My Loneliness is Killing Me (But So Are You):

How *The Mortal Instruments* Series Instills the Misogynist Notion in Young Adult Readers That "To Love is to Destroy"

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Abstract

Some of the most tumultuous years of a person's life happen during adolescence, and young adult (YA) series like *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare can often portray love as needing pain, sacrifice, or trauma to make it worthwhile. However, this depiction of the ideal adolescent romance often instills in young readers' minds that violence—physical as well as verbal—within a relationship is a sign of adoration and devotion instead of the "red flag" warning of abuse that it really is. Like many other authors writing similar stories for young adults, Clare claims that her series is "feminist" because of its leading female characters, but the presence and justification of these abusive relationships implies more internalized misogyny than the author may have originally realized and makes these stories far less feminist than they claim to be. In this essay, I explore how this harmful depiction of romantic relationships and pseudo-feminism in *The Mortal Instruments* series warp young readers', especially young girls', concepts of what heterosexual love is meant to look like.

Keywords: *The Mortal Instruments*; Cassandra Clare; *City of Bones*; Shadowhunters; Young Adult Literature; Feminism; Young Adult Trauma; Romantic Trauma; Domestic Violence

It is difficult to conceptualize a society that could exist outside the patriarchal structures so inescapable in the male-led world we live in. Women now have the right to vote, to own their own property, their own passports, so it is difficult for some to see how women could possibly desire anything more than they already have, or more specifically, some truly believe that sexism has been "eradicated" and that we are now living in a "postfeminist era" of unmitigated equality in all realms of women's everyday lives. This idea that we live in a postfeminist society has a wide reach over many of the things we do and consume day to day—to the extent that the word "feminist" has become an all-encompassing, futile phrase, meant to describe the supposed progress we have made as a society. As a result, there are many young adult (YA) novels that center female protagonists and applaud themselves for being feminist, but, in practice, they actually embody little in the way of female empowerment.

The Mortal Instruments series by Cassandra Clare is one such YA series that the author labels feminist; however, it is my perception that the books in this series fully encapsulate the misogynistic framework that underpins postfeminist ideology. Of her main character, whom the author adeptly names after herself, Clare claims:

> The characteristics of heroes—recklessness, bravery, dedication to a cause, willingness to self-sacrifice, a certain heedlessness—are often characteristics we identify with boys. It was a great deal of fun to give them to a girl. Clary Jumps first and asks questions later; Jace, who serves as a secondary hero, is often the one counseling caution. When Jace is the one counseling caution, you know you're in trouble; that, hopefully, is part of the fun. (xiii)

If all one must do to write a "feminist" story is include a "tough, strong girl with a reckless streak and a big heart" (Clare xi-xii), then Clare surely has accomplished such a feat. However, Clary is not as independent and powerful as the author claims her to be. Clary does "jump first and ask questions later," but she often gets shamed and reprimanded for it in the form of stern words and

rough handling from her boyfriend, Jace. When Jace "counsels caution," as Clare claims, he often does it by gripping Clary's arms, so tightly he leaves bruises, and yelling at her to the point of making her cry. Clare also claims Jace is the "secondary hero" of the story, but Clary never matches him in power or strength, often leaving the bulk of the fights to him and depending on his heroics to save her. Clare claiming that Jace's acting as a "secondary hero" and "counseling caution" to Clary is "part of the fun" proves that she adheres to misogynistic ideologies that men must always guide and correct women's subversive behavior, which makes her work far less ground-breaking in terms of female-liberation than she thinks. Furthermore, in implying that Jace's alleged role-reversal in *The Mortal Instruments* series as the one who cautions Clary to not act so recklessly is "part of the fun," Clare simultaneously justifies and excuses the means he uses to do such "counseling." Clary, along with the other main female characters in the series, Maia and Isabelle, all undergo similar instance of "counseling" from the men in their lives. Clary is "counseled" through harsh words and manhandling; Maia is "counseled" through domestic violence and stalking; Isabelle is "counseled" through family trauma and internalized aversion to romantic love. In other words, all these women in Clare's supposedly feminist work undergo trauma that teaches them not only how to act but also what love is meant to look like. If Clare had indeed written these feisty heroines as having equal power to their male counterparts and not forced them to receive traumatic repercussions for utilizing the same cutting wit and stubborn independence that many of the males do, then perhaps this story could sit easy on shelves with other YA novels that are actually deserving of the title "feminist." In the following pages, I will show that these often-violent depictions of what the author regularly labels "love" need to be viewed more critically, as they rarely contribute to true feminist ideals of female equity and liberation. I argue that these problematic depictions of young love do not empower women, as

Clare claims, but rather tacitly support and perpetuate misogynistic notions that love must be earned, often through pain, in order for it to be worth it.

The Female Body and Sexuality in YA

Research pertaining to the physical bodies of young women and how they express (or do not express) their sexuality in YA literature is a potent and passionate field, particularly related to the negative effects of body objectification and sexual mistreatment of young women. As Roberta Trites claims, YA novels tend to "objectify the female body so badly that even the female protagonists objectify their own bodies, participating as objects of exchange in male homosocial love triangles—with a general Noah's Ark-ing of the characters, paired off two by two, by the novel's end" (118). Melissa Ames and Sarah Burcon speak to a similar correlation between female bodies and their worth within heterosexual relationships in YA novels when they claim:

> Unfortunately, studies have long found that books marketed to adolescent females often focus extensively on physical appearance and the ways in which girls' physical appearance impacts their ability to obtain a boyfriend—the 'ultimate success' for all too many female YA characters. The result is that these books tend to promote female self-objectification as a form of sexual empowerment, and they frame self-improvement (in terms of physical appearance) as a means to gain male attention or approval. (40)

Female bodies have been tied to the male gaze[1] and male approval for centuries. If a woman is not deemed attractive by a man, she no longer has worth, if a woman is not approved of by a

[1] See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," wherein she speaks to the prevalence of visual objectification of women in films. It is often assumed, as she claims, that audiences are predominantly male, so the shots of female characters in movies must paint them as sexy objects to be ogled rather than real, human characters within the story. This "male gaze" also extends to media outside films, supposedly justifying the blatant

man, she no longer has any purpose. This is a harmful message to perpetuate, especially in texts whose target group is adolescents. If young readers are taught that a woman's worth is tied directly to how she looks and how she serves the men in her life, as is the inadvertent message of many YA stories, they will inevitably internalize such notions and see the world through this misogynistic lens.

The historical tie of female worth to pleasing the male gaze and adhering to patriarchal commands is prevalent in works like *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler. Butler claims:

> As in the existential dialectic of misogyny, this is yet another instance in which reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute facticity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject. (50)

As women's bodies have been objectified and controlled by men through the ages, and through various genres and forms of literature, female protagonists' own characterization and their importance to the story have often taken a back seat next to their seemingly more important role in providing visual pleasure and servitude to male readers and other male characters present in the story. As Ann Childs states, "Stereotypically, girls are portrayed as so invested in romance above all else that even the brave girl's 'ultimate goal is still male approval'" (197). Since "the institution of heterosexuality [is] the founding basis of the male-dominated social orders" (Butler 170), texts that label themselves as "feminist" yet place heterosexual romance not only as a prevalent plot point but also make it one of the main driving forces behind female characters' actions, as well as their character development, are likely not as feminist as they claim to be and this can cause misinformation and leave counterproductive impressions on young readers' minds

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objectification of women to please male viewers and simultaneously dehumanize the women who are the subject of such "gazing."

of what feminism is and how to be a feminist oneself. This sort of misrepresentation, as applied to the main, driving plot points of romance in such YA stories, further impresses the notion in young readers that in order for a girl to have ample worth, she must be valuable—and malleable—to a man. Women are essentially taught that they have no merit on their own, no independent function or success, unless it is tied to, and approved of by a man.

YA Literature's Effect on Young Girls

Katherine Cruger has stated, "YA franchises do cultural work, meaning that they are both constitutive of and constituted by our larger cultural and social ideas about gender, romance, sexuality, heroism, and ideology" (115). The media young people consume has lasting effects on how they view the world and how they learn and interpret certain, niche situations as well as entire, more nuanced, concepts. In the case of YA literature—generally marketed to children ages twelve to eighteen, one of the most important and tumultuous stages in a person's development—the stories and perspectives that are told and the messages that are conveyed through this format can have major repercussions on readers' lives. Since the world is so saturated with both blatant and subtle misogyny, it is inevitable that "such messages about body culture and material culture find their way into the paperback entertainment that girls escape into" (Ames and Burcon 37). As a result, while young readers immerse themselves in fun, fictional realms, they simultaneously internalize the messages and implications of the texts. As an example of the effect literature can have on young readers' consciousness, Susan Lehr states, "'by age eight many boys and girls already identify passivity and waiting for the prince as the girl's ultimate role'" (Lehr qtd. in Childs 191). One may argue that in order to stop the spread of misogynistic ideologies, one need only avoid tales with such blatantly harmful messages. The

issue, however, is that these types of messages are often much more subtle than we may realize, leading to young readers absorbing anti-feminist rhetoric, and tropes that accompany them, usually without realizing it. Reading texts catered toward young adults is also good for adolescent development. Ames and Burcon state, "[R]esearch suggests consuming YA literature is key to the 'emotional and mental health of an adolescent', and it's harder to just look the other way when it comes to these sensational texts" (40). And sensational they are. Franchises with female protagonists like *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Mortal Instruments* have taken the world by storm, becoming some of the most prevalent young-adult-centered stories in recent years. Simply "avoiding" such stories is likely not an option, so the messages and roles for young women they perpetuate, whether consciously noticed or not, will be carried with these young consumers for the rest of their lives and affect various aspects of their daily existence in ways they, and the creators of such stories, may not have anticipated. It is, therefore, imperative that authors recognize the hallmarks of internalized—and also blatant—misogyny in their own works before labeling them "feminist" to prevent young readers from internalizing such misogynistic notions and perpetuating the harmful behaviors and beliefs that accompany them.

Domestic Violence and Trauma Ties to YA

One of the more harmful messages that is often perpetuated through YA literature is what love and sacrifice look like in heterosexual romantic relationships.[2] As Judith Walkowitz states,

[2] This essay focuses on heterosexual romance because the majority of the female characters in *The Mortal Instruments* series are heterosexual. There are a small number of queer relationships in the series, but these relationships have traumas of their own, mostly related to the fact that they are queer relationships instead of heterosexual ones in a society where queer relationships have yet to be accepted on the same level as those of the heterosexual nature. The heterosexual relationships in *The Mortal Instruments* depict instances of outright abuse and trauma-inducing experiences or treatments that must be analyzed to draw attention to—and dismantle—such misogynistic messages that abuse of this nature is okay, even natural. If my limited space provided for it, I could explore in-depth how other misogynistic patriarchal functions contribute to the trauma that often accompanies queer relationships, however, such an analysis is best saved for another time, where the ideas can be explored more fully.

patriarchal writers—whether intentionally patriarchal or not—are "'delighted to cast women as victims requiring male protection and control, and… desire to turn feminist protest into a politics of repression'" (Walkowitz qtd. in Rubin 85). In the context of sexual relationships, Roxanne Harde claims:

> [T]he core dynamic of patriarchal sexuality is the normalizing and sexualizing of masculine control and dominance over the feminine, which finds expression in a number of beliefs about what is natural, acceptable, and even desirable in male-female sexual interaction: that the male will be persistent and aggressive, the female often reluctant and passive; that "real men" (young men in this case) are entitled to sexual access to women when, where, and how they want it; that sexual intercourse is only an act of male conquest; that women are men's sexual objects or possessions. (171-172)

Harde drives home this idea that men are supposed to be dominant and domineering in relationships, that it is normal for women to feel the effects of such harsh, unmitigated masculinity, and that they are supposed to be attracted to it. Ann Childs adds to this concept, stating that, in heterosexual relationships, "The wonder isn't that he influences her, but how any other relationship can compete" (196). YA novels of all genres often perpetuate this image of love: being in a heterosexual relationship, no matter the cost, is better than *not* being in a heterosexual relationship. This trope teaches young girls to accept love even in its most abusive forms, for that is seen as better than no love or validation from men at all. Katherine Cruger puts it best when she states, "[A]ll too often in YA, 'I love you,' is used as a justification for female characters being subjected to physical and emotional violence. In YA, the romantic relationships are often endgame, meaning permanent, but very rarely healthy" (118). In many heterosexual relationships, fictional and otherwise, it is almost expected that the woman be sacrificed for the pleasure and happiness of the man, and even if she is the main protagonist, the male character is

given motivation as a hero through the violence perpetuated on the female lead. If she is killed in the process, it only motivates him more. This concept is eloquently articulated by Gail Simone's concept of "Women in Refrigerators." Simone's concept points to the fact that many "superheroines who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator" have been done so to motivate the male hero in their story (Simone). While the male in these relationships gets to revel in his glory and fame, the women are entirely left out, or more precisely, left for dead. This dismemberment and dismantling of a female hero's power, in turn, perpetuates the idea that romantic and sexual relationships are all about the men, that women may naturally suffer as a result, that all this is normal, expected, and good. Young readers consuming these stories that portray the same messages may internalize these things, potentially leading them to their own abusive relationships. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, "Women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner" ("Statistics").[3] Considering these are the ages directly following the target age group of YA novels, one can reasonably assume that this media consumption and internalization of some of its harmful ideologies may have something to do with such outcomes. Series that claim to uphold "true" feminist ideals, like *The Mortal Instruments*, must follow through in their claims, otherwise, young readers are misinformed about what feminism looks like and how to enact it themselves, and, as a result, may devalue their own comfort and happiness in both their romantic relationships and generally as women.

[3] For more statistics about domestic violence in America, visit the NCADV website: https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS.

The Protagonist Paradox: Women Are the Problem *and* the Solution

There appears to be a prevalence of writers who believe either that there is only one way to be a feminist, or that it is up to women alone to educate themselves on the predations of men and how to notice such red flags. Melissa Ames and Sarah Burcon, while supplying useful information elsewhere in their collection, *How Pop Culture Shapes the Stages of a Woman's Life: From Toddlers-in-Tiaras to Cougars-on-the-Prowl*, claim in the introduction to the collection that Miley Cyrus is somehow less deserving of feminist praise because of how she expresses her own sexuality as a woman:

> And if we were confused about whether young girls continue to face unreachable beauty standards and overt sexual objectification, we need only flip through any sampling of reality television shows (for example, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Teen Mom*, *The Bachelorette*) or watch Miley Cyrus twerking—or dancing with a foam finger or sailing through the air on a wrecking ball—to realize that this continues to be an epidemic. (3)

This statement is problematic because, while it rightly points out how women think they need to be hypersexual in media in order to please men and get public attention, it simultaneously shames Cyrus for expressing herself and her sexuality in her own way. Indeed, it implies that women should remain modest and restricted in their self-expression so as not to taint feminism's name or send the wrong message about women—to both men *and* women. As Butler says, "we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (190), and according to Ames and Burcon, Miley Cyrus is deserving of such punishment; and it is not an exaggerated jump from their censure of Cyrus to their judgment regarding all women and what they would consider appropriate feminist behavior.

In a similar vein, Chris Crowe has written an article titled, "Young Adult Literature: An Antidote for Testosterone Poisoning: YA Books Girls—And Boys—Should Read," where he

argues that girls should read books about abusive men, so they know what sorts of red flags to avoid in the adult dating pool. Crowe claims, “I don’t encourage using these books to make young women paranoid of all males, but the stories can help girls, especially those prone to naivete, see that they should be wise in their choice of companions and in the situations they place themselves” (135). One of Crowe’s favorite words to describe young girls throughout this article is the word “naïve.” He essentially claims that, without books about abusive “bad boys” and narratives where women suffer because of the men they are surrounded by it would be impossible for girls to learn what to look out for and they would otherwise fall victim to the same misogynistic systems. This implies that it is up to women, themselves, to avoid harmful systemic misogyny instead of such misogyny needing to be dismantled in the first place. While leaving it up to women alone to solve the problem of misogyny, Crowe also claims that the abusive men are not entirely to blame. He attributes their abusive behaviors to “mindless maleness,” and states outright, “Even when [men] cause their significant others pain, the pain of the male character is more important” because they are victims in the system of toxic masculinity, or “testosterone poisoning,” as he quirkily names it (121, 136). Young readers of YA stories can very quickly internalize the idea that, no matter what actions women take or if they are the ones getting hurt, men are always the real victims. And, because there is only one way to be a feminist, one that polices women’s actions through a misogynistic lens, women must oversee making the world a better place *for men* or they are not doing feminism, or their gender, right.

In the pages that follow, I will draw particular attention to some of the harmful ways these misogynistic ideologies are perpetuated in *The Mortal Instruments* series by Cassandra Clare, how subtle they can be, and what effects they may have on instilling lasting trauma in young readers. Women are taught from a young age that men must be vulnerable to be forgiven,

but women must be tortured in order to know whether or not the boy they love truly loves them in return. As a result, women internalize the notion that men must be strong to be heroes, but women need only be punished, sometimes even killed, to rise victorious over adversity—and this victory is most commonly associated with their achieving a heterosexual romantic pairing. Young women listen to writers like Cassandra Clare who that tell them love comes from trauma, and oftentimes, that abuse is what makes relationships most romantic. My argument questions these mentalities and exposes readers to their prevalence, because it is essential for us to become more aware that, even in series that claim to be feminist, it cannot just use the label and not follow through. These authors must actually work to dismantle the harmful and oppressive roles and standards that have become so mundane in our societies, or it is simply misogyny disguised as progress.[4]

Clary Fray and Male "Protection" as Love

The central relationship throughout *The Mortal Instruments* series is that of Clary and Jace. The series starts with the pair meeting at a club when Clary ventures into a back room and witnesses Jace and his siblings, Isabelle and Alec, torturing what looks, to Clary, like an ordinary teenage boy but is, in fact, a demon in disguise. From the moment Clary first sets eyes on Jace, she is dumbfounded and maintains a strong infatuation with him in the books that follow. Throughout the rest of the series, the two fall supposedly more and more in love, and of course, end up happily paired with one another by the series' close. The problem with Clary's and Jace's

[4] *The Mortal Instruments* series is also a sight of many racist characters, storylines, and ideologies. The Downworlders, or those who have part demon blood or are otherwise infected with an incurable disease that "taints" their humanity (werewolves, vampires, warlocks, faeries), are very heavily shunned by angel blooded Shadowhunters. There is—sometimes implied, sometimes blatant—discussion of white-supremacy, eugenics, and general racism against these Downworlders. This is a very important aspect of the novels—and the world—to discuss, and many have done so; however, in the limited space provided, my essay aims to dissect solely some of the misogynistic aspects of the series.

purportedly swoon-worthy relationship is the often violent and demeaning behavior that Jace can get away with in his treatment of Clary and how these actions unquestioningly get passed off as "love" not only by the other characters in the novel, but by the author herself and others who have read and fallen in love, so to speak, with the series.

Clare, in her introduction to an anthology of essays about her series, claims Jace is a character who uses "humor as a defense mechanism" (xii), which is one of his quirky, bad-boy attributes that is repeatedly used throughout the series to excuse, and/or to deflect, his violent behavior. Jace has a tragic genesis from which he was raised by a vengeful Shadowhunter—who also happens to be Clary's biological father—in a home where he was never allowed to show emotion and always had to perform his young warrior duties to his adoptive father's high and unwavering standards. He was repeatedly told throughout his childhood that "to love is to destroy, and that to be loved is to be the one destroyed," which served as the justification for his father's abuse (*Bones* 206). This tumultuous upbringing is another reason often used to excuse his violent actions toward others and as a means to conjure sympathy from the reader. This sentiment harkens back to Chris Crowe's point discussed above, namely that "evil" boys in stories are typically not actually evil because they are, themselves, victims of patriarchal conditioning. At the same time, other authors and enjoyers of the series have made adoring, humorous claims like, "Jace never learned how to flirt properly, because he was raised by a murderous sociopath" (Peterfreund 38). While this may explain some of his actions, they should not, by any means, be treated as a valid excuse for the way he frequently hurts Clary, both physically and emotionally. Clare is clearly not truly intent on composing a series that has a feminist, heterosexual relationship at its core, for Jace repeatedly proves that his comfort and consolation apparently matter far more than Clary's, if hers ever mattered at all.

In the first book of the series, *City of Bones*, Clary is out of sorts after being attacked by a demon. To save her and get her back to the Institute, the home of local Shadowhunters, Jace magically tattoos a Shadowhunter Rune on her arm with his *stele*. She tries to fight him as he does this, but "his grip was too hard" and she was too weak from the demon fight to fully fend him off (*Bones* 55). While this can be interpreted as a white knight saving the damsel in distress, especially when she is unaware of the "true" danger she is in, it should be noted that Shadowhunter Runes will kill a non-Shadowhunter, or Mundane, if drawn on them. At this point in the story, Jace and Clary have only met twice, and he does not know for sure whether she is a Shadowhunter or not. Clary was not raised a Shadowhunter, but she does have Shadowhunter blood, which is the only reason Jace's nonconsensual Marking of her body did not kill her—but he did not know this at the time, and *he Marked her anyway*. Permanently Marking Clary without her consent is already a red flag, but the fact that the Mark had a fifty percent chance of killing her is another, altogether disturbing, issue entirely. This Marking is a metaphorical form of penetration, one that is forced permanently on Clary's body when she is unable to fully consent and which may lead to her being killed, whether from receiving the Mark or from leaving her demon-inflicted wounds untreated.

This first example not only foreshadows how Jace's and Clary's relationship unfolds throughout the rest of the series, but it also highlights another way Clare's books are not as feminist as she claims them to be. As Roberta Trites states:

> [I]t is on the skin that women inscribe their own objectification by means of exfoliation or tattoos or scars. Too often, then, the body thus becomes a politicized object, rather than being regarded as a material reality that interplays through discourse with environmental factors to support and enhance a self-defined identity. (93)

Jace tattooing Clary with a Shadowhunter Rune, especially doing so without her consent, is a way—in fact, the first way—that he objectifies her body, treating her as non-human, a thing to be manipulated toward his will. It should be noted that a few chapters after this initial Marking, the following conversation occurs between Jace and Clary:

> "How did you know I had Shadowhunter blood? Was there some way you could tell?" …
>
> "I guessed," he [Jace] said, latching the door behind them. "It seemed like the most likely explanation."
>
> "You guessed? You must have been pretty sure, considering you could have killed me." …
>
> "I was ninety percent sure."
>
> "I see," Clary said.
>
> There must have been something in her voice, because he turned to look at her. Her hand cracked across his face, a slap that rocked him back on his heels. He put his hand to his cheek, more in surprise than pain. "What the hell was that for?"
>
> "The other ten percent," she said, and they rode the rest of the way down to the street in silence. (*Bones* 85)

While Clary defends her agency and value as a woman in this scene, further down on the page she states that she immediately feels "a little bit guilty" (*Bones* 85). Additionally, while Clary should not have resorted to physical violence to express her anger at Jace's dismissal of the importance of her life, she also should not have forgiven him as quickly as she did, falling in love with him all over again mere pages later, as if both accounts of problematic violence had never happened in the first place. To young readers absorbing these exchanges between Clary and Jace, the existence of the "true love" that the pair feel for one another, even so early in the series, far outweighs the more violent and traumatic aspects of the relationship. As Katherine

Cruger puts it, “Because these characters are written as being destined to be together instances of abuse are easily brushed off; a relationship with a soulmate cannot be toxic, as it was written in the stars” (119). Jace and Clary, from the first moment they lock eyes in the storage room of a teen night club, and more importantly, from the first time Clary sees Jace shed another’s blood in battle, they are locked together, seemingly for eternity. Nothing can come between the two, not their thinking they are siblings for all of *City of Ashes* and most of *City of Glass*, not Jace’s multiple possessions in the later books (which only increase his instances of abuse, but all is forgiven because he was *possessed*), and especially not Jace’s harsh actions toward her that he justifies as his means of “protecting” the love of his life. From the genesis of their relationship, Clare uses both Jace and Clary to depict a warped and toxic representation of what heterosexual love is meant to look like. By championing such a depiction as the quintessence of romance, Clare easily perpetuates misogynistic notions that love is defined by the trauma that apparently must accompany it.

Furthermore, there is a trope in YA stories—and in the patriarchal systems of the world, in general—that men need to save women, whether it be from a ten-foot-tall demon or from the woman’s own reckless, naive tendencies. Jace, oftentimes, must save Clary from both. Jace is under the same assumptions—and poses some of the same threats—as Edward from the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer:

> Edward operates under the outdated notion that men know best and that it is his duty to keep [Bella] safe, even when such efforts are not wanted. This has left many scholars concerned that young girls will look on Edward and think of his actions as normal, imagining him to be the perfect boyfriend. (Ames and Burcon 46)

Jace and Edward both act as the knight in shining armor for their female counterparts, often performing these "protective" roles at any cost, even at the expense of the woman's happiness and mental health. In *City of Glass*, Jace "protects" Clary to the point of making her cry:

> "The truth is that I don't want you here because you're rash and thoughtless and you'll mess everything up. It's just how you are. You're not careful, Clary."
>
> "Mess… everything… up?" Clary couldn't get enough air into her lungs for anything but a whisper… "But it's not like every decision I've ever made was a bad one! You said, after what I did on the boat, you *said* I'd saved everyone's life—"
>
> All the remaining color in Jace's face went. He said, with a sudden and astounding viciousness, "Shut up, Clary, SHUT UP—" … "I just told you that to keep you from whining!" Jace shouted… "You're a disaster for us, Clary! You're a mundane, you'll always be one, you'll never be a Shadowhunter. You don't know how to think like we do, think about what's best for everyone—all you ever think about is yourself! But there's a war on now, or there will be, and I don't have the time or the inclination to follow around after you, trying to make sure you don't get one of us killed!" (*Glass* 123-124)

Jace makes Clary cry with his violent words on more than one occasion, but this excerpt is one of the most telling instances. Clary is constantly trying to proactively solve the conflicts that the characters in the story must face, but these actions are instead interpreted by Jace as being reckless and selfish. It is apparent that Clary cannot be as independent and confident in her problem-solving as Jace, even though she is meant to be the main female heroine. He must tear her down, no matter what abuse it takes to do so, just so he can remain the true hero of the story while simultaneously acting as Clary's "protector." After all, a woman acting as independently and confidently as a man evidently means she is being reckless, instead of heroic, and is therefore a threat to her own, and others', safety. All this verbal attacking is later explained away

when Jace claims, as if Clary is a small child that he must explain the simplest of things to, "'I wasn't talking about you, Clary. I was talking about me. That's what *I'm* like'" (*Glass* 212). The pair also share a small, vulnerable conversation later, where this sentiment is expanded upon. Clary starts the conversation, stating:

> "I've spent the past few days wondering if you hated me. And then I saw you tonight and I was pretty sure you did."
>
> "Hated you?" [Jace] echoed, looking bewildered… "This could be the last night of our lives, certainly the last even barely ordinary one. The last night we go to sleep and get up just as we always have. And all I could think of was that I wanted to spend it with you." (*Glass* 332)

The terrible things Jace says are canceled out by the fact that he *loves* Clary and because he, himself, has a traumatic past and low self-esteem, both of which he is allowed to take out on Clary. Clary was supposed to naturally assume that Jace would *never* yell at her the way he did—for reasons that he claims are due to her shortcomings—that he *must* have been talking about himself the whole time. She is meant to feel stupid for not knowing that, when Jace was yelling in her face, he was actually talking about himself and how sad and broken *he* is. Accusations like, "[Y]ou're rash and thoughtless," "[Y]ou'll mess everything up. It's just how you are," and, "You're a disaster for us," are all Jace's way of projecting his own anger at himself onto Clary, berating himself for his own negative attributes while simultaneously attempting to "protect" Clary from herself, from acting as recklessly as *he* does, himself, all because he "loves" her (*Glass* 123-124). Clary was supposed to know from the start that instead of hating *her,* Jace was actually expressing how much he hates *himself*. His abuse is, once again, justified by his apparent love for Clary, and the "unique" way he expresses it, and by his own traumatic past which he has yet to figure out how to cope with. Clary even forgives Jace later,

claiming, “There was nothing she had ever wanted in her life more than she wanted this night with Jace” (*Glass* 333). Jace is allowed to yell at and mistreat Clary because he *loves* her and is simply trying to *protect* her (from herself, nonetheless, because Clary is not allowed to act independently without it raising red flags, without Jace’s permission). In essence, Jace views her as reckless and unreliable, so he must be forceful with her to get her to listen to him, which is obviously her role in their relationship: to follow and obey the big, macho man, to validate his feelings, and to somehow inherently know when he is talking about himself, not her, and in need of comfort for his own internal suffering. This plays into the mentality of abuse victims who “are sometimes told that their abuser’s behavior is for their own good” (Cruger 121). Jace very often raises his voice, forcefully pushes Clary, or grips her arm very tightly to show her that he is in charge, and he is playing his role as her protector. This is perceived by Clary as something he is doing for her benefit, a way for him to show his love by protecting her. Like many victims of domestic violence, Clary quickly learns to interpret her own pain, her own tears, as a sign of Jace’s love for her. This teaches young readers to interpret abusive behavior in a similar way: as a means of protection and love, as something done “for their own good.”

This sentiment is additionally explained through the character Sebastian. We are introduced to Sebastian—whose real name is Jonathan—Clary’s biological brother, in *City of Glass*. Sebastian manhandles Clary in a similar manner as Jace:

> He caught her wrists in a painful grasp…
>
> “Sebastian,” she said as calmly as she could. “You’re hurting me.” (*Glass* 175)

Since the beginning of the series, Jace has caught Clary’s wrist in an aggressive manner countless times, yet it is not until Sebastian does it, the man that Clary is not meant to have a romantic relationship with, that it is labeled “wrong.” This further proves that it is okay for Jace to act abusively toward Clary because the audience is supposed to identify Jace’s behavior as

romantic, as loving. We, as readers, are simultaneously supposed to feel bad for him for *his* trauma instead of sympathizing with Clary for the pain her apparent "soul mate" causes her. The theme of victim blaming is one that crops up a plethora of times throughout Clare's series and is consistently explained away as "love." Sebastian's physical behavior with Clary is used as an example of "real" abuse, evident by her dubious and fearful reaction to his treatment. However, when compared with Jace, it is difficult to differentiate the two behaviors in a constructive way, as audiences are often as conditioned as Clary to see Jace as the hero coming to our "rescue" when we should be running the other way.

Maia Roberts, Domestic Violence, and Forgiveness

Maia Roberts is a character introduced to Clare's series in the second book, *City of Ashes*, and Maia's ex-boyfriend, Jordan, is the source of her romantic trauma. The pair were dating for a few months before Jordan got turned into a werewolf, and his Turning had dramatic effects on their relationship:

> The first few months were like a dream; the last few months like a nightmare. He became possessive, controlling. When he was angry with her, he'd snarl and whip the back of his hand across her cheek, leaving a mark like too much blusher. When she tried to break up with him, he pushed her, knocked her down in her own front yard before she ran inside and slammed the door. (*Ashes* 28)

At this point, Maia does not know that Jordan was recently Turned into a werewolf and that the reason for his increase in abuse is because he was trying to navigate the transformation inside his own mind and body. Maia stands up for herself by breaking up with him, which is fantastic for her character and feminists everywhere; however, Jordan's response is far less laudable:

> Later, she let him see her kissing another boy, just to get the point across that it was over. She didn't even remember that boy's name anymore. What she did remember was walking home that night… She remembered the dark shape exploding out from behind the metal merry-go-round, the huge wet wolf body knocking her into the mud, the savage pain as its jaws clamped down on her throat. She'd screamed and thrashed, tasting her own hot blood in her mouth, her brain screaming… (*Ashes* 28)

Attacking Maia for publicly being with another man *after* her and Jordan broke up is already a horrific red flag for Jordan's abusive tendencies, but the fact that he penetrates her skin with his fangs (a metaphorical sexual assault), only adds to the thought process his character—and that of many misogynistic men—has surrounding what he thinks Maia's role in their relationship is as well as her role as a woman. He confirms this misogynistic thought process when he whispers in her ear, "'You're mine now. You'll always be mine,'" after he attacks her, subsequently leaving her for dead (*Ashes* 29). Jordan thought he owned Maia during their relationship. Then, when she decided to leave him, he made the decision that it would be better for her to be very nearly murdered than for her to be without him. Jordan thinks that, as a man and as a werewolf, he is entitled to Maia's body, that he can do whatever he wants with it, even if she is forever traumatized and marked by his actions. This, alone, is reason enough to speak out against such misogynistic portrayals of "love" in young adult stories like that of *The Mortal Instruments* series. However, the situation is worsened when we reencounter Jordan in the series' fourth book, *City of Fallen Angels*. As Katherine Cruger points out, "From the moment the audience meets Jordan he is set up to be a sympathetic character and not an abuser and the audience is encouraged to forgive him" (119). When Jordan is introduced at this point in the series, we meet him as a fun, carefree character going by the name "Kyle." The fact that Clare did not want to introduce him as Jordan in the first place only drives home the fact that he is not meant to be a

forgivable character. Clare knows that if she introduced him as Jordan, readers would recognize him for the terrible person he is and would not end up forgiving him like she wants us to, essentially excusing his prior history of violence.

When we meet Kyle/Jordan in *Fallen Angels*, he quickly befriends Simon, one of the most beloved characters in the entire series, further solidifying that we are meant to trust and even like Kyle, and the two end up moving in together. Kyle gives Simon a place to live when Simon, whom we all know and love, has nowhere else to go. Thus, Kyle/Jordan is immediately established as a savior, a good Samaritan. It is not until about the halfway point in the book that we learn who Kyle really is, and from there, we learn Jordan's side of the story of what happened between him and Maia while they were dating. His point of view implies quite heavily that all the abuse was, in fact, not his fault, and only happened because he had been turned into a werewolf:

> "About three weeks later [after Jordan was Turned into a werewolf] it started to hit. Waves of uncontrollable rage and anger. My vision would just black out, and I wouldn't know what was happening. I punched my hand through my kitchen window because a drawer was stuck shut. I was crazy jealous about Maia, convinced she was looking at other guys, convinced… I don't even know what I thought. I just know I snapped. I hit her. I want to say I don't remember doing it, but I do. And then she broke up with me…" (*Fallen Angels* 206)

This may be reasonable justification for violence in a fantasy world, but it implies to young readers that there is always a justifiable reason for domestic violence in a relationship and that it is up to the victim to hear their partner out and accept the violence until the abuser can sort out their own issues. Jordan allegedly only acted violently toward Maia because the werewolf bite

made him more aggressive and jealous.[5] While he is not exactly blaming *her* for his violence, he is still removing the blame from himself, and Maia is next in line to receive that blame. Jordan makes a point of including in his retelling the fact that part of the reason he attacked Maia was because he saw her kissing another boy after they broke up. This additionally transfers the blame from Jordan in two aspects: not only was he not responsible for the abuse because he is a werewolf, but he is also not responsible because it was Maia's fault that she was kissing someone else in the first place, *after they had already broken up*. Moreover, Jordan later explains that he befriended Simon to get close to Maia again, to make sure she was okay and well-adjusted after he turned her into a werewolf, or more precisely, to reinsert himself into her life without her knowing to essentially stalk her. This is problematic as well since, as Cruger later explains, "Because Maia and Jordan's story is heavily focused not on the pain that Jordan caused Maia, but on the pain Jordan feels for hurting Maia, the message is being sent that in some cases domestic violence is acceptable and forgivable" (120). Jordan has decided to join an organization called the Praetor Lupus to become a better person, help other people, and make up for the pain he caused Maia all those years ago. In fact, some of Jordan's first words when trying to explain to Simon why he did what he did are, "'I loved Maia'" (*Ashes* 205). Much like Jace's abusive behavior toward Clary, Jordan claims he acted the way he did because of the love he feels toward Maia. In Jordan's and Maia's case, however, Maia recognizes the abuse for what it is and attempts to leave, only to be further punished by Jordan and permanently changed into a werewolf, which he hypocritically left her to deal with on her own, only to return as a quasi-

[5] Jordan's experiences Turning into a werewolf can also metaphorically represent a similar hormone imbalance and shift in behavior undergone during puberty. If Clare uses Jordan's Turning as justification for his violence and jealousy, it may be natural for readers to similarly use puberty as justification for real life boys' violence and jealousy. In doing so, Clare inadvertently supports the saying, "Boys will be boys," implying that internal (mental or hormonal—or even supernatural) turbulence justifies and excuses abusive behavior, which it certainly does not.

savior with a new name, a new identity, that readers are supposed to accept as proof of change. In essence, Clare depicts the idea that "we all do crazy things when we are in love," by making abuse Jordan's "crazy thing," implying that he should not be held accountable for his violent behavior, even though Maia continues to suffer from the trauma he put her through years ago.

To add to the horrific portrayal of love Clare achieves in this character arc, Maia ends up forgiving Jordan for what he did to her. This is particularly intriguing because Maia also had a brother, Daniel, who physically and verbally abused her (even breaking her arm when they were children), and she still has severe PTSD from that relationship. Daniel is already dead when we meet Maia in book two, but the effects that his abuse have had on her are still very prevalent. She must often remind herself, "*He's dead. Daniel's dead*" (*Ashes* 30). Maia is not quick to forgive Jordan; however, she still does, to the point where she reenters a romantic relationship with him in book five, *City of Lost Souls*. Jordan's previous, abusive actions are all but forgotten by the other characters in the story and by the reader, and he is treated as just another loveable, quirky character like those we have known since the series' start, even to the point of mourning him with a tear-jerking death scene near the series' close. According to the rules of Clare's strict binary of what does or does not constitute abuse, Maia can only forgive either her brother's or Jordan's abusive behavior, not both. Under Clare's framework, it is likely that Maia forgives Jordan because there is the possibility of a romantic relationship with him. Much like Jace's abuse is forgiven because he is her romantic interest—where, Clary's brother's, Sebastian's, abuse is not because he is the villain of the story—Jordan's abusive actions are equally forgiven because he is Maia's romantic interest and *her* brother, Daniel, is not.

Heteronormativity is so centralized and important within YA books that things like abuse are often overlooked if it means that the male and female pairing can end up romantically

entwined by the series' close. Clare, herself, even defends this depiction of romantic violence, stating, "portrayal is not endorsement" (Clare qtd. in Cruger 120), and also claiming that Maia never actually forgives Jordan, but the pair's romantic involvement for a period of time after meeting again following all the instances of abuse potentially points to a different conclusion. Cruger, however, refutes Clare's defense fantastically by claiming, "He's a romanticized and sympathetic character remembered fondly after his death. That's a form of endorsement" (120). By depicting Jordan as an abusive, then loveable character, by asserting that Jordan's abuse is justified by his Turning into a werewolf and by his jealousy at seeing Maia kiss someone else, by excusing Jordan's abuse because it is tied to romance and refuting Daniel's abuse because it is not, Clare borders the line of condoning Jordan's abuse because it adds an apparent depth to his relationship with Maia, while Jace's abuse adds an similarly intriguing and apparent depth to his relationship with Clary. Clare is taking a very real struggle many women have in their relationships and terribly portraying it as a mere side effect of the paranormal, implying also that domestic violence is seemingly as rare as werewolves. Clare is depicting this relationship that is dense in domestic violence, victim blaming, and psychological trauma as "love," proving to young readers that this is the kind of relationship they should look out for, that this is the kind of relationship that is acceptable. Maia gets punished for breaking up with Jordan and exercising her right to kiss someone else as a single woman; this depiction of what romance is meant to look like is not one that accurately or healthily teaches the concept to young readers. If authors wish to tell stories about domestic violence, it is imperative they do it accurately and informatively. Crowe claims that it is the woman's responsibility to learn from literature what an abusive relationship looks like, but where Crowe's suggestion is a way to teach about domestic violence that prioritizes victim-blaming, we can instead use literature to amplify the voices of

abuse victims, to tell their story, to spread awareness. In this sense, it is not the female's fault that she did not see the warning signs, it is not up to her to educate herself on what to look out for, but instead, the narratives of abuse, that have been long silenced and ignored, can be heard. Clare's attempt at this sort of narrative is harmful in its inaccurate portrayal and justification of such abuse, painting Jordan, instead, as a redeemable character, as more of a victim than Maia. This approach only makes it more imperative that "feminist" works truly take a feminist stance in their depictions of love in its many forms and in their portrayal of such difficult—yet unfortunately common—scenarios of domestic violence, to properly educate and demonstrate to young readers what the world of dating may have in store for them, rather than condoning and dismissing such behaviors.

Isabelle Lightwood and Emotional Trauma

Isabelle Lightwood is the sister of Alec Lightwood, Jace's *parabatai* or (legally bound) Shadowhunter best friend. When readers are first introduced to Isabelle, it is clear that she is known for her looks and her sex appeal, despite being a very young teenager.[6] From the beginning of the series, Isabelle is depicted as a strong, independent woman who doesn't need a man. She is often described as a man-eater, sleeping with various men, using her sexuality as a weapon, but never staying in a prolonged romantic relationship. We learn in the fourth book, after Isabelle finds out that Simon has been cheating on her, that the reason for Isabelle's

[6] This further problematizes the objectification and oversexualization of women, particularly young women, which is a broader issue of its own. For the sake of this essay, and lack of space, however, I want to instead focus on Isabelle's own romantic trauma. As the feisty, self-reliant woman she is characterized as from the beginning, it is not expected that she has any sort of weakness. Clary is a Mundane, a mere human—or so is originally thought—so she is expected to have flaws in her character, weaknesses to overcome. Isabelle is, instead, the badass, leather-clad heroine who is meant to signify the common femme fatale trope. It is interesting that, despite all this apparent strength and the stony countenance that Isabelle upholds, her romantic life is equally rife with trauma as Clary's and Maia's are. This is what I choose to explore in this essay instead of the equally problematic over-sexualization of female characters in YA stories.

reluctance to remain romantically involved with any men, the reason she never "gives her heart away," is because when she was thirteen, she found out her dad was cheating on her mom:

> "[W]hen everything happened, and [Isabelle's parents] got banished, and they realized they'd practically wrecked their whole lives, I think [Isabelle's dad] blamed [Isabelle's mom]. But they already had Alec and were going to have me, so he stayed, even though I think he kind of wanted to leave. And then, when Alec was about nine, he found someone else."
>
> "Whoa," Simon said. "Your dad cheated on your mom? That's—that's awful."
>
> "She told me," said Isabelle. "I was about thirteen. She told me that he would have left her but they found out she was pregnant with Max, so they stayed together and he broke it off with the other woman. My mom didn't tell me who she was. She just told me that you couldn't really trust men. And she told me not to tell anyone… I didn't think about how it might have changed me. But I watch my brothers give their hearts away and I think, *Don't you know better?* Hearts are breakable. And I think even when you heal, you're never what you were before." (*Fallen Angels* 239)

This scene between Isabelle and Simon is supposed to be romantic. Isabelle is betraying her mother's advice not only in telling Simon the truth about her parents, but also in being vulnerable with him, showing him her heart. Readers are expected to swoon at moments like this, where Isabelle does the forbidden thing, the thing that has thus far been so out of character: falling in love. However, Isabelle's mother was mistreated by her father, which Isabelle witnessed and internalized, herself, at a young age. Isabelle has experienced romantic trauma in different ways than Clary and Maia in that her trauma has not been physical. Clare depicts Jace's violence as love and protection and Jordan's abuse as a mere paranormal blunder. In Isabelle's case, however, she is rescued by Simon—she is no longer a prisoner of this harmful mentality that all men are bad, all thanks to a man.

A monogamous heterosexual relationship acts as a cure for Isabelle's previous, supposedly tainted, notions of romantic love. This is seen as a proper relationship because Simon is acting as a savior of sorts, especially because he convinces Isabelle to overcome the trauma of her parent's broken relationship to have a "healthy" romance of her own. In this sense, Isabelle falls into a fairytale trope that "requires a reckoning with the trauma that led to the long sleep" (Coste 102), or, in this case, her aversion to love. Simon acts as a Prince Charming in a traditional fairytale, kissing her awake from her "long sleep," awakening her to the possibility of romantic love, changing her perspective on the world of romance and the need for women to seek approval from men. Indeed, before she meets and falls in love with Simon, Isabelle is more than happy to live a life without a man; she is the quintessential strong, independent woman. Once she realizes her feelings for Simon, however, and once she opens her heart to him just as her mother warned her not to, Isabelle "wakes up," and decides that perhaps she *does* want to try her hand at monogamy. Simon's somewhat general admonition that: "'I care about you… I always cared about you'" (*Fallen Angels* 240), acts as Isabelle's "true love's kiss" that awakens her from her independent ways of rejecting love. In this sense, Clare ends up "saddling the strong heroine with a male savior, with whom she will have an inevitable romance" (Coste 103), saving Isabelle from living a full life without a man by her side, a life certainly not fit for any woman by true patriarchal standards. This sentiment reinforces both the notion that women need saving by men as well as that it also adheres to the "ongoing constructions that align maleness with reason and femaleness with nature and as a result, establish maleness as superior to femaleness" (Day 78). It is not until Isabelle sees the traditional romantic relationships going on around her that she imagines having one, or even needing one, for herself. Simon changes something fundamental within her, and this change occurs when he exerts his male intellect and charm and "fixes" her.

This mentality of being fine as a woman on her own is not only perceived as childish, but as wrong; Isabelle is not performing her gender correctly. It is a mentality Isabelle must overcome to be in the same romantic position as everyone else in her family and in her friend group, so she can gain more worth as a woman. This romantic discovery prompted by Simon is Clare's way of disguising Isabelle's trauma as something much more swoon worthy. Isabelle was, according to Clare's concept of "love," lost before she met Simon, and it is only because of him that she was apparently able to transform the trauma instilled in her by her parents' romantic failures into her own true love.

Isabelle's romantic trauma, and her way of overcoming it, all play into the misogynistic depictions of love Clare exemplifies throughout her *Mortal Instruments* series. Not only is Simon depicted as a savior in rescuing Isabelle from her trauma, but Isabelle, herself is also portrayed as more inclined to believe him because he is a male—a male in the savior role, at that. Isabelle is also of the same mentality as Jace that "to love is to destroy," so she refrains from participating in any sort of romantic relationship until Simon comes around. Isabelle must overcome her trauma or transform that trauma into something mildly representing "love," in the same ways Clary and Maia must also transform their trauma into something more, something better, with the help of the right male romantic pairing. This may be presented as a motivational tool, a reminder to readers to not give up in the face of hardship, to use one's trials and tribulations for good, for transformation. However, it also depicts love as only being able to come from, or be successful through, trauma. It could also be argued that Isabelle never overcomes her trauma, her notion that love must be painful, for in *City of Lost Souls*, an intimate scene between Simon and Isabelle shows the two becoming aroused by Simon, a vampire, biting Isabelle's neck:

> Her long, perfect legs wrapped around him, her ankles locking, holding him to her. "I want you to." Her breasts flattened against his chest as she arched up against him, baring her throat. The scent of her blood was everywhere, all over him, filling the room.
>
> "Aren't you scared?" he whispered.
>
> "Yes. But I still want you to."
>
> "Isabelle—I can't—"
>
> He bit her…
>
> But Isabelle gasped, her eyes flying open and her body arcing up against him. She purred like a cat, stroking his hair, his back, little urgent movement of her hands saying *Don't stop, Don't stop*. Heat poured out of her, into him, lighting his body; he had never felt, imagined, anything else like it. He could feel the strong, sure beat of her heat, pounding through her veins into his, and for that moment it was as if he lived again, and his heart contracted with pure elation— (*Lost Souls* 265-266)

A woman expressing her sexuality however she pleases is *not* the issue here. The potentially problematic aspect of this scene is that Isabelle is constantly depicted as a woman who is afraid to cry, afraid to be vulnerable not only because of what happened between her parents, but also because of the intense masculinity she is always surrounded by. In letting Simon bite her during their intimate moments, she is potentially using the penetrative act to punish herself for this sort of vulnerability—sex *with* emotion, which is something she has never participated in so as to, as her mother advised her, not give her heart to any man. This moment also acts as a means to reinstate the idea that men are dominant in relationships with women and that pain must go hand-in-hand with love and vulnerability. Immediately following this intimate moment where Simon bites Isabelle, he thinks that she might admit that she is in love with him:

> "Simon…"

> He drew back. She was looking at him with her big dark eyes, very serious, her cheeks flushed. "I…"
>
> "What?" For a wild moment he thought she was going to say 'I love you,' but instead she shook her head, yawned, and hooked her fingers through one of the belt loops on his jeans. (*Lost Souls* 267)

Isabelle is not the only one who associates pain with love in this situation: Simon does too. In Simon's mind, his biting Isabelle, his hurting her, is expected to be rewarded with an "I love you." While vampires and their bites have frequently had a sensual connotation in literature, often eliciting an intoxicating effect on those being bitten, Isabelle's past struggles with accepting and experiencing love likely means that she also associates the pain of Simon's bite with love, as he does, and as the other females in the series do. It is unclear whether Isabelle associates the pain of Simon's bite with love because biting is often depicted as a sensual act or because the bite is, itself, painful to her while it gives him, a man, only pleasure. Either way, this furthers Clare's notion that love must be painful and traumatic to be worthwhile, to be justified. As Isabelle overcomes, with Simon's help, her own preconceived ideals of monogamous love, brought on by her parents' unhealthy relationship, she is solidifying the patriarchal ideal that women possess more worth when in a relationship with a man. Her longing to be hurt by Simon while in their relationship also perpetuates notions that love must be painful, depicting more harmful portrayals of heterosexual romance to young readers that only serve to further saturate their understanding and internalization of the kind of "love" Clare advocates for.

Brothers in Arms, Women in Pain

With the trauma these three female leads face in relation to their heterosexual romantic relationships, one would expect them to stick to each other's sides and relate to one another

through their shared suffering. What ends up happening, however, is these characters spend much of their time hating one another simply because of their shared gender. As Katherine Cruger states:

> In YA fiction, it seems that the best thing a heroine can be is nothing like other girls… To prove their strength and individuality, heroines often reject conventional expressions of femininity, but more than that, fantasy heroines reject other women and girls as vapid, conniving, or slutty. (117)

From the moment Clary meets Isabelle, she immediately compares herself to the other girl, hating herself and hating Isabelle for how beautiful the latter is. Clary, apropos of young adult females, compares herself to every other female character she meets. For example, she feels "gigantic" (*Bones* 105) in comparison to Isabelle, even though Clary, herself, is just over five feet tall and repeatedly described as "tiny." In *City of Bones*, Clary is pining after Jace, so she sees Isabelle as competition, even though Jace is, in effect, Isabelle's adoptive brother. In *City of Ashes*, Clary is dating Simon, so she sees the newly introduced Maia as competition. In the world of YA, and in the world of many adolescent girls' minds, there can only be one girl—one strong girl, one pretty girl, one girl for all the boys—and Clary never feels like that girl, so she lashes out against her fellow women. Clary directly reflects on this in *City of Ashes* when she is having a conversation with Maia:

> Honestly, Clary thought, it was hardly fair for a werewolf to be curvy and pretty; she ought to be big and hirsute, possibly with hair coming out of her ears. *And this*, Clary added silently, *is exactly why I don't have any female friends and spend all my time with Simon. I've got to get a grip*. (*Ashes* 274)

This is without question a quintessential example of internalized sexism—both by the character and by the author. Clary thinks she needs to be just as, if not more, beautiful than all the other

women she is surrounded by; just as strong, if not stronger; just as easy going, if not more easygoing; just as confident, if not more confident; the list can go on. This competitive urge rests in needing to be the most attractive romantic option for men to not only obtain their approval, but also to obtain a mate. The end goal for women in a patriarchal society is always deemed to be marriage to a man followed closely by motherhood. Women are trained from a young age to want to look good for men, to be objects for them to admire and acquire as potential partners. When competition is this competitive, women are supposed to turn on one another, thinking they must harbor hate for their opposition in gaining the attention of all men, not just potential mates. This is perfectly summed up by Ann Childs:

> According to these stereotypes, young women will always abandon friendships for a young man, as they seemingly value romance over platonic friendship. This specific stereotype, when extrapolated, privileges females' heterosexual relationships as the only important ones and, therefore, males as the most important social connections. A host of resulting insinuations paint girls as shallow, competitive creatures incapable of camaraderie. (188)

Since women can supposedly only find their worth in monogamous relationships with men, they often will choose to stay in those relationships no matter what, including circumstances in which the women are being abused or otherwise unfairly treated by their male partners. Clary, Maia, and Isabelle are all teenage girls who have less than ideal experiences with romantic love, but they would still rather be with their male partners than in homosocial relationships with other women—all because patriarchal society has trained them to see other females as competition, not as a support system. This internalized misogyny tells these characters as well as their female readership that men are *always* more important than women, that they should value their male relationships more than their female ones, and that they should prioritize their male partner's feelings and comfort over their own. These implications not only make Clare's work

significantly less feminist than she claims it to be, but it also teaches young readers that this lack of homosocial female bonding is normal and that women matter less in every aspect of life, especially when it comes to love.

There is a direct relationship between the aversion to female friendships and the prevalence of trauma in YA characters' heterosexual relationships. As Ann Childs states of YA female protagonists:

> [She] cannot have successful rebellion, deep female friendship, and heterosexual love—doing so prevents the hopelessness and warning of the dystopia from coming through. One of these three things must fail, and it will be the female friendship because of 'deep-seated socialized thinking' that devalues females based on stereotypes. (199)

This sentiment further establishes the notion that a traumatic heterosexual relationship is more valuable, and better for a young girl, than a homosocial relationship between two girls. This increases the competition between women while it simultaneously increases male dominance in women's lives and proves that sacrifice and trauma are needed for a good romantic relationship.

Kendare Blake furthers this sentiment by stating, "Happy couples are boring. Bo-ring… As readers, we're drawn in by the struggle, by the drama, by the *desires* of the characters" (101). Apparently if that "desire" is not born of suffering, it is not worth it. Blake's point of view is shared by many, even Clare herself: "[I]sn't that what we want from a story? For it to make our hair stand on end? For it to make us question our assumptions about what sort of love is acceptable to us, and why?" (Clare qtd. in Blake 101). By these standards, love, even adolescent love, is only valuable if it is earned through pain. Love, in these sorts of stories, is never natural, and it is certainly never unconditional; there are always caveats, trauma quotas that must be met. In short, "to love is to destroy" and having it any other way is not the sort of love that is worth it. In the initially competitive relationship between all these female characters, we learn that trauma

is good because it earns the girls the boy they want in the end; and if we learn anything else from YA fictional romances, it is that getting the boy is the ultimate goal, everything and everyone else be damned.

YA Toxicity and Postfeminism

As Roberta Trites states, feminism should be "more complex than simply being able to take action or seek heteronormative love" (119). It is true that it is groundbreaking that we have international bestsellers like *The Mortal Instruments* series that includes three lead female characters that get to fight and be witty alongside the boys. It is excellent that books with strong, leading female characters get to be so popular and get to be a part of literary discourse. It is spectacular that we are taking steps in the right direction. However, even in these female-fronted novels, as I have shown throughout this essay, there is ingrained internalized misogyny in both the characters and the authors that would place these female characters in obligatory heterosexual relationships and keep them traumatized and always less powerful than their male counterparts. Countless essays have been written about the perpetuation of female subjugation in YA books, particularly YA dystopian and fantasy novels, where the girl fighters get to fight but never as dexterously or successfully as the boy characters. They certainly never get as much praise for it, either. Some readers and scholars who maintain a postfeminist mentality seem to think that it is enough that women get to fight, even if they are not ever as strong as the men. We can do better. Gayle Rubin states, "Some oppression is dramatic, spectacular, and grotesque. Most exploitation and oppression, however, takes place in the realm of the everyday, the routine, and the quotidian" (82). If we take stories like that of *The Mortal Instruments* series and claim they are feminist beyond a shadow of a doubt and if we do not notice the ways women are being

controlled and manipulated by our inherently misogynistic patriarchal systems every day, then we will never outrun such oppression. It is only through the recognition and the dismantling of such systems that we can hope to achieve any sort of change, and this starts with asking questions and exposing such misogyny for what it is, instead of placing a romantic label on it and reframing trauma as true love.

Adolescent years are some of the most important, developmentally, in a person's life, which means that the lessons learned and internalized during this stage will likely stick with someone forever. From narratives like *The Mortal Instruments* series by Cassandra Clare, young readers can potentially learn that love must always involve trauma, especially in a heterosexual context. Adolescent readers that consume YA stories are a part of the age group that is just starting to date, and these stories that prioritize suffering and trauma over comfort and happiness in a relationship teach readers to value or dismiss dangerous behaviors. Clare's claim that these books are feminist works, and her defense of her misogynistic portrayals within the series, is equally devasting because it teaches young readers that feminism means women do, in fact, only hold value in the world so long as that value is still less than that of their male partners. This view of the world leaves Clare's series reading more like trauma-porn that serves as a justification for abuse, rather than a ground-breaking work of feminist YA fiction. In her series, Clare repeatedly treats female-directed trauma, or the overcoming of trauma with the help of a male character, as the quintessential aspect of romantic love. I mentioned above that Clare thinks a requirement of a good story is "to make us question our assumptions about what sort of love is acceptable to us, and why?" and I hope this essay prompts more questioning of what sort of love each of us accepts, excuses, desires, and even longs for. Clare would have us think that real love is painful, but I hope each of us rethinks this sentiment. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a

swoon-worthy, or even downright steamy, scene between two characters in a YA series like *The Mortal Instruments*, but it is imperative to keep in mind what sort of misogynistic tropes and ideologies are being perpetuated through such scenes, what patriarchal systems these tropes and ideologies are founded in, and what the broader implications depicted in these stories are teaching about relationships to the young readers who consume them. It is up to us as readers, scholars, feminists, to rethink the way we portray love, especially adolescent love, in young adult literature, to dismantle the misogynistic notions repeatedly ingrained in our youth through such literature, and to ponder what love *does* look like in our own lives and reimagine what it *should* look like.

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