brother she would come short in surviving the Ottoman world.

Lada shook her head in numb disbelief. Radu had come to the same conclusion she had – Halil Pasha was still a threat to Mehmed – and instead of running around in the dark, climbing walls, prowling aimlessly through a house, he had figured out a way to protect Mehmed. "What can I do?" she whispered. (245)

In her surprise of not knowing what to do Lada shows for the first time that she is dependent on Radu's friendliness and know-how of making friends. She asks her brother what she can do, but she is told to stay out of his way and the hurt of being told off by her brother sends her off with a feeling of shock, thus Lada is in disbelief that her brother has shown independence by not involving her at all.

Radu becomes more confident after arriving in the Ottoman Empire and finding peace in Islam, he even makes friends and understand the importance of befriending the high-ranking officials of the Ottoman Empire. Radu understands that he comes further with friendliness and political politeness than fists and brutality, and now he can work more by himself than being in Lada's shadow and protection. To Lada this is new and strange, since she has gotten used to constantly protect her brother, but she finds caring for others a weakness, yet she in a way contradict her own hard exterior by caring for her brother. "Radu finally stopped struggling, glaring at her instead. Tears pooled in his big eyes. He was so pretty, this brother of hers. (...) And when Lada saw him hurt, she wanted to protect him, which made her angry. He was weak, and protecting him felt like a weakness" (White, Kiersten. 2016: 37). Lada does not want to admit that she cares for Radu, and he is the closest character Lada comes to safety and resemblance of home and Lada needs that leverage to get through the day because she is desperate to go home. After settling in the Ottoman Empire Radu does not dependent on his sister, and does not follow her as her shadow anymore and this is hard for Lada to adjust to, and in the shock she distances herself from her brother.

Lada and Radu work in a symbiosis of dependency of each other, but when arriving the Ottoman Empire the symbiosis begins to break down. The co-dependency the siblings had between each other breaks and Lada more or less forgets her brother in her fixation for going home to Wallachia again. In the beginning both needed each other, but as their narrative evolve Lada and Radu manage to find solutions independently of each other. There are scenes in the following novels where Radu questions himself what he would do if his sister were there with him, but they become more fleeting thoughts as his narrative evolves. The siblings evolve in their respective narrative and they become less dependent on each other and more independent, yet they still have each other in mind when they face events where they need to make important decisions, but the vast co-dependency has lessened.

Can female protagonists be strong and independent?

As mentioned in the introduction BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that teenage girls, compared to boys, are significantly less likely to describe themselves as heard, confident and brave. In addition, they claim that 1 in 3 girls (34%) and 1 in 3 boys (28 %) acknowledge that girls have fewer opportunities than boys to be leaders. Despite this, according to the survey, almost 9 in 10 girls and boys feel optimistic about their future (87 %) and they believe that they can achieve anything they put their mind to (88 %). In their article the term

gender gap is introduced, and they claim that this gap extends to traditionally male-dominated career fields such as jobs offered in the STEM fields (natural sciences and maths). Further, BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that the majority of teen boys (57%) express an interest in a career in science (or related fields), but only one-third of teen girls want to pursue a career in the same field. Despite being optimistic, girls need more role models in science and they need someone they can look up to, and this extends to literature too.

In addition, BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim, which is also stated in the introduction, that 2 in 3 girls agree that there should be more of female role models (63%), strong female characters (65%) and relatable female characters (65%). This gives an indicator that strong, independent female characters who are relatable are important and are needed in literature. Lada Dragwyla is one such character, she is strong, independent and relatable and reading Lada's story girls will easily relate and recognize themselves in her. Lada does not want to be silenced and she is an outspoken and independent female character.

Radu went perfectly still, head down. Lada did not have to see his expression to know how he looked. Terrified. "He will be angry. And Mircea [Lada and Radu's older brother] will kill me. I am scared to die."

"Everyone dies sometime. And I will not let Mircea kill you. If anyone is going to kill you, it will be me. Understand?"

(White, Kiersten. 2016: 59)

Lada does not shy away of stating her own opinion and she understands that if she has to be heard and respected she needs to act on other people's fear. She knows that her brother is afraid of her, but in the same time, her outspokenness can be a sort of safety for her and her brother. Knowing where he has his sister, Radu understands her better than anyone else and that is his strength, and from a young age Lada is not afraid of disagreeing with other characters. "Finally noticing her daughter, Vasilissa beckoned her daughter. 'Ladislav, come out from there. Your father is home.' Lada did not move. 'He is not my father'" (White, Kiersten. 2016: 11). Instead of punishing Lada for her statement, Lada's mother Vasilissa is the one being punished for not having control over her daughter. Lada is a character that gives teenage girls a voice and believing that they can be brave by voicing their opinion.

In their article 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Qualitative Study of How Young Adult Fiction Affects Identity Construction' (2011) Jessica Kokesh & Miglena Sternadori claim that the Bem Sex Role Inventory (a gender measure based on the answer from 100 Stanford

undergraduates in the 1970's by S.L. Bem) lists different traits as feminine. The list includes traits such as: affectionate, cheerful, childlike, avoiding harsh language, eager to soothe harsh feelings, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loving children, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding, warm, and yielding (141). In addition, Kokesh & Sternadori (2011) claim that by contrast to the female traits, independence, leadership, athleticism and ambition classifies as masculine characteristics (141). Furthermore, they claim that cultural narratives of femininity suggests that women have, or should have, more limited agency than men. In *And I Darken* Lada is shown to have great agency, but to the cost that she puts herself in dangerous situations and this is supported by Kokesh & Sternadori (2011) who claim that stereotypes of femininity are negative in regard to women who have relatively significant agency.

Female protagonists can be strong and independent without men, and Simone de Beauvoir (1949) claims that men have created their own heroes, such as Prometheus, Hercules and Parsifal and women are placed in the shadow of the heroes great deeds and women are merely supportive characters in order to make the story thriving. BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) supports de Beauvoir's (1949) claim by stating that in the genre of sci-fi/superhero the male protagonist have dominated and women often have been delegated as the damsel-in-distress or the side-kick of the hero. More independent and strong female protagonists are needed in literature for the young adult and teenagers, but there have been a few strong and independent female protagonists during the last 15 years (such as Katniss Everdeen, Beatrice Prior and America Singer to mention a few). The main issue is that many of the female protagonists have ended up with the archetype 'dream' man and this gives a signal that all women needs a man at the end of the day. Lada does not desire to be married and carry children, she absolutely resists the idea and believe it is abhorrent. In the third novel of the trilogy, she is with child and she adopts her child away to her brother Radu, knowing he has desired having children. Through Lada the teenage female reader can see that they do not need to marry or have children to be strong and independent, they can live a fulfilled life without the need of finding 'Mr Right' or to have children.

This is why Lada is such an important figure for the teenage female reader, she proves that she can be independent, strong, loud and everything a man can be without it holding her back. She does not see the need of being dependent of a man nor having a family, and having a family does not suit everybody and Lada shows that there are strong and independent female protagonists for everybody. In other words, Lada breaks the gender norms of her contemporaries by breaking the expectation set for her and more female protagonists such as

Lada is needed in literature, and there might (hopefully) be more in the future in Young Adult literature. Female protagonists can be independent and strong without the interference from male characters, but the issue is that in many novels in the Young Adult literature the female protagonist have become dependent of the male character in the end. Strong female protagonists are needed as someone the teenage reader can look up to and use the female protagonist's standard and ideal to live by.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that characters are made to be complex and reflecting traits the reader wants to have. It is also important to remember that a character can be a hero and a villain at the same time, but a character can be a hero and an antihero at the same time too. Dorothy and Alice are the frontiers of the female protagonist, and Alice has been praised for being the first female protagonist who is inquisitive and outspoken. But, the female protagonist has changed throughout the decades, from being in a male dominated narrative to a female dominated narrative where the female protagonist reflects what girls want to be: brave, heard and confident. Representation within literature is important, both of strong female protagonists and characters from the LGBTQ+ community. The strong and independent female character is given freedom in their right to feel angry and assertive, but it does not always have a good outcome for them. Lada shows teenage girls that they can be brave and independent, and that they do not need to wait for a 'Mr. Right' in order to do what they want, or to become who they want. Further, in chapter 2 I will focus on gender roles, expectations and performativity in *And I Darken*, and in chapter 2 I will also focus on the difficult realities Lada and Radu faces with their contemporaries.

Chapter 2: Gender roles, expectations and performativity in *And I Darken*

“Do not thank me. All I did was teach them to fear me. How does that help you? Next time you hit first, you hit harder, you make certain your name means fear and pain. I will not be there to save you again.”

– Lada to her brother Radu

White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 16

Gender roles reversed

In many novels the stereotypic appearance of the character is often reflected in the character's gender, and in these novels the female character has been described as young, beautiful, flawless, having beautiful hair and few flaws to her character and having broad hips and breasts, while men is often been described as tall, physically strong, capable of making decisions and they are always the hero of the stories. In the same novels the female character is described as fit for hysteria and the strong male character comes to save her from danger, thus showing that the female character cannot do anything on her own. The female character is reduced to a character that constantly needs to be helped and saved, and there is no room given for the female character to be a hero of her own story. Female characters can neither have temper, be outspoken or be scandalous in any way, while the male character can be outspoken and be physical in fights.

In *And I Darken* the gender roles are reversed, where Lada comes across as loud and finds herself easily in a fistfight and being full of temper, Radu is the shy, quiet and easily frightened one of the siblings. “She was contrary and vicious and the meanest child the nurse had ever cared for. (...) By all rights the girl should be silent and proper, fearful and simpering. (...) But in Lada she saw a spark, a passionate, fierce glimmer that refused to hide or be dimmed” (6). Lada is described as a tomboyish girl who is not afraid of being loud and throwing herself head-first in a fist fight. The nurse observes Lada and comes to an understanding that she will encourage Lada in being outspoken and temperamental when she grows up.

As a sort coming of age ritual all boys between seven and twelve are left in the local forest, this ritual is seen almost as a tradition and only boys are left in the forest. This ‘ritual’ happens once a month and Radu is left in the forest with other boys from his village. Radu is seen as the easy target, and this time he does not have his sister to hide behind. “Radu tasted blood in his mouth. It mixed with the salt from the tears streaming down his face. Andrei and Aron Danesti kicked him again, their boots sharp against his stomach. Radu rolled onto his side,

curling in on himself, trying to become small as possible” (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 13). Radu struggles with acting out with fists and kicks when treated unjustly, especially when someone is hurting him. This positions Radu as a weak character who struggle to defend himself, but Lada being Lada, she is full of surprises and she does not like to be excluded from anything where she feels she can assert herself. She joins the boys in the forest and proves that she is equally good, and perhaps even better to fight than the boys.

(...) Aron was spinning in a circle, trying desperately to dislodge Lada. (...) She had jumped on the boy’s back, clasping her arms around him and pinning his arms to his sides. Radu could not see her face through her tangled drape of hair until Aron twisted to the side, revealing Lada’s teeth sunk into his shoulder.

Lada stood and slammed her hand into Andrei’s nose. He screamed, dropping to his knees and snivelling. Lada walked after him, then kicked his side so that he fell onto his back. (...) She put her foot on his throat and pushed, just enough to make his eyes bulge in panic. (15-16)

The gender roles are reversed by Lada coming to Radu’s rescue, and out of the two siblings Lada is the character to act-out while her younger brother is the shy and demure character. Lada saves Radu from an embarrassing situation, but this is not the first nor the last time she saves her younger brother out of situations where he cannot defend himself. The siblings are balancing each other, and where Radu receives the blows and bullying Lada acts-out and fights back. Another reason for Lada joining the boys in the forest and fighting the Danesti brothers is to save her father from the potential embarrassment of Radu not managing to fight back, and that is an embarrassment Lada wants to save her father from. On another note, if one were to consider Toril Moi’s (1989) definition of being feminine Lada is far away of being feminine and it is as if the role of the feminine is given to Radu in order to even Lada’s aggression out. Lada’s acting-out and Radu’s demure personality can be interpreted as a yin and yang balance, the anger and fire represented through Lada is calmed down by the quietness and shyness from Radu. One would expect that Radu is supposed to be the masculine and strong one, but he has been given more feminine traits and is afraid of acting out by punching back.

Where Lada takes back by punching, Radu takes back by acting in the shadows, he is cunning and works out and initiates different plans in order to take advantage of a situation. Surprising his sister Radu has both the Danesti brothers caught for stealing jewellery. When the Danesti brothers are caught, Radu states to Lada that “There are other ways to beat someone

than fists” (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 19). Radu feels that he does not need to turn to violence in order to solve problems, however when the punish (by lashing) starts Radu becomes scared of what he has initiated and he is ashamed of himself.

Radu’s smile wilted and died. He looked away. He was safe now. And Lada was proud of him, which had never happened before. He focused on that to ignore the sick feelings twisting his stomach as Aron and Andrei cried out in pain. He wanted his nurse – wanted her to hold and comfort him – and this, too, made him ashamed. (19)

By longing for comfort of his nurse Radu is given the role as damsel-in-distress; he needs a mother figure who can save him. He is scared of what he has done and it scares him of what he can do. By witnessing the punishment and knowing he is the one putting the two Danesti brothers in such a position gives Radu guilt. But, he acknowledges that he is ashamed of himself and that he wants to be comforted, and being aware of this makes him ashamed of himself as a man, but Radu feels guilt that his sister does not feel guilty or wanting to be comforted by the nurse. The reader has to consider that the siblings have grown up with an absent mother, who has neither been there for them physically or mentally, and the nurse has functioned as a mother for them during their childhood.

And I Darken turns the gender roles in reverse, not only with the character’s personality, but also how they look like. Lada is described as something violent and ugly. “Like her brother, Lada had big eyes, but hers were close-set, with arched brows that made her look perpetually cross. Her hair was a tangled mass, so dark that her pale skin appeared sickly. Her nose was long and hooked, her lips thin (...)” (5). Radu is described as having big eyes and being petit in his childhood years, with thick hair and a charming smile with a dimple. While becoming a man, Lada still sees some of the boy in Radu, even though he has outgrown her.

(...) She experienced her usual jolt of surprise and jealousy at finding his hand larger than hers. (...) Somewhere in the last two years, her baby brother had become a man. He had grown fast and straight and strong, the cherubic roundness of his cheeks slowly fading to reveal cheekbones and a jaw of stone. With no baby features to balance his large eyes, they were striking, a dark sweep of lashes framing them beneath thick brows. (...)

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 202-203)

Compared to Lada Radu is made more feminine and 'weak' by his contemporaries' standard of how men should be, while Lada is the masculine with her outspokenness and temper. But, Lada does feel jealous when she sees Radu and how he has grown, and she envies her brother for the physical change he goes through and she wishes it to be her that goes through a physical change like her brother does. Life is not fair, and Lada has to accept what she has and work her way from the position she is in. For once Lada is jealous of her brother, but she is never vocal about him physically out-growing her and she feels that she is in the same place and nothing has changed.

Later in the novel when the siblings are in the Ottoman Empire their path crosses with the Sultan's son Mehmed II. Slowly Lada, Radu and Mehmed II form a friendship, but the friendship comes with a cost. After they form a friendship Mehmed II begins to fall in love with Lada, and Radu begins to explore his feelings toward Mehmed II in particular. Mehmed II even confesses to Lada with his feelings, and if Lada has any romantic feelings for Mehmed II she never confesses it. "(...) 'I love *you*, Lada.' He closed his eyes and lowered his voice, trying to regain control. 'Please allow me to love you. You are the most important person in my life. You and your brother are the only people who truly know me.'" (318). Mehmed II shows his affection to Lada in forms of kisses and physical affections, and Lada knows what power she gains over Mehmed II through his affections, and in a sense she lets him show his affection for her in private. But, Lada is the one to break Mehmed II heart.

AFTER SHE WAS GONE, Radu held Mehmed as he wept. (...) "Never leave me." Mehmed's grief-choked voice still rang with command. Radu closed his eyes. (...) Mehmed was in his arms, but he knew Lada was the only thing in in Mehmed's heart. (...) Mehmed was looking north, where Lada and her men travelled to claim Wallachia. (472-473)

Mehmed II shows grief for the loss of Lada and her choice of choosing Wallachia first crushes him. According to Toril Moi (1989) how femininity is perceived is a cultural given aspect, and considering this, showing emotions such as crying makes Mehmed II appear more feminine and more emotional than masculine and strong. Mehmed II still has Radu to hold on to, and Radu would do anything Mehmed II asks of him. But, Mehmed II finds it difficult of letting Lada go, and he looks in the direction of north where Lada and her men are headed to. Both boys are given traits of femininity by showing emotions and not physically defending

themselves to danger (this is most notable for Radu). Radu, in particular, is given traits of femininity when described by his sister Lada. “Radu loved dancing. The beat, the music, feeling it from his head to his toes as he twirled around the room in perfect synchronization with the other dancers” (146). The connection between dancing and femininity is that dancing gives the character more feminine traits, and dancing is for entertainment, and the male gaze is given a chance to rest its gaze at the female body. The feminine and femininity in Radu is strengthened by his love for dancing, and of course the perk of getting complements and attention from his dance partners is important for him.

Gender and performativity

Gender and performativity is well represented in *And I Darken*. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler (1990) argues that “(...) acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (185). What she means is that gestures which are made by the gender are constructed by society, and these gestures often perform the essence of the identity of the gender. According to Butler (1990) these gestures are fabricated and is supported through bodily signs and aimless means, but she argues that: “If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (187). If the connection between gender and performance is not connected then the cultural and social expectation connected to the gender and the performance of the gender becomes less valid.

The dissonance between gender and performativity shows itself through Lada when she begins her training with the Janissaries. Lada begins to dress like them in order to distance herself from what she feels is expected from her, and she wants to prove that she too can fight. The Janissaries were the standing elite army of the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century to 1826; the soldiers of the Janissary army were tributes who were Christians from the Balkan provinces, converted to Islam and drafted into the Ottoman army (*Janissary*, The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 12 February 2020). “Lada finished tugging on her boots. She wore trousers beneath her skirts, the skirts ill-fitting and put on almost as an afterthought” (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 151). Lada does not conform to the dress code of the females in the Ottoman Empire and she decides that she wants to dress like a Janissary. Lada sees an advantage by training with the Janissaries and by training with them she acquires the fighting

skills she needs when she returns to Wallachia. Lada is aware of the expectation of her gender, but she still chooses to dress like a Janissary when she has the chance. “She dressed in chain mail and the Janissary uniform, except for the cap. She left her hair down, a tangled mass of curls in defiance of Janissary custom and feminine styles. At her hips was her sword, and on her wrists were her knives” (465).

On her journey Lada has come to terms with who she is, but still she does not care about the expectation of the dress code for her time and place. By having her hair down in her Janissary uniform, Lada defies the Janissary dress code of having the hair up (due to practicality when training and fighting) and by having the Janissary clothing on Lada defies the dressing customs of women in the Ottoman Empire (having loose clothing). Lada has decided to perform her gender in accordance to her own will, but what disappoints Lada the most is that she feels that she cannot perform her gender in what she feel is her right. Lada does not see the issue of not training with the Janissaries and be equal to them in skills of fighting.

Before she had striven to prove herself the fastest, the cleverest, the most ruthless. But after Ivan’s lewd attack and Nicolae’s protective response, she had seen that none of it mattered. She would never be a Janissary. She could never be powerful on her own, because she would always be a woman.

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 217)

Lada begins to reconsider her value as an individual, and facing the fact that she is a woman and nothing more than a woman is what hurts her the most. All Lada desires is to perform her desires and beliefs, regardless of her gender. Throughout Lada’s narrative she is faced with prejudice from other characters for being a woman and not capable of fighting. Another reason for Lada acting-out and being aggressive is that she is angry at herself for being a woman and in need of protection. She feels that being a woman is a weakness since she has to be protected, yet at the same time she is not afraid of defying people who holds a higher rank than her. During a fighting practice with a few of the other Janissary soldiers, a commander inserts his presence to oversee the practice and instead of hiding or leave Lada stays visible in front of the commander.

“What is going on here?” A short man with piercing dark eyes, one ear a mangled, scarred stub, strode into the practice ring. The Janissaries snapped to attention.

“We were practicing, sir.” Nicolae stared straight ahead, as though if he did not look at Lada, the commander would not notice her. (...)

She met the man’s gaze without batting an eye. “I train with these Janissaries.” (...)

“We are not so lax in Edirne as they are in the outer regions. You will remove yourself.” He turned, effectively dismissing her. (...)

The man turned to Nicolae. “Show this girl that she has no place on a field with Janissaries.” (143)

Through the attitude and verbal order of the commander of the Janissaries in Edirne Lada is asked to remove herself, but she does not see the issue of training with the Janissaries. She wants to be the best, the fastest and the most brutal of all the Janissaries, but she is judged by her gender and not her fighting skills when she is told to leave. Instead of being hurt or put out Lada dares one of the Janissaries soldiers to fight her so she can prove herself worthy. This is what Lada has to do every time, to prove herself worthy in order to be herself.

Another important issue to discuss is Lada’s body language and how she behaves in the commander’s presence. All the Janissary soldiers who are present show the commander great respect and fear by snapping to attention and position, and Nicolae pretends that if he does not acknowledge Lada’s presence the commander will ignore her and move on. Lada does not care if the commander is in charge, she believes that she has equal rights as the rest of the Janissaries to be there. Unfearful and brave she stares back without batting an eye at the commander when the commander acknowledges her. Lada is not afraid of being acknowledged, and she admits that she trains with the Janissaries, but the commander does not like that there is a girl in his ranks and asks her to remove herself. Lada does not remove herself, and Nicolae is asked to make her go. What is also important to notice is that Lada skips the formality with the commander and does not call him “sir” as Nicolae does, she simply states that she train with these men without any formality to it.

Lada does not bend to other’s will and she believes that she can be equally treated as the other Janissaries. Through her body language she shows that any military rank does not affect her, and she will treat everybody the same. In contrast to the other Janissaries Lada has not been instilled the same fear and respect for officers ranking higher than the soldiers she trains with, and perhaps the other officers have been more relaxed with Lada’s aggressive attitude. Lada’s body language shows that if the commander shows her no respect why should she show him any respect back. Through Lada’s body language the teenage female reader will

identify herself with Lada, and Lada shows that the teenage female reader can be more brave and the teenage female reader does not need to tolerate to be looked down upon.

Radu is also a character who's gender and performativity does not correlate, and from a cultural perspective it is expected that Radu has combat skills and that he has to participate in war. This is not what Radu feels the most drawn to, and in contrast to his sister Radu does not solve his problems with fighting. He works in the shadows, and he uses his intellect to combat those who have done him wrong. Allying with a servant Radu has the Danesti brothers punished, but when the punish of the Danesti brothers begin, Radu feels guilt and regret of the actions he has done, and by regretting and having second thoughts about one own's action is perceived as weak and feminine.

A rash of thefts plagued the castle. After every feast attended by the boyar families, someone would notice a necklace, a jewel, a personal token of value missing. (...) "Why would they have stolen those things?" Lada watched, her mouth turned down in curiosity. Radu shrugged. "All the missing items were found under their beds by a servant." (...) Radu smiled. (...) Lada turned to look at him, suspicion drawing her brows together. "Did you do this?" "There are other ways to beat someone than fists." Radu poked her in the side with a finger.

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 18-19)

Though Radu understands what he has done is wrong, he acted out because he felt that he needed to set boundaries in order to be more respected and feared. As he states to his sister not everybody needs to use their fists in order to punish others, yet Radu feels bad when the Danesti brothers are punished for a crime he know they did not commit. In the dialogue between the siblings, the role of body language has an important role too. Through frowning her mouth Lada shows that she is curious, perhaps even impressed by her brother, but by frowning her mouth she also shows that she might not like the direction of her brother's actions. By shrugging Radu shows that the thefts that have plagued the castle does not bother him, even though he is the master mind of it; perhaps he is bothered, but does not want to show that it bothers him and takes on a casual tone to his body language. Suspicion of who is the master mind of the thefts draws Lada's attention to Radu, and perhaps a part of her is surprised that her quiet and shy little brother is capable of such a thing, but the mistake Lada did was judging the book by its cover, and thus Radu got the upper hand of working in the shadows.

Another gap with gender and performativity with Radu is that he is more prone to cry than his sister. Lada does not show any feelings beside anger and provoking fear in her brother.

Right now he wailed at the nurse's pause in spooning the thin gruel, sweetened with honey, into his mouth. "Make him shut up!" Lada climbed over her father's largest hound, grizzled and patient with age. "How would I do that?" (...) "Throw Radu out with the chamber pots!" Radu wailed louder, working himself up to a fit. The nurse clucked her tongue, picking him up even though he was much too large to be carried around. (6-7)

Lada is annoyed that Radu cries when he is upset and afraid, and she does not understand that Radu and she deals with problems differently. Radu is easy to scare, and he is even frightened by his own father. "'And what of this one? Is he as fierce?' Vlad leaned in to where Radu finally peered outward. Radu immediately burst into tears, burying his face once more in the nurse's shoulder (...)" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 10). Radu has a soft side to him and he finds the other characters easily frightening when meeting them, and one reason for crying easily might be that his parents are completely absent in his upbringing, and the only other character he can turn to is his nurse. Radu is longing for stable parents, and he feels that he is not loved by anyone.

Though Radu tends to cry and wants security, he shows to some extent correlation between his gender and performativity. A time after arriving the Ottoman Empire Radu does practice with the Janissaries and he participates in Mehmed II warfare, but there are some things Radu does on request from Mehmed II. "(...) Although at Mehmed's suggestion Radu had been training with the Janissaries for a couple of years now, having a familiar face among them made it more enjoyable rather than a chore" (223). Radu understands that training and improve his fighting skills will help him in the future and strengthen his place in the society as a man, but he needed this idea to be suggested by Mehmed II himself.

There are a few times Lada does perform her gender according to the cultural expectation of her society. She does care for her brother Radu and is worried for him sometimes, especially when Radu tries to prove himself to the other children in his village. Radu wants to be brave too, and he dares one of the children to compete with him by going out on an icy lake, but Radu has not considered that if the ice cracks both he and the other child will go through and neither of them can swim. The whole competition ends by the ice cracking, and the other

child goes through the ice. Guilty and desperate to please the others Radu wants to save him, but in the last minute his sister saves him.

Someone grabbed his ankle, yanking him back. (...) “Wait, wait, we need to help him!” Radu tried to scramble to his feet, but another hand took hold of his other ankle and slammed him down. His chin bounced against the ice, teeth biting into his tongue and drawing blood. (...) “What were you thinking?” she screamed. (...) “He will drown! Let me go!” She picked him up by his collar, shaking him. “You could have died!” (...) Radu finally looked at Lada, expecting to see fury, but instead she looked... unfamiliar. Her eyes were brimming with tears she would have mocked him for.

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 31-32)

Frightened for her brother Lada saves him from disgrace and drowning, but Radu gets shocked when he sees Lada has tears in her eyes. He is used to have tears in his own eyes and Lada making fun of him for it, and this time the table has turned. Deep down Lada is afraid for her brother, but due to the special family situation they are in, Lada does not know how to show affection towards others, other than with aggression. Despite being angry at her brother for being ‘weak’ by crying and not giving punches, Radu is still her brother and perhaps Lada is afraid of what repercussions she will get when her father finds out what have happened. Lada shows that she can show concern and emotions in regard to her brother, yet she is afraid that if she shows emotions like concern and crying she will strengthen the cultural values of her as a woman. Another incident where Lada shows concern for her brother is when they have argued and Radu almost begins to cry. “And when Lada saw him hurt, she wanted to protect him, which made her angry. He was weak, and protecting him felt like a weakness” (37). Lada connects crying with weakness and protecting someone who is crying makes Lada feel weak herself, but Lada also view protecting others as a weakness in itself and a reason why she feels that way might be because no one has protected her, and thus feeling the need of protecting others makes her annoyed and angry.

Gender expectations

Lada is constantly met with the attitude that she has to marry in order to fulfill her place in society. She has no desire to marry, and she has no desire to carry children into the world and the reason for her resistance of marriage is that she has seen what it has done to her mother, and

Lada is afraid that the same will happen to her. During her childhood her mother is absent and a nurse takes care of her and Radu, and the nurse has worked as a mother figure for the siblings. Lada's mother was young when she had to move away from her homeland to marry and give birth, so the Dragwyla line could preserve. After giving birth to Radu, Lada's mother struggles with birth depression and becomes an absent figure in her childrens lives, and later Lada's mother becomes physically absent by travelling back to Moldavia.

She [Vasilissa] stared at the wall. Her gaze never drifted to her son. (...) Vasilissa's tiny frame trembled. Then she dropped to her knees, lowered her head (...) "Please. Please, I beg of you. Let me go home." Vlad put out his other hand and stroked Vasilissa's lank, greasy hair. (...) "You are the weakest creature I have ever known. Crawl back to your hole and hide there. (...)"

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 3, 11-12)

The tense marriage of her parents becomes Lada's framework of marriage, and the fear of being treated the same way follows her through her whole life. "She burned with hatred at the very idea of that man, waiting, waiting to make her crawl" (26). She remembers when her mother had to beg to go home to Moldavia and her father made her mother crawl back to her room, and thus Lada does not want to have a man that makes her crawl to her room. By experiencing her parents ill-natured marriage, Lada opposes the idea of marriage and she understands that marriages does not have any positive outcome for women, and marriage is just a practical means to serve men. Lada's idea of marriage is that she will become a servant to a man and her sole purpose is to give birth so she can bring her posterity to the world. Lada does not see that there is anything for her when she is married, and she recognizes that the social and cultural perk of marriage is for solely for men.

After having her first menstruation Lada becomes frightened, not only because she understand that she is eligible to be married off, but when she gets her menstruation she has it in a foreign country. Again, Lada reacts with fists, and fights when her 'secret' is discovered.

"Oh," said the maid, a girl fragile and darting as a bird. Lada looked up in horror. Evidence of her womanhood draped over her hands, the red and undeniable testament. She had been caught. (...) And now this maid, this spy, knew she was old enough to be a wife. With a scream, Lada jumped on the maid, hitting her around the head. The maid dropped to the floor, bracing against the blows and screaming out. (...)

Lada is afraid that the maid will tell the Sultan about becoming a woman and be married off to someone who is strange to her. All the maid did was stating the situation with an “oh”, and this made Lada panic and attack the maid. Instead of being punished by attacking the maid Lada is brought to two of the Sultan’s wives, Mara and Halima, in order to learn more about herself and becoming a wife. Mara and Halima are polar opposites when it comes to the view of marriage, where Halima has a naïve and romantic view of marriage Mara is more pragmatic in her approach to marriage.

“Oh, you must have questions! Do not be afraid. You cannot embarrass us. We are wives, after all.” (...) “Oh, be kind, Mara! She does not understand. It is a wonderful thing, being a wife! Murad [the Sultan] is so attentive, and we are taken care of better than we could ever hope for.” (...) Lada answered in Hungarian, intrigued by Mara’s honesty. “What about you?” “I am here for the same reason you are. My marriage to Murad was the seal of a truce with my father and Serbia. My presence keeps Serbia free.”

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 96-97)

Lada and Mara are both pragmatic in their view of marriage, where Lada feels that she is trapped by the thought of marriage Mara sees it as an asset to manipulate things to work in her favour. The meeting with Mara and Halima makes Lada reflect on the purpose of marriage and equality, and Lada recognizes that there are other ways to make things happen to one’s own favour, but Lada still believes that marriage does not suit her. The Ottoman society and the Wallachian society builds on the idea that there is no room for not marrying the best suitor, and by being high born Lada has to marry, but the reason for the obsession for marriage in Lada’s situation is due of political reasons and to ensure that she secures the family line by giving birth. Lada is expected to marry and bear children by her contemporaries, but she wants to defy those expectation and she expresses herself to Mehmed II that she wants to be a voivode (prince) of Wallachia and does not see the issue her gender presents with this idea.

Lada is no exception of experiencing expectation from society. Radu and Mehmed II both experience expectation from society, but in a different form than Lada. Both boys do experience an expectation to marry, but not to the same extent as Lada. Later in Radu’s narrative (in the second novel of the trilogy) Radu is offered, by Kumal, to marry his niece Nazira. The

offer is a practical solution for Radu and Nazira, since both define themselves within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, Radu understands that the offer of marriage is a protection for both of them and he accepts it. Radu is a diplomatic character and prefers to use diplomacy rather than swords when solving a problem. When his father and older brother dies, Radu surpasses his sister in the line of inheritance since he is the next in line for the Wallachian throne, but he does not want to inherit the throne. The fear of returning home to all the bad memories and leaving Mehmed II are the reasons for Radu to not return to Wallachia.

Mehmed II puts pressure on himself from what he believes the society and his ancestors expects of him, but he also has practical reasons to put that pressure on himself. He feels he is secure on his path to the throne, until Halima births a son, who becomes the legitimate heir to the throne. Since Mehmed II is a son of a concubine and thus born out of marriage his position is challenged, and his mother expects him to show strength and kill the new-born baby.

“They will think I ordered Ahmet’s death,” Mehmed said (...) “Halima was with me when it happened. I will have to tell them, it was Huma, it was not –“

“No,” Lada said. “They will think it was your order no matter what you say. If you claim it was your mother, it will make you a murderer *and* a liar.”

“What am I going to do?”

Lada thought of what she would do. This was a time for power, not subtlety. “Make it a law. (...) Make a decree that when a sultan is crowned, it is legal for him to kill his brothers for the security of the empire.” Mehmed had never looked at her with genuine horror before, but he did now. (456)

Lada is not happy about the death of Mehmed’s brother nor his reaction to it, but she understands the practicality of the event. Mehmed II shows a soft side by feeling and showing the horror of Lada’s suggestion of making a law which claims that the future Sultan can kill his brothers if he needs to. The thought of making a law such like Lada’s suggestion, combined with his grief and panic shows that the idea of killing one of his own brothers is something he could never do. Mehmed II will be judged by his contemporaries for disappointing the social expectation of not being man enough and react to the situation with violence. Through acting with violence he has to show that he can be a competent leader. But, where Mehmed II finds it difficult to kill, he believes that if he can conquer Constantinople and have control over the city the social expectation and doubt of him will diminish. Mehmed II is constantly compared to his

father by many of the Janissaries and not all of them are happy with the thought of having him as a future Sultan.

Facing difficult realities

Though Lada has been brought up in a tough society socially, culturally and climate wise, she has been protected from the hard reality of women. She has mostly been surrounded by men, but a nurse have brought her up, and Lada is a high born too. The concept of women being victims to sexual assault and harassment has never been explained to Lada, thus it comes as a shock to her the first time she is sexually assaulted by a man. Lada has never thought much of her gender and what can happen to her because she has never been needed to protect herself from assailants. Meeting Nicolae after a long absence fills Lada with joy, but her joy is short lived when Ivan tries to make a sexual move on her.

“But some things are not so small in here.” He reached out and grabbed Lada’s left breast, squeezing painfully.

Before she could react, Nicolae spun Ivan away, slammed his head against the table, and threw him to the ground. (...)

(...) This had never happened to Lada before, but she suspected she had Nicolae to thank for that. (...) How much had been said when she could not hear it? (...) She felt it, (...) the knowledge that she could never be their equal. She would always be separate.

(White, Kiersten. 2016: 207-208)

After the incident with Ivan Lada has an epiphany of how she, and other women, are regarded in society. It frightens her that such acts and insinuations might have taken place behind her back too, that there might have been insinuated or said something about her between the Janissaries that she is not aware of, and the lack of control is what frightens Lada the most. The disappointment over Ivan’s harassment and the protection from Nicolae gives Lada a shock and perspective of the reality of being a woman, and what hurts Lada the most is that she feels that Nicolae, a male Janissary, has to protect her and her reputation from potential future assaults. Lada has always felt one of the Janissaries and that she too can achieve the same as men, but now the assault from Ivan proves her opposite, thus she comes to realise that she is a woman and can never be equal to the Janissaries or her brothers.

Ivan's assault of Lada with the consequence of Nicolae's protection, Lada understands that she cannot limit herself in the presence of Nicolae or other men in fear of being assaulted again. The second time Lada is assaulted she has learned, and she is more prepared for Ivan's approximation.

She heard the footfall a second before the sharp blow to the side of her head. (...) She reached for her wrist sheath, and a boot came down, pinning her down to the ground. "I know your tricks, little whore." Her sluggish, aching head recognized the voice. (...) "Ivan?" (...) He dropped to his knees, straddling her, pinning her legs beneath his and holding both her wrists above her head. (...) Lada jumped on his back, fastening her legs around his waist and wrapping her arm around his throat. She grabbed her own wrist, pulling the arm tighter.

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 281-282)

This time Lada recognizes the danger Ivan is to her, and she is more prepared to defend herself. After coming to herself from Ivan's surprise attack she manages to fight back. The fight ends with Lada killing Ivan, and her logic for killing him is so she does not have to live in fear for the next harassment or assault. Lada kills Ivan and walks away as if nothing has happened, and nonchalantly informs Mehmed II afterwards of what has happened. Thus, killing Ivan, or in Lada's eyes getting rid of an annoyance, makes Lada restore her confidence of herself again.

It is not just Lada who has a difficult time, her brother Radu struggles with finding his place in society and understanding himself. Radu carries the fear of his sexuality by his own not knowing where or who to turn to with his feelings, but he is in conflict with his own identity and the fear of punishment is what tearing him apart. There are no one of Radu's contemporaries that, openly, dares to tell Radu what to do with his emotions towards his own gender. Only Lazar, a Janissary, and his sister speaks to him about their knowledge of his love for Mehmed II and preference for the same gender.

In a conversation between the siblings, Lada understand Radu's feelings toward Mehmed II and the burden he has carried for a long time.

(...) She stopped, searching her brother's face. It was there, as plain as the stars in a cloudless night sky. Perhaps it had always been there. (...) She had heard rumors of this type of thing. Jokes and bawdy stories from Nicolae and the Janissaries about men who loved other men in the manner of a woman. It had never made sense to Lada, but then,

she had never loved anyone the way she knew her brother loved Mehmed. (...) How, then, must it feel to want *someone* as much as she wanted *something*, and know that someone would never want you?

(277)

Understanding dawning on Lada and she sees her brother in a new light, and from that point on she recognizes her brother's feelings towards his own gender. In a sense she understands the desire and longing her brother carries, even though they both share a desire for something or someone, but from a social and cultural perspective it seems impossible to reach in regard of their position and gender. Lada recognizes that both cannot have what they desire, but in Lada's case she can be outspoken in her desire to go home and be a ruler of Wallachia, while her brother has to live in silence with his feelings of Mehmed II. If Radu is open about his feelings towards Mehmed II he has given himself a death sentence and he will be punished by death for having romantic feelings toward someone of the same gender as him. Perhaps Lada has known longer of her brother's sexuality, but she has never had the knowledge to vocalise her understanding of her brother's feelings. To herself Lada wonders how torturous it must be carrying the feelings in silence as Radu does.

Lazar understands Radu's feelings for Mehmed II sooner, and he comments to Radu that he needs to guard his feelings. Lazar's comment is made with good intention, and with protection and sincerity, but Radu interpret the comment as a threat.

“There are some things it is not acceptable to want, but there are ways around it, and those who will look the other way. (...) Even the mere act of wanting, if noticed by the wrong people, can get you killed.” He gave a heavy, meaningful look at the spot Mehmed had been. “Be more careful.”

(...) What had Lazar seen? What did he suspect? Could he tell simply by watching Radu that something was very wrong with him, when even Radu did not understand what it was?

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 225)

Radu is frightened by Lazar's comment and he is more on guard after the talk and he begins to question himself and how visible his feelings toward Mehmed II is. The fear he carries does not diminish after Lazar's comment of the possibility of being killed if he is discovered. Radu is scared that Lazar might tell others about his feelings toward Mehmed II, and knowing that

other's know his secret without being able to control how they deal with it scares him. Radu believes that he has lost control of his secret, yet he begins to wonder how long Lazar has known or understood that there is something different with him. Perhaps Lazar has seen it from the first time they met, or perhaps Lazar has seen it since Radu came to the Ottoman Empire or when he stood and observed the conversation between Radu and Mehmed II.

The siblings face their own hard reality without knowing how to deal with it, and one reason for this is because they have not had any parents who have been present during their childhood and teenage years. The siblings long for stability, predictability and guidance from those who should have done it, which is their parents. Their mother has been physically and mentally absent since the birth of Radu and their father has been physically absent for long periods in their childhood. Not having a stable family life has done something to Lada and Radu and only having the nurse in their upbringing is not the same as having their parents around, even though they are from a family of a good position. Lada is the one who mostly longs for her mother, especially when her menstruation cycle begins. Lada has only had her nurse to ask, and she has never had a proper mother figure in her life.

Lada did not know how long she could get away with stealing bead sheets. (...) The smell of burning cloth had lingered through the month, and now the blood was back.

When her nurse had told her she would not have to worry about marriage until her monthly courses started, it had been a comfort. Until the morning Lada awoke covered in blood, in her enemy's house. She lived in terror of the day she was discovered. (...) (89)

Lada is afraid of being married away when she has started her menstruation cycle, and she has seen what marriage has done to her mother. The concept of marriage frightens Lada, the idea of being tied to a man who can decide over her body and mind terrifies her to her core. Lada is afraid of losing herself when she marries. "She would be thirteen this summer. Her mother had married at thirteen. Lada's mouth tasted like blood and iron all the time now. It tasted like defeat" (White, Kiersten. 2016: 54). "Vasilissa lay, glassy-eyed and mute, on the bed. She stared at the wall. Her gaze never drifted to her son. (...) Her mother was every bit as absent, withdrawn and worthless in their home, incapable of doing anything herself" (3-6). Lada's biggest fear is ending up as hopeless, helpless and distant as her mother, and the marriage between her parents is the only marriage she has known for years and her parent's marriage is what have shaped her to become who she is. When she meets Mara and Halima, Lada gets a

different view of marriage, and she comes to understand that, more often than not, that marriage benefits men more than women. Radu's way of dealing with having an absent father figure is to cry whenever he feels afraid, but he finds comfort in making new friends when arriving the Ottoman Empire. A man with the name Kumal Vali becomes close to Radu and becomes his companion throughout Radu's narrative in the trilogy.

Understanding settled on Kumal's face, but where Radu feared seeing anger or derision, there was only sympathy. "Ah, I see. It would appear your education has been less than kind." Radu lifted a hand to his face, self-conscious. Kumal took the hand, squeezing it, then putting it down so Radu had to look at him. "Please do not judge my country by the cruelty of a few. (...)"

(White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 86-87)

Radu keeps the warm feeling of friendliness Kumal gives him in a foreign country. With Kumal Radu feels comfortable, but he never confesses his true feelings to Kumal, and if Kumal suspects something he keeps it to himself. During Radu's narrative Kumal works as a father figure to Radu, a figure Radu never had in his life. Radu needs a father figure who can help him navigate in a foreign country with a foreign language and a strange culture. Having befriended Kumal, Radu feels less alone and self-conscious and Kumal plays a supportive role for Radu and making him more confident further in his narrative. Kumal gives Radu the love and stability that has lacked from his childhood and they become close friends.

Can Lada be read as a hero, villain or antihero?

The reason for Lada being such an important, strong and independent character is that she is outspoken and she defies expectations set by her contemporaries. It is important to mention that Kiersten White has humanized Lada in a way that Lada does not necessarily need to fall into any category of hero, antihero or villain. Lada has a strong belief of her goals and she does not see the issue of reaching her goals, whatever the means. From the teenage reader's perspective, while reading *And I Darken*, it is easy to label Lada simply as a hero, antihero or villain because they want to take the easy way out and label a character that fits their worldview, but the issue with many characters is that they are not static and they change throughout their narrative. The teenage reader might find it difficult to understand that a character can be more than just a hero, antihero or villain; the character can be both antihero and hero or hero and villain at once. The

teenage reader's need for labelling other humans is transferred to the need of labelling characters, but it is also worth remembering that the teenage reader might be affected by their peers when reading the novel and label Lada accordingly. Thus, it is important to remember that while it is easy to label a character based on their actions, the characters are not always black-and-white as the reader wants them to be.

The challenge is that *And I Darken* is the first novel of a trilogy and the characters change through the novels, and the reader's view of the characters will change too. How Lada and the other characters are perceived as heroes, villains or antiheroes will be affected of how they evolve and where their narrative take them. How other characters perceive, feel and describe Lada in the spur of the moment has an effect of how the reader will label Lada as the hero, antihero or villain. The traditional definition of antihero is given on the premise that the antihero lacks the conventional traits of a hero, and if the traditional definition were to be followed Lada would fit this definition. She lacks the conventional traits of a hero, and does not always act out of a pure and good heart because she considers acting from a pure and good heart a weakness. Considering the extended definition, my thesis has given the antihero a more complex role, and the antihero is given more freedom to act on their own accord and not being purely good or evil as heroes or villains are depicted. Lada is a character who is given a more complex role in her narrative, and her actions is based on how she sees the actions fit her narrative.

Lada might seem like a villain since she acts with violence and it seems that she wishes to do harm to other characters, but Lada does not effectively go out of her way to do harm and damage to others. Due to her upbringing and being surrounded by men Lada does not see any other outcome than being the fastest, the most brutal and ahead of the boys in order to assert herself in society. She might seem like a villain acting out with violence, but she has no intention to act out with harm and hurt people. Lada thinks everything through every time she uses her fists and does not understand the concept of blind violence as her brother Mircea does. "There was a meanness at Mircea's core. Lada had watched him torment the castle dogs for sport, causing pain for no reason. She did not understand it. Why do anything without purpose?" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 55). Mircea acts the villain, even though he does not appear often in Lada's narrative. In the beginning of *And I Darken* he is frequently mentioned by Lada as the cruel and villainous character who likes to torment her, Radu and others for sport, but after her father's feast and Radu's encounter with Mircea, Mircea is only briefly mentioned afterwards.

Lada is the major character of *And I Darken* and the two following novels, but she does not necessarily have all heroic qualities. Her goal is to become voivode of Wallachia and to do what she thinks is the best for her people, which is to keep the Ottomans away from Wallachia. In that sense Lada has pure intention for her people, but her fists, temper and the urge of not giving into the social and cultural expectation comes in the way for her purely heroic deeds. Lada will always be more of the antihero than a hero or villain, but she is the antihero who is needed in the sea of heroes and villains in Young Adult literature of today. Another note which is important to make is that my thesis argues that the villain does not necessarily needs to be a character, but it can be an idea, emotions or something foreign. To Lada the Ottoman Empire is something foreign and to her the Ottoman's are the villains trying to take her land away from her, which she cannot accept. To Radu the villain is his sexuality and feelings to the same gender and Mehmed II in particular, and the repercussions that will follow if he is open about his sexuality.

Conclusion

Lada can be read as a hero, but she lacks the conventional traits of a hero, thus she becomes more of an antihero than a hero. She has some heroic traits such as having a goal she strives towards, and she works hard on the goal of becoming voivode of Wallachia. In *And I Darken* the gender roles are reversed; Lada is the brave, strong and independent character, where her brother Radu is the shy, easily frightened and feminine character of the siblings. Lada fights the gender expectations set by her contemporaries, and the expectation that frightens her the most is the expectation of marriage, since she has seen what it has done to her parents. Lada performs her gender on her own accord, and dresses in Janissary clothes, and she does not often dress in the loose clothes which is found in the Ottoman society in her time. The gender roles are also reversed by Lada saving Radu, thus portraying Radu as the 'weaker' character of the siblings. Still, the siblings are dependent on each other and they work in a symbiosis, but when arriving the Ottoman Empire the dependency begins to break and the siblings become more independent of each other. Radu begins to explore his feelings towards the same gender, and Mehmed II in particular. Radu is not the only one facing a difficult reality. Lada experiences sexual assaults twice among the Janissaries, and she is in shock when she experiences it the first time. She has never heard of women being sexually assaulted or harassed, and being protected by a male Janissary is what hurts her the most. Further, in chapter 3 I will take a closer look at how *And I Darken* can be implemented in the classroom. In chapter 3 I will also discuss

how the novel can captivate the reluctant reader, and especially the male population of the classroom.

Chapter 3: Didactic uses of *And I Darken*

“*And*, he had added in a disinterested tone, *I do not think women capable of much learning. It is to do with the shape of their heads.*”

Lada excelled after that. She memorized more sections of the Koran than either of the boys, and intoned them in a mocking imitation of Molla Gurani. She completed every theorem and practice of mathematic and algebraic problems.

White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 110

Benefits of reader response and cultural studies approach

Reader response “(...) focuses on readers’ responses to literary texts” (Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2006: 169) and reader response is “(...) a broad, exciting, evolving domain of literary studies that can help us learn about our own reading processes and how they relate to (...) specific elements in the text we read, our life experiences, and the intellectual community of which we are a member” (Tyson, Lois. 2006: 169). Reader response is often used in the classroom, even though teachers are not always aware of using it when introducing literature to their pupils. After reading novels and through discussion, reader response is used in the classroom. Creating a dialogue between the pupils with reflections such as what kind of emotion the novel creates makes the pupils reflect on how the novel has evoked something in them. As a teacher it is important to practice the pupil’s ability to reflect and analyse how they view and meet the literary work they work with and create a discussion of why they reflect and analyse the way they do, and it will help them to become better in arguing for their views and beliefs.

Making use of reader response in the classroom the teacher can make the pupils “(...) examine different ways in which our literary interpretations are influenced by social factors: for example, by the social or cultural group with which we identify, (...), even by our classmates whose opinions influence our responses as we read literary work together” (Tyson, Lois. 2011: 13). Choosing literature, which is appealing to pupils and especially pupils in their teenage years, is important for teachers to remember. Tyson (2011) points out that “some reader-response approaches try to determine how our responses to literary works are influenced by our personal experiences, by the emotional or psychological dimension of our daily life” (13), such emotional or psychological dimensions are interests, fear, the need for predictability, the need

of belonging and our memories. In addition, Tyson (2011) debates that all reader response theories have one thing in common, which is that they believe readers “play an active role in *making* meaning when they read” (13).

When reading *And I Darken*, pupils will make a meaning extraordinary to themselves when they read the novel. When reading pupils will respond to the novel with their personal experiences, and in this case it will be *And I Darken*. The pupil’s response to *And I Darken* will also be coloured by their classmates opinions and attitude towards the novel, and some opinions and attitude can be obvious such as statements “I do not like this novel”, “Reading is boring” or “I really love this novel” and “I love reading”. While other opinions and statements do not need to be so obvious, such as body language or not vocally stating anything at all. Pupils who do not feel so confident in themselves or their own opinion might parrot their friends in order of not being left out, or they want to please their friends. The pupils might even say that they do not like the novel, but in reality they do and are afraid to say it out loud in fear of being laughed off. This is why it is important that the teacher encourage the pupils to read and show a positive attitude towards literature, even though it might be challenging.

In *Using Critical Theory: How to Read and Write About Literature* (2011) Lois Tyson introduces the concept of response vehicles. From the response vehicles Tyson (2011) gives examples of terms such as personal identification, the familiar character, the familiar plot event and the familiar setting. The most relevant terms to my thesis are personal identification, the familiar character and the familiar setting. Tyson (2011) states that in personal identification the reader sees themselves in the literary character without being aware they do, while with the familiar character the character seems familiar to the reader because the character reminds the reader of someone they know. The familiar setting means that the setting seems familiar due to geographical location or that an appearance evokes memories of a place the reader associate their experiences with. In relation to these response vehicles the teacher can introduce a few exercises that the pupils can do. Such exercises can be easy questions such as why do the pupils like the character they like and why do they dislike a certain character, and what makes them answer the way they do. The teacher can make the pupils list the characters they do remember and list those that seem familiar to them and have the pupils try to recognize the region or country the events are taking place and what time period they think the novel is taking place. The perk with *And I Darken* is that it has a partition of a map in the beginning of the novel the pupils can look at and make themselves familiar with where the novel takes place. The teacher has an advantage that he or she has electronic devices to lean on, where the teacher shows the

pupils where the Wallachian and Ottoman Empire would be today (Modern Romania and Turkey) through a digital map.

Cultural studies and reader response are tightly connected to reading and making pupils reflect on what they have read. Culture studies can also be viewed as being a form of reader response in itself too, and in her article 'Taking a Cultural-Response Approach to Teaching Multicultural Literature' (2005) Yu Ren Dong cites Richard Beach (1997) that cultural studies "(...) challenges the students' preconceived notions about another culture by increasing their cross-cultural understanding" (55). The challenge for teachers is that the literature they introduce to the classroom is often set in another culture and in another time than the pupil is familiar with. An important argument to remember is that more and more families move between countries the classroom has become more multicultural and thus, many pupils will understand the culture depicted in the different novels. In addition, Dong (2005) points out in her article that:

For students who are from the culture that the work depicts, connections are easy to make. Still, they must go beyond making simple connections to exploring the historical, social, and cultural context of these works. Students who are unfamiliar with the racial and cultural differences of the characters may be resistant or silent in the beginning because they have difficulty relating to the differences. Students should be encouraged to listen to and actively observe these differences from another perspective, such as the perspective of a person from that culture. (56)

Cultural references has to be explained in order for the pupils to understand them, and one example is that slang might be different than many of the pupils are familiar with and the character might be of a different ethnicity than them. In some novels there is a dictionary of slang or words used in the narrative by the end of the novel, thus helping the pupils understand the language used in the novel better. By having fellow pupils who are born to different ethnicities and cultures, and understanding the culture, is an asset to the classroom and these pupils can be a helpful resource to their fellow pupils in order to better understand the culture depicted in the literature they have read. Another point to highlight is that the novel *And I Darken* is set to a different time period than the 21st century, which is a time that is foreign to the pupils and there is no common ground for them to understand the characters. It is important to remember that gender expectation is different from the time the novel is set (the Middle Ages) and the time the pupils are living (21st Century), yet there are differences in gender

expectation across different cultures in the 21st Century too, and it is often easy to forget. Making the pupils aware of gender expectation between the Middle Ages and the 21st Century, and making the pupils compare and contrast to what kind of gender expectation they know from their cultural background, makes the pupil aware of the differences and similarities from the 21st Century and the Middle Ages. Perhaps many of the pupils can correlate the gender expectation they have faced with the gender expectation both Lada and Radu face and one argument is that it is important to make people aware that human beings as species has evolved through history, but that gender expectation might not be too different from the Middle Ages and 21st Century.

And I Darken is a novel the teacher has to give a historical background in order for the pupils to understand the narrative, and relate to the characters. There are no references to technology the pupils are familiar with, the language might be different to them and the depiction of the Ottoman Empire and the Wallachian society is largely homogenous. This might be strange to the pupils who are brought up in a multicultural society surrounded by advanced technology, and making the pupils understand and see the connection between their own society and Lada's society is important. Lada and Radu are moved, by force of their own father, to the Ottoman Empire and they deal differently to the change of situation. There will be several pupils in the classroom who have been forcibly removed from their origin (either by war, conflict or persecution) and to a new country where the language, mindset and society is vastly different. These pupils will recognize the emotional fear, longing and sadness of being pulled away from their own home to something new; some might adapt to the new culture and society, whereas some might not adapt to the new society and culture. Teenagers who are uncertain of their own sexuality and begins to question themselves will understand Radu and his inner journey to understand his own sexuality, and Radu can be a help for the teenager struggling with their sexuality. Though there is a difference in time, society and culture the intended reader of the novel *And I Darken* are teenagers, and perhaps people in their early twenties might even read this novel. Often teenagers who are fond of reading will choose *And I Darken* and perhaps most girls will be more inclined to read the novel since the protagonist is a female and is on the book cover. It is important to not forget the boys too, where it is important to highlight that there are a few male characters who play an important part in the novel.

A struggle the teacher will stumble upon when introducing a novel such as *And I Darken* to the classroom is how to make it interesting and relatable for the pupils, even though the pupils are the intended readers of this novel. In order to make it interesting the teacher can give examples from the novel where the pupil might recognize themselves in the character and the

examples can be family ties, struggling with identity and sexuality (seen through Radu), being in a foreign place not knowing the language or the customs (especially if the pupil has recently moved to the country and is new to the local community). Fear, love, identity struggle and adapting to a new society are common traits that teenagers can relate to, regardless of gender, ethnicity or origin. *And I Darken* will also function as a target in the classroom for the pupil's cultural foundation, behaviour and language and the teacher's role is to make the pupils discuss what kind of similarities and differences they see in the novel from the world view the society has today.

After the pupils have read *And I Darken* the teacher creates a discussion in class where the pupils can compare and contrast the society they live in and have been brought up in with Lada and Radu's society. The important questions that needs to be asked are what do the pupils find different to what they are used to? What are the similarities, if there is any? Comparing and contrasting their own life with the character's life makes the pupil more aware of their own society, and it helps them understand the society of the characters. As a result of comparing and contrasting their own society to the society of the characters the pupils increases their understanding of different cultures from a different time. Culture changes through decades and centuries, and the pupil's challenge is to understand that what is accepted now in their community has not always been accepted. If pupils are asked to consider differences in culture they tend to focus on the differences that exists now and not cultural differences that has existed before. It is important to introduce novels such as *And I Darken* to the pupils, because such novels helps them understand that cultures change through history and what they consider as accepting in their community today might never be accepted in Lada's time.

A question the teacher should ask themselves and acknowledge when teaching *And I Darken* in class is: how similar or different are the characters from the modern teenager and will they relate to the characters in the novel? Introducing *And I Darken* to the classroom the teacher can ask the pupils to look at which character they feel the most similar to and the most different from and discuss why they chose the character they did. Having the pupils discuss which character they feel more similar to and argue why will make the pupil better in argue their opinion, and the pupil will actively see the similarities with themselves and the chosen character.

If the novel *And I Darken* were to be introduced to pupils who are on their second or third year of upper secondary school, the teacher can tie what they have read with what the pupils learn, or have learned, in history classes. If the pupils are in their first year of upper secondary school it is important that the teacher gives historical connotations to the pupils while

they read the novel; perhaps the teacher can tie some of what the pupils learn in social study classes when reading *And I Darken* in English. Helping the pupils with historical connections when comparing and contrasting the novel will help the pupils increase their understanding of the character's society, and in essence will help them understand their own society in terms of gender expectation and gender roles. In the end the pupils might understand and relate to the characters more easily when understanding the culture and society of the characters.

The challenge of engaging male pupils

As stated in the previous sub-chapter there are challenges a teacher will face when choosing literature to read in the classroom. The teacher has up to 30 pupils, and sometimes a few more, in each class and the teacher has to consider what is the best for every pupil at all times. Every 30 and some pupils are unique and they all have their own beliefs, personalities, interests, hobbies, background and dreams. This is something the teacher has to consider when they plan the year ahead of them, and one of the biggest challenge the teacher faces is the reluctant readers in the classroom. There might be different reasons for the pupil being reluctant to read, where the pupil might have dyslexia and have not received help for it, they might find reading boring and perhaps they consider reading a feminine trait and they do not think it is fun to read, or the pupil might be influenced by other pupils who are reluctant readers. The challenge is to find a way to make the pupil read without making the pupil feel forced and they end up being more reluctant to read.

Another challenge the teacher has to face is the male population of the classroom, and a stereotype that has attached itself to the male pupil is that they are more often than not reluctant readers. The male pupil might often be forgotten by the teacher, or the teacher might hang back with finding literature that appeals to the male pupil. Asking the male pupil what they want to read might be a solution, but the challenge arise if a population within the male group of pupils are dominant in their reluctance to read. In 'The Case of the Missing Male Reader: Implication of Genderlect and the Reality Principle' Howard B. Parkhurst (2012) argues that "(...) For males to be motivated to read more, though, they must have materials that will capture their interest and meet their needs. Even avid readers are unlikely to spend time reading uninteresting and irrelevant material" (15). Finding materials the male pupil will find interesting can be though and Parkhurst (2012) further debates that "Fiction provides benefits for readers who are not readily available from other genres. Fictional characters confronting moral choices help readers learn to make choices in their own lives" (16). Citing Smith and

Wilhelm (2002), Parkhurst (2012) discusses their term “the reality principle”, and in short “The reality principle” is reading material that teenage boys desired to be “real” and where they could see themselves.

The real challenge for a teacher is to find a novel where the male pupil will recognize himself in, which is novels with short chapters and a language the male reader understand and recognizes himself in. Parkhurst (2002) argues that novels which have a male protagonist and novels with short chapters “(...) provide feelings of competence and accomplishment” and this is important to remember when choosing literature for the male pupil. The teacher has to remember that how the pupils interact and speak between themselves is different from how they interact and speak with someone of their own gender and someone from the opposite gender. Parkhurst (2002) reasons that “Genderlects have their own sociolinguistic rules, and are a key component of speaker’s identity construction” (18), which means that it is important for the reader that they can recognize the use of language they are familiar with in the novel they read.

Parkhurst (2002) expresses his concern within the Young Adult literature that “The whole realm of fiction for adolescent males has been an underpopulated subgenre in young adult literature. One reason has been reluctance on the part of publishers who market books that might not sell” (19). He is worried that due to the publishers reluctance to publish novels with male protagonist where the male reader will recognize themselves, the male reader is forgotten and become even more a reluctant reader. However, Parkhurst (2002) does bring up a few examples of Young Adult fiction with a male protagonist and the male genderlect such as Anthony Horowitz’s Alex Rider series and *Yellow Flag* by Robert Lipsyte (2007), and even though *And I Darken* has a female protagonist there are prominent male characters in the novel. The male reader will recognize himself in either Mehmed II or Radu, or perhaps even both characters. The male reader who begins to question who he is and his sexual preferences will recognize himself in Radu and if he does not know who to turn to, or is afraid that his family and peers will judge him, he will attach Radu’s traits to himself. The male pupil who comes from a different culture than the majority of the class will also recognize himself in Radu. The foreign Ottoman Empire seems scary, unfamiliar and brutal to Radu and it scares him. He has his sister with him, yet he feels alone and scared by the Ottoman society where everything is foreign: the food, the religion, the social system and the language, and for a young boy moving from one country to another the cultural and social adaption is overwhelming.

The male reader who recognizes himself in Mehmed II might do so because he feel as alone in society as Mehmed II does, still Mehmed II has his father, his teachers and servants around him, yet he feels alone. Mehmed II feels that he needs a friend, and that is why he asks

Lada to be his friend and he gets Radu in the bargain too. “‘(...) I *have* servants. And teachers, and guards, and a father who despises me. I want you... to be my friend.’ This was not the answer Lada had expected. (...) Lada huffed, exasperated. ‘Very well. What exactly does a friend do?’ ‘I have never had one. I was hoping you would know’” (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 120). The sense of belonging is important, especially in the teenage years it is important to feel included in a group and feel the sense of belonging. If the male reader comes from a different culture than the majority of the class he might feel alone and struggles to find a group of friends he feels that he belongs to.

Many of the chapters in the novel are short, which make the chapters easy to read for the male reader and they get a sense of accomplishment, even though the novel is over 400 pages long. Despite being set in the 16th century the teenage reader will recognize themselves in Lada, Radu and Mehmed II because as themselves Lada, Radu and Mehmed II are teenagers. Regardless of the time gap from the teenagers own society and the society of the characters, the characters go through the same struggle as the teenage reader. People might think that throughout history there have been new interventions and the past is different from the present, but in reality it is not. Lada, Radu and Mehmed II go through the same hardships as teenagers do today and the sense of belonging, understanding oneself, defying cultural and social expectation and longing never change. That is why teenagers will recognize themselves in Lada, Radu and Mehmed II.

Strategies of learning *And I Darken* in terms of LK06 and the Subject Renewal

Introducing literature to the classroom the teacher has a few target points they need to consider: what is the novel about? What age are the pupils? What captivates the pupils, and how can the teacher include and engage the pupils in reading literature? There are many important factors to consider when selecting what to include and introduce to the classroom. The teacher has to use the competence aims from the curriculum as guidelines, but the teacher is free to decide which of the competence aims that is relevant and how to incorporate them to their teaching. There exist different curriculums in the Norwegian school system, but it is only a handful of these guidelines a teacher needs to adhere to. The main focus in this thesis will be on teachers and the teenage pupils in the upper secondary school. A teacher in the upper secondary school needs to withhold to four curriculums from LK06, and the four curriculums are English (as a compulsory subject at VG1 general studies and VG2 vocational school), International English

(VG2 general studies), English Literature and Culture (VG3 general studies) and Social Studies English (VG3 general studies).

My thesis main focus will be on the curriculum of LK06 (Læreplanverket Kunnskapsløftet 2006), and the courses from LK06 which will have the most focus are VG3 English Literature and Culture and VG1 English (general studies only). From the Subject Renewal the focus will be VG3 English in Culture and Society (replaces VG3 English Literature and Culture and VG3 Social Studies English) and VG1 English (general studies only). In the Subject Renewal there will be fewer competence aims, and the teacher can go more in depth with each competence aim. Another difference between LK06 and the Subject Renewal is that English in vocational school will be in VG1 instead of VG2, and the curriculum at the vocational school will be more targeted to relevant terminology the pupil has to know when they begin to work in their respective fields. The Subject Renewal will slowly be implemented in the Norwegian school system. From August 2020 English from Year 1 to Year 9 and VG1 for general studies and VG1 for vocational school are implemented, and in August 2021 English for Year 10 and VG2 English in the World (replaces VG2 International English) will be implemented, and from August 2022 VG3 English in Culture and Society will be implemented.

The reason for looking at VG3 English Literature and Culture and VG1 English for general studies in LK06 and VG3 English Literature and Society and VG1 English for general studies in the Subject Renewal is to limit the curriculum and make it easier to see the relevance to *And I Darken* and its potential use in the classroom. The curriculum for VG2 English in the World and VG3 English Literature and Society are currently a draft, but they will be implemented in August 2021 and August 2022.

The chosen competence aims for VG1 English general studies from LK06 are:

- Forstå hovedinnhold og detaljer i tekster av varierende omfang om forskjellige emner/ To understand the essence and details in texts to a different degree about different subjects (my own translation)
- Drøfte kultur og samfunnsforhold i flere engelskspråklige land/ Discuss culture and social condition in several English-speaking countries (my own translation)
- Drøfte ulike typer engelskspråklige litterære tekster fra ulike deler av verden/ Discuss different types of English-speaking literary texts from different parts of the world (my own translation)

(Utdanningsdirektoratet, Læreplan i Engelsk (ENG1-03), 03 March 2020)

Though two of the chosen competence aims state discuss culture and social condition in multiple English speaking countries and discuss different types of English literary texts from different parts of the world they work perfectly with *And I Darken*. The novel is not set in an English speaking country, but it highlights the culture and social condition in Wallachia. The last competence aim is questionable for the use for *And I Darken*, but it is an English literary text that highlights a perspective from a different part of the world geographically and it is important for the pupil to be aware of different historical, social and cultural conditions from different parts of the world. Another direction the teacher can do when introducing the novel is to shortly state what the novel is about, and in a plenary session make a mind map on the board before and after the pupils have read the novel to see if there are any differences or similarities between the mind maps. This is to see if the pupils have changed their opinion and impression of *And I Darken* and its characters and plot while they have read it. The first competence aim states that the pupil has to understand the essence and details in texts of varying degree in different subjects, and this opens up to use *And I Darken* in the classroom; either the full novel in itself or just a few chapters as excerpts. Choosing either the full novel, or just a few chapters, the teenage pupil can connect what they have read to other texts they have read in English during the school year.

The relevant competence aims from LK06 VG3 English Literature and Culture are:

- Analysere minst to lengre skjønnlitterære verk/ Analysing at least two longer fictional work (my own translation)
- Tolke litterære tekster og andre kulturuttrykk i et kulturhistorisk og samfunnsmessig perspektiv/ Interpret literary texts and other cultural expressions in a cultural historical and social perspective (my own translation)
- Presentere et større fordypningsarbeid med emne fra engelskspråklig litteratur og kultur og vurdere prosessen/ Present a larger in-depth project with a topic from English-speaking literature and culture and reassess the process (my own translation)
- Bruke et rikt, nyansert og presist ordforråd til å kommunisere om litteratur og kultur/ Use a rich, nuanced and precise language to communicate about literature and culture (my own translation)

- Oppsummere, kommentere og diskutere ulike synspunkter i skjønnlitterære tekster/ Summarize, comment and discuss different views in fictional texts (my own translation)

(Utdanningsdirektoratet, Kompetansemål etter VG1 studieforbereende utdanningsprogram - Læreplan i Engelsk (ENG01-04) 03 March 2020)

For VG3 English Literature and Culture the competence aims which are chosen shows that *And I Darken* can have a major role in the Literature and Culture course. If *And I Darken* is going to be used in the classroom the teenage pupil will have to summarize, comment and discuss different viewpoints in the novel and interpret the novel and other cultural expressions in a cultural historical and social perspective. Choosing one of the two extended fictional works, the teacher can choose *And I Darken* as one of the literary works the teenage pupil will have to read. When reading the novel, the teacher can engage the pupils in oral discussions about the different character's view in the novel, but the teacher can introduce the novel in class and give the pupils a choice in choosing a novel and presenting it in a literary in-depth project.

For the second competence aim the teacher can make the pupils write down distinct cultural and historical features they see in both the Ottoman Empire and the Wallachian society. Such as the use of harems, the landscape and climate, churches, mosques, Janissaries, etc., and the pupils can compare how the Ottoman Empire and the Wallachian society are presented versus today's Turkey and Romania. In regard to the second chosen competence aim the teacher can highlight the cultural expectation and familiarity the characters are carrying, for instance Radu when he is in the harem with Mehmed II and Lada. Radu is aware of the concubines job, but from his own cultural background he picture their job as something else. "(...) She [Lada] looked wild and angry, nothing like a concubine. At least, not how Radu imagined them to look. Radu pictured concubines like his nurse, matronly and soft and always sewing or fussing" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 177). Highlighting Radu's cultural background and cultural expectation in his meeting with the Ottoman Empire the teacher can create a discussion of the pupils own cultural expectation and knowledge of other cultures based on their own cultural background, and perhaps during the discussion compare their cultural understanding with Radu's cultural understanding.

From the Subject Renewal the relevant competence aims for VG1 English are:

- Lese, diskutere og reflektere over innhold og virkemidler i ulike typer tekster, inkludert selvvalgte tekster/ Read, discuss and reflect of content and devices in different types of texts, including self-chosen texts (my own translation)
- Lese, analysere og tolke engelskspråklig skjønnlitteratur/ Read, analyse and interpret English-speaking fiction (my own translation)
- Utforske og reflektere over mangfold og samfunnsforhold i den engelskspråklige verden ut fra historiske sammenhenger/ Explore and reflect about diversity and social condition in the English-speaking world from a historical context (my own translation)

(Utdanningsdirektoratet, Læreplan i Engelsk – programfag i utdanningsprogram for studieforberevende (ENG4-01) 03 March 2020)

In the Subject Renewal there is less focus on culture and literature in the VG1 English course, but the pupils will have to read, discuss and reflect about content and meaning in different types of text, including self-chosen texts. They have to read, analyse and interpret English fiction too. *And I Darken* can be discussed in the classroom, and the teacher can divide the pupils into groups and make them reread certain parts of the novel, especially where the chapters begin with the year and the place the events are taking place. Such chapters can be the opening chapter of the novel, where the chapter begins with “1435: Sighisoara, Transylvania” (1) or chapter 11 “1448: Edirne, Ottoman Empire” (69). When rereading and discussing the chosen chapters it might be interesting for the teacher to see if being conscious of the date and place have any effect on how the pupils read the novel. The last competence aim included from the Subject Renewal from VG1 English says that the pupils have to explore and reflect about the diversity and social condition in the English speaking world from its historical perspective. *And I Darken* can be used in this sense too, especially since the novel takes place in both Wallachia and various parts of the Ottoman Empire. The novel can be compared and contrasted to another novel from the English speaking world, or the teacher can focus only on the historical aspect of the competence aim where *And I Darken* draws much of its plot.

The most relevant competence aims from VG3 English Literature and Culture are:

- Tolke og drøfte ulike typer skjønnlitterære tekster knyttet til kultur og samfunn/ Interpret and debate different types of fictional texts attached to culture and society (my own translation)

- Vise selvstendig refleksjon og kritisk tenkning i lesing og drøfting av ulike typer tekster/ Show independent reflection and critical thinking in reading and debating of different types of texts (my own translation)

(Utdanningsdirektoratet, Kompetansemål og vurdering VG3 – programfag Engelskspråklig litteratur og samfunn 03 March 2020)

In VG3 English Literature and Culture there is more room to include other fictional work and texts where the plot is not necessarily set in an English speaking society (such as the USA, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, etc.). The pupil will interpret and discuss different types of fictional texts connected to culture and society, and they have to show independent reflection and critical thinking when reading and discussing different types of texts. Using *And I Darken* in the classroom the pupils will interpret the novel and discuss it with the social and cultural perspective found in the novel, and they will show their independent reflection and critical thinking when reading and discussing *And I Darken*. After the pupils have read the novel the teacher can divide the pupils into groups and give them chapters that starts with the year and the place where the setting unfolds, then the teacher can ask the students if they have read the chapter differently when becoming aware of the time and setting.

Creating a discussion in class the pupils will come to realize that they are affected by how they read and what they are aware of when reading, and they are more likely to become aware of the character's social and cultural attachments when doing a close reading. Giving a group of students chapter 22 of the novel the pupils are going to be familiar with the harem and its society within a society. "Harem politics were as complicated as court politics, if not more so. Thought the harem was a community unto itself, the women could exert incredible influence on the most powerful man in the empire (...)" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 174). The teacher can create a debate in the classroom about the role of the harem in the Ottoman Empire, and make the pupils reflect what they feel if the harem were a concept today.

Conclusion

The teacher has a certain number of curriculum guidelines they need to follow, but within the guidelines the teachers can choose freely of the competence aims they feel are more relevant for the subject they teach. A challenge the teacher has to consider is: how can they include all of the pupils at the same time? All pupils are unique, with their own personalities, opinions, beliefs and interests and the teacher has to remember this when planning the year ahead of them.

The male pupil is often considered the reluctant reader, and there might be many reasons for them being considered a reluctant reader. They might find reading boring, they consider reading feminine, or they might be dyslectic and they have not received help for it. The teacher can create discussions and debates in class when the pupils have read *And I Darken*, or excerpts of the novel. Making the pupils reflect about the novel they have read, and relate what they have read to their own society and contemporaries makes the pupil reflect on themselves and their own world view. Other activities such as finding similarities from their own culture to the culture described in *And I Darken* can be an activity for the pupils to solve, or make mind maps of what the pupil knows and what they have learned from reading *And I Darken* can be another activity. Literature with characters the pupil can recognize themselves in is important, especially if the pupil takes on traits from the character to themselves.

Conclusion

For the past 15 years there have been an increase in strong and independent female protagonists, but more strong, independent and relatable female protagonists are needed in Young Adult literature. But one must not forget the female protagonists in the past such as Alice and Dorothy, who have been frontiers for the strong and independent female protagonist. Lada Dragwyla is a strong and independent female protagonist because she defies expectations set by her society and culture, and she does not want to be told what to do or be defined by her contemporaries. The talk about marriage is what she defies the most since she only has her parent's marriage as a framework of how marriage works, but Lada also does not feel the need of having a man to live her life. The correlation between gender and performativity clashes in Lada's case, and after spending a period of her life in the Ottoman Empire Lada begins to dress as a Janissary and trains with them. She learns how to fight, and she does not want to sit and sew with the women of the Ottoman court. Further, Lada despises who she becomes when she begins puberty and starts developing breasts and begins her menstruation cycle, she is afraid of being married away when she is 'discovered' for becoming a woman. "When her nurse had told her she would not have to worry about marriage until her monthly courses started, it had been a comfort. Until the morning Lada awoke covered in blood, in her enemy's house. She lived in terror of the day she was discovered" (White, Kiersten. *And I Darken*, 2016: 89).

Radu does not fully act his gender either, out of the two siblings he is the feminine out of the two and he has an easier time making friends than Lada, yet he is easily scared of others. There is a dissonance between Lada's and Radu's gender and how they perform it, and Judith Butler (1990) argues that performativity is acts, gestures and enactments of the gender. In light of gender and performativity, the gender roles in *And I Darken* are reversed, especially in Lada and Radu's case. Radu is the feminine character, while Lada is the male character out of the two; Lada uses her fists and temper to get her will, but Radu uses his charm and friendliness to befriend others to get his will. Lada and Radu are polar opposites, but they still dependent on each other, especially since their arrival to the Ottoman Empire; a foreign land where they have no one but each other. Lada does want to protect her brother, but she feels that protecting her brother is a weakness, yet she cares for him in her own way. Radu faces his own troubles, which Lada cannot protect or help him from. He fears his conflicting emotions towards Mehmed II, and he is afraid that everyone will see what he truly feels for Mehmed II. Radu understands that

the sexual feelings he has is dangerous and that is why he is afraid when Lada and Lazar find out about his feelings.

The presence of cultural and social expectations exists for Radu and Mehmed II too, but the presence is different for the boys as it is for Lada. The idea of marriage is there, but not in an all-consuming way as it is for Lada. It is expected for the boys to become good warriors and not showing any emotions at all, which is a struggle for Radu. Mehmed II has to urge Radu to take fighting lessons among the Janissaries, while Lada willingly exerts her presence among the Janissary soldiers. Lada's presence among the Janissary soldiers are not entirely welcome, and twice Lada is sexually assaulted by one Janissary soldier, Ivan. Lada has been shielded from the concept of sexual assault and she has never had to deal with it in her life. One reason is that she is brought up in a male dominated household with only one nurse, and the issue of sexual assaults and harassment have never been spoken off in her presence. When Nicolae defends her, Lada has an epiphany and understands that she never can fully be one with the Janissaries because of her gender, and that is an epiphany that truly hurts.

Lada does have heroic traits by wanting the best for Wallachia and its inhabitants, and she has a goal she strives to achieve, which is to become voivode of Wallachia. Thus, she has heroic qualities, yet she is quick to temper and fast with her fists and this makes her more like an antihero than a hero entirely. It is important to remember that how Lada is perceived is coloured by how the other characters perceive and feel about her. A potential teenage reader will be coloured by how Lada is described by other characters and how their peers perceive her. Kiersten White has made Lada more recognizable and humane by not making Lada a stereotypic hero, villain or antihero, but White has given Lada a trait of both the hero and antihero.

When arriving the Ottoman Empire and meeting Mehmed II a sort of friendship forms between Lada, Radu and Mehmed II. It is a friendship that is sorely needed for Lada and Radu, since they have been abruptly taken away from their homeland by their father and are placed in a foreign land. As their friendship evolves Mehmed II develops feelings for Lada, but Lada does not return those feelings. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argues in *The Second Sex* that there is a paradox to men, and men wants to understand women, but when they try to understand women they deem women to artificiality. Lada does not want to be understood and she wants to be independent, but Mehmed II thinks he understands her and he believes that Lada wants to marry. Lada even contradicts herself; she does not want to be understood by Mehmed II, but she wants to impress her father and she wants to be understood by him.

Introducing the novel to the classroom gives the pupils characters they can recognize themselves in. Lada gives the teenage girl inspiration to be outspoken, strong, independent and believing in themselves, and Radu gives the teenage reader who struggles with their emotions and coming to terms of their sexuality help and recognition. Radu shows representation for the LGBTQ+ community and those who struggle, but at the same time Radu shows the male reader that it is okay to show emotions too. The teacher has to remember that they have 30, and sometimes more, pupils in the classroom who have different personalities and interests. Some pupils love to read and other pupils are reluctant readers, and the teacher has to take this into consideration when choosing literature for the pupils. *And I Darken* covers all the pupils in the classroom, and even the reluctant reader will enjoy the novel. The teacher must not forget the male reader in the classroom and *And I Darken* will suit the male reader with male characters such as Radu and Mehmed II, which they can recognize themselves in. The novel has short chapters with a direct and short language and this will give them the motivation to read more in order to find out what is happening in the narrative.

BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that 2 of 3 girls feel that there should be more female role models (63%), strong female characters (65%) and relatable female characters (65%). Lada is a strong female character, relatable and a female role model for the teenage girl. Further, BBC America and Women's Media Centre (2018) claim that girls are less likely to describe themselves as brave, confident and heard. Lada gives girls a chance to feel confident, brave and heard, and Lada is a character to look up to for pupils arriving from different cultures and countries, since these pupils will recognize themselves in Lada and her reaction to arriving to a foreign land. Arriving a foreign country with a foreign language and culture is hard to adapt to, especially if they do not have any family or extended family in the country, the foreign will seem intimidating. Thus, the bravery of Lada and the friendliness of Radu are good qualities for them to build upon.

Using *And I Darken* in the classroom will help the pupils reflect on their own culture and society, but the novel will also help the pupils reflect on the society where the novel takes place. The classroom has become more culturally diverse with a mix of ethnic groups and the pupils can compare and contrast their own cultural and ethnic origin and the Norwegian society and culture with the societies in *And I Darken*. Using the reader response and cultural study approaches in the classroom are good tools for the teacher, and the approaches make the pupil reflect on the characters and how the characters impact them. Perhaps Lada Dragwyla becomes the new inspiration and idol the pupils need.

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