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## INTRODUCTION

Fantasy literature, despite its abundance of magic and fantastical creatures, is a reflection of our own world. In literary works, authors reflect on their surroundings, backgrounds, and experiences with the world and turn them into works of fiction. Therefore, no matter how detached from reality a book is, it will always carry an impression of the real world.

It is especially noticeable in the modern world, where both authors and readers attempt to deviate from the fantastical canon established by Tolkien. People strive to create and perceive different fantastical worlds which are not based on intimately familiar medieval Western Europe.

Eastern Europe, on the other hand, is an underutilized setting. It comforts readers with its vague familiarity of childhood fairy tales and amazes with the promise of the mysterious, exotic, and unknown. No wonder that some of the authors strive to uncover this setting in their literary endeavors.

But how can they paint the vivid landscapes of Eastern Europe in the limited wordcount of a book aimed at teenagers? They will have to rely on national stereotypes, a sure way to quickly introduce the readers to the setting and its atmosphere. But how successful can the implementation of stereotypes into young adult fantasy be? And what possible consequences might reliance on stereotypes have?

We will attempt to answer the question in this work.

The **topicality** of this paper lies therein:

- young adult fantasy literature continues to be an emerging literary genre that has not garnered significant scholarly interest outside of theoretical or educational contexts;

- there is a considerable body of literature examining the perspectives of Eastern Europeans towards the rest of the world and vice versa, but there is a lack of discourse analyzing such perspectives in modern popular literature.

The **subject** of the study is the perception of Eastern Europe in American young adult fantasy literature.

The **object** of the study are two young adult fantasy trilogies, the *Shadow and Bone* (or the *Grisha*) trilogy by Leigh Bardugo and *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy by Emily A. Duncan.

The **aim** of this study is to recognize some of the national stereotypes concerning Eastern Europe in American young adult fantasy literature and predict what kind of impact these stereotypes may have on its readership.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, we set the following **tasks**:

- to outline the history of young adult literature;
- to develop ways of defining "young adult" and "fantasy" literature'
- to explore the popularity of Eastern Europe as a setting and reasons for interest in it;
- to explore the origins of stereotypes related to Eastern Europe;
- to predict how the interaction with the stereotypes may influence the readership;

The methods of comparative analysis, reader-response, descriptive, and deductive analysis were used in the study.

The **scientific novelty** of the obtained results lies in the fact that young adult fantasy literature was not analyzed from an imagological perspective before.

The **practical significance** of the work lies in its use in future research as well as in classes on literary theory.

The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions to each chapter, references, and a summary in Ukrainian.

The **introduction** describes the general characteristics of the master's thesis and outlines its key features.

**Chapter 1** analyzes the history of young adult fantasy literature as an independent genre, its key features, and the representation of Eastern Europe in the genre. It also establishes the concepts of "young adult literature" and "fantasy literature."

**Chapter 2** analyzes an imagological approach to analyzing a literary work and explores some of the most popular stereotypes about Eastern Europe.

**Chapter 3** demonstrates some of these stereotypes in young adult fantasy literature, analyzes their significance within the text, and predicts their significance without text.

**Conclusions** serve as a general summary of the perceptions of Eastern Europe in American young adult fantasy fiction.

## **CHAPTER 1: YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE. ORIGINS AND FEATURES**

### **1.1 Young Adult Literature: Introduction and Origins**

Young adult literature is now the dominant force in the modern literary scene, exerting a significant impact on the interests, tastes, and attitudes of contemporary readers.

The concept of literature targeted exclusively at children is a relatively new development. Sarah Trimmer, a prominent British novelist, renowned critic of children's literature, and notable figure in educational reforms, was the pioneering advocate who first articulated the need for literary works tailored expressly to cater to the adolescent demographic. In her periodical, *The Guardian of Education*, she wrote about the need for "safe and good books" for children and young people that would be selected "from the most respectable sources" (Trimmer, 1802). She further says that she supposed "all young gentlemen and ladies to be Children, till they are fourteen and young persons till they are at least twenty-one; and shall class books we examine as they shall appear to us to be suitable to these different stages of human life" (Trimmer, 1802).

Trimmer agrees with contemporary biologists and publishers on two key points: firstly, that young adults, often referred to as teens, include individuals aged between 14 and about 21 years old; and secondly, that this developmental phase represents a suitable era for the introduction of increasingly sophisticated and complex topics into their cognitive framework. However, the consensus stops at this point. Sarah Trimmer, a staunch adherent of the Christian faith, contends that literature targeted at young adults should embody a paradigmatic representation of Christian values, thus serving as a guiding influence for children. Conversely, contemporary book publishers tend to use the "adult" aspect of young adult literature as a means to include more explicit subject matter in these works.



It is evident that Sarah Trimmer did not publish her periodical with the explicit aim of catering to the audience of her recommended novels. The intended audience of the message consisted of responsible adults, parents, and guardians who were expected to take the author's recommendations seriously and obtain suitable literature for their children. Contemporary young adult literature has a considerable degree of similarity. Although it undoubtedly attracts young audiences, it must also cater to mature viewers. Not only do adults aged 18–64 make up the bulk (70%) of young adult literature readers (Peterson, 2014), but the prevailing majority of books are "written by adults, published by adults, reviewed by adults as well as marketed by, and, in fact, for adults as they are usually the ones who make books available to children both educationally and economically" (Steveker, 2015, p. 150).

Throughout its history, young adult literature has shown a dual nature, either primarily targeting adult readership with its subsequent appeal to adolescent audiences emerging as an unforeseen but appreciated byproduct or consciously considering the adult demographic from the start. The first instances of such works may be found in popular literature from the second half of the 19th century. Despite the prominent inclusion of young adult protagonists in the literary works of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling, Louisa May Alcott, and Robert Louis Stevenson, it is important to note that these authors did not specifically target young adult readers as their primary audience. Instead, their focus was on creating narratives that would resonate with a broad spectrum of readers.

The rise of literacy rates among children and teens, together with the popularity of the aforementioned novels, led to a need for more literature that not only included young adult main characters but also catered specifically to their needs and interests. Examples of such books include *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Secret Garden*, the *Little House* series, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Lad: A Dog*, and *Emily of New Moon*. In her work titled *Writing for Young Adults*, Sherry Garland provides insights into the literary landscape of the time: "It seems that any story with an orphaned child or an animal protagonist was considered proper reading for American youth". (Garland, 1998, p. 6)

Another notable trait of the literature of this period was the preference for realistic depictions of everyday life, which led to a lack of fantastical elements. The narratives encompass certain elements that necessitate readers to temporarily suspend their disbelief, particularly in the case of literary works featuring animal protagonists, wherein the protagonists possess the capacity to communicate and engage in rational thought akin to human beings. However, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of these fantastical elements bear a stronger resemblance to the traditional conventions observed in fairytales rather than strictly adhering to the established norms of the fantasy genre. During a significant portion of the 20th century, there existed a persistent inclination to depict the challenges and difficulties associated with the process of growing up in a way that was firmly rooted in reality. The pattern persisted with notable works of adolescent literature such as *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger and *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. The previously mentioned literary works, albeit including teenage protagonists as central characters, were not intentionally designed to appeal exclusively to the adolescent population. Nevertheless, the latter quickly rectified this marketing oversight, instigating a transformative paradigm shift within the realm of young adult fiction. "It felt shockingly authentic: a novel by a real teenager, about the things real teenagers care about. After its publishers marketed it to real teenagers, it became one of the bestselling YA novels of all time" (Grady, 2017). The following few decades saw a gradual increase in interest in the genre, although it remained largely obscure and continued to focus on the realistic, if dramatized, depictions of adolescence. For contrast, Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which was adapted for a younger readership at the urging of her publisher, stands as an example of early young adult fantasy.

The landscape of young adult literature underwent a significant transformation in 1997 when J.K. Rowling's novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published. Nowadays, the book is classified as middle-grade, that is, specifically intended for children between the ages of 8 and 12. However, as the series progresses, both the protagonists and the author's voice mature, and the later books in the series

are appropriately placed in the young adult category. "Voracious appetite arose for books aimed at children that adults would enjoy too, and that appetite quickly shorthanded itself into "books for teens"" (Grady, 2017).

More and more books aimed at young adults were created after the Harry Potter series became so popular. Some attempted to replicate its popularity by mimicking its style and form, while others followed its substance by inserting fantasy elements into the real world. The notable representatives of the latter category are the *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer and *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins. These books became massive hits, fueling the growing demand for young adult literature. The *Twilight* series introduced a love story between a human and a vampire, while *The Hunger Games* explored a dystopian society where teenagers fought for survival in a televised death match. Both series tapped into the desires and fears of young readers, solidifying the place of young adult novels in the literary landscape.

Not only did the successful adaptations of the novels become profitable films, but they also attained cult status among their respective fan bases. The series' profound impact had a lasting effect on popular culture and the young adult publishing industry. Initially, authors and publishers endeavored to replicate its success by producing numerous imitation novels that utilized the same premise and, in the majority of cases, had extremely similar plot points; later, publishers attempted to deviate from the standard established by the books.

The rise of social media contributed to the visibility and popularity of young adult literature, as well as its accessibility and proximity to the audience. Social media platforms provide a space for readers to share and discuss their opinions about books and recommend their favorites. With the rise of short-form content, communities like BookTok became incredibly popular; in January 2023, the community had "over 29.1 billion views" (Macready, 2023). This surge in online book communities has allowed young adult literature to reach a wider audience and gain recognition beyond traditional literary circles. As a result, authors and publishers have started to take notice of these

digital platforms, actively engaging with readers and even adapting their marketing strategies to cater to this new wave of online book enthusiasts. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the app, which promotes content based on trends and similarity to other, previously published content, the BookTok favorites tend to be very similar to each other. As Elizabeth Wolfe puts it, "it results in an echo chamber that doesn't leave much room for deviation from trends, for diverse authorship and content" (Wolfe, 2022).

## **1.2. What is young adult fantasy literature: Features of the genre**

As previously stated, young adult literature has a significant presence in the publishing sector. This section will examine the distinguishing characteristics between adult and young adult fiction, as well as the specific attributes of the genre that contribute to its broad appeal across diverse audiences.

The definitional complexity of both elements of the genre has long perplexed scholars, owing to their widespread usage. The existing definition of "fantasy" is "a creaking superstructure on top of the genre," according to Kim Wilkins (Wilkins, 2019, p. 3). There have been some influential works that discussed the definition of fantasy from a literary perspective. One notable scholar in this field is Brian Attebery, who, in his work titled *Strategies of Fantasy*, takes a unique approach to defining fantasy. Rather than focusing on the boundaries of the genre (i.e., "where does fantasy end?"), Attebery explores the roots and origins of fantasy (i.e., "where does fantasy start?"). In his work, Attebery provided the following definition: "'Genres may be approached as "fuzzy sets", meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center" (Attebery, 1992, p. 12). *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* also defines fantasy in incredibly broad terms as the genre that exists "in contrast to Realism" and "is a most extraordinarily porous term and has been used to mop up vast deposits of story that this culture or that — and this era or that — deems unrealistic" (Seed et al., 1999, p. 337). Lucie Armitt also defines fantasy in an incredibly broad manner, going so far as to claim that "all fiction is fantasy". She further claims that fantasy is created as a result

of "a dynamic meeting point giving shape to unique pleasures" (Armitt, 2005, p. 2). Farah Mendlesohn agrees with this definition, claiming that fantasy is "heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xiii). These authors' broad definitions of fantasy highlight its eclectic nature and capacity to include a wide range of fictional works. From their respective viewpoints, it appears that fantasy transcends genre and elemental boundaries, instead emerging from the dynamic interplay between the author's imagination and the reader's active participation. This implies that the main appeal of fantasy does not lie within a certain set of tropes or conventions, but rather in its ability to ignite the reader's imagination and transport them to new and fantastical worlds. It is this sense of wonder and escapism that draws readers to fantasy, allowing them to temporarily leave behind the constraints of reality and explore limitless possibilities.

These specific descriptions aim to challenge the conventional notion of fantasy as a genre characterized by rigid formulas, limited diversity, and innovation. While it is indeed accurate that employing recognized and familiar tropes and literary conventions may serve as an efficient way to promptly create the ambiance or narrate a storyline, the primary allure of fantasy, in my perspective, is not in the elements that are replicated throughout many books but rather in the aspects that set them apart. The presence of recognizable and formulaic elements in novels has two purposes: it enables readers to temporarily suspend their disbelief and accept the underlying assumptions of the fictional universe, and it helps authors divert attention from one aspect of the book in order to focus on the development of another.

Thus, in order to enhance the simplicity of the concept as proposed by earlier scholars, Wilkins presents a more concise definition of fantasy. Her definition disregards the concepts existing in a text, instead relying on the audience's established notions about the genre and previous experiences with it. She suggests that "it is written like fantasy, it is packaged like fantasy, it circulates like fantasy, and it reads like fantasy from the perspective of those writing it, packaging it, circulating it, and reading

it" (Wilkins, 2019, p. 4). Because of its simplicity and ease of application, the definition will be used in this study. The trilogies of *Shadow and Bone* and *Something Dark and Holy* were classified and marketed as fantasy by the publishers, a categorization that has been widely accepted by the readership. The initial installment of the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, with the same title, garnered a classification of 'fantasy' or a related variant, as indicated by readers in excess of 40,000 instances (Top shelves for Shadow and Bone, n.d.). In contrast, the introductory book of the *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy, *Wicked Saints*, received no fewer than 4,000 such categorizations (Top shelves for Wicked Saints, n.d.). The significant disparity in numerical figures may be attributed exclusively to the differential popularity of the respective series rather than stemming from any conflicts among readers regarding the categorization of the texts. Both book series may be categorized as belonging to the genre of 'high', 'epic', or 'immersive' (as suggested by Mendlesohn (Mendlesohn, 2008, xx)) fantasy since they are set in a parallel universe that is apart from our own reality. Specifically, the fictional kingdoms of Ravka and Kalyazin and Tranavia serve as the backdrop for these narratives, where the existence of magic is a fundamental aspect of the world.

The definition of young adult literature is quite straightforward, yet it comes with its own distinct array of challenges and complexities. In the previous section, it has been argued that due to the widespread appeal of the genre among various age demographics, writers and publishers must consistently consider the diverse consumer base, sometimes referred to as the "mixed market" (Spencer, 2017, p. 433), which encompasses distinct preferences, tastes, and demands. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that adult fantasy literature, which tends to be favored by teens, and young adult fantasy fiction, which tends to be favored by adults, are distinct genres with varying appeal factors. In this analysis, we will examine the prevailing characteristics typically ascribed to young adult literature and assess their relevance to the issues under investigation.

Primarily, with regard to their physical attributes, young adult books often have a narrower word count range, spanning from 45,000 to 95,000 words. Nevertheless, in

order to go further into the narrative and intricacies of the characters, authors and publishers opt to extend the plot through subsequent installments—sequels. This marketing strategy seems to be wise: by releasing the debut book, publishers can gauge the audience's interest and gather feedback. Subsequently, they can make an informed decision regarding the continuation of the series, typically in the form of a trilogy, as exemplified by influential works such as *The Hunger Games*. Both research topics are trilogies, which enables them to follow the advice outlined in Syd Field's 1979 book *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* regarding traditional three-act structure. Additionally, these subjects emphasize the development of a subplot within each act, resulting in a more intricate and engaging overall book structure for the reader. The act of splitting the narrative into separate books not only facilitates the advancement of the plot but also enables the distribution of pacing and character development across a greater word count, thus mitigating the risk of rushing through the story.

Another aspect, highlighted by Wilkins, is that young adult books sometimes have a larger font than adult books (Wilkins, 2019, p. 6). The lack of physical copies of the book makes it difficult to verify this fact, but there are several potential reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, it could be attributed to the target audience of young adult books, which primarily consists of teenagers who may struggle with reading smaller fonts. Secondly, it is possible that the intention is to enhance the accessibility and enjoyment of the reading experience for young readers. Last but not least, the desire to enhance the book's overall aesthetic appeal may also influence design choices. Moreover, the use of bigger fonts might potentially enhance visual clarity and facilitate reading, enabling readers to engage completely in the narrative without experiencing eye strain.

The literary works mostly center around teenage characters and their societal roles. The subjects of the study predominantly feature adolescent protagonists, with adult individuals assuming secondary roles as supporting characters or villains and seldom being afforded the opportunity to express their own perspectives. The text exhibits a significant proximity in narrative distance between the characters

and the reader. Typically, narratives are presented from either the first-person or third-person limited perspective. The *Shadow and Bone* trilogy employs a first-person point of view, focusing exclusively on the protagonist, Alina Starkov. In contrast, the *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy utilizes a narrative structure that alternates between six different characters. Among these, three primary characters receive a relatively equal distribution of chapters from their point of view throughout the entirety of the series. Additionally, the third book in the series, *Blessed Monsters*, introduces three secondary characters who are granted their own chapters, presented as interludes.

Readers' proximity to the protagonist of the story is closely linked with other distinctive features of the genre, such as fast pacing and, as a result, limited opportunities for in-depth character reflection. A reduction in the amount of time allocated to character reflection results in the emergence of another notable characteristic, namely, high emotional stakes. Traditionally, young adult literature is characterized by its tendency to evoke intense emotions, perhaps verging on melodrama. This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to the portrayal of adolescent protagonists in these narratives, who exhibit heightened perceptiveness and responsiveness to their environment compared to adult characters. Furthermore, the adult characters depicted in the "adult" literature have a well-defined framework for engaging with the world, and the exploration of their worldview is often an integral part of the story, but teenagers lack such a framework. Furthermore, the establishment of this framework frequently serves as the central focus in young adult novels.

Moreover, the heightened emotional intensity of the narrative influences the subsequent element: the exaggerated relationships among the characters. In young adult literature, parent-child bonds, friendships, romantic involvements, and enmity are frequently portrayed as larger-than-life, and interpersonal connections frequently serve as catalysts for the narrative and additional character growth (or lack thereof). This is true for both trilogies. Although attempting to outline the intricate web of character relationships may prove to be an arduous task, it is noteworthy that romantic



relationships occupy a significant role within both trilogies. In the *Shadow and Bone* series, the protagonist, Alina Starkov, is depicted as having a minimum of three love interests. Each of these relationships serves as the author's sincere attempt to portray distinct life paths that the heroine could choose. The initial installment of the *Something Dark and Holy* series just alludes to the potential existence of a love triangle, subsequently focusing on the advancement of a rather committed relationship between two of the main characters that propels the narrative, compensating for the lack of coherence within the overarching storyline.

The significance of overarching themes is also crucial in assessing the appeal of young adult literature. Although books include a wide range of themes and ideas, the overarching ones are tightly intertwined with the universally shared experiences of adolescence. The popularity of young adult literature can be attributed, in part, to its encompassing themes. Younger readers, as well as those who are a similar age to the protagonists, may interact with these stories aspirationally or in order to contrast their own experiences with those of the characters. Conversely, older readers may find value in these texts as a means of experiencing nostalgia.

The predominant topics mostly revolve around the process of coming of age and the formation of one's personal identity. Risku refers to the combination of these elements as the "liminality of the adolescent existence" (Risku, 2017, p. 32), further categorizing the process of identity formation into two distinct formative encounters, namely, "morality and the individual's relations to institutions" (Risku, 2017, p. 32). Wells lists a total of seventeen recurring themes that are commonly seen in literature targeted at young adults. According to her, the themes explored in this study include "friendship, getting into trouble, interest in the opposite sex, money, divorce, single parents, remarriage, problems with parents, grandparents, younger siblings, concern over grades/school, popularity, puberty, race, death, neighborhood, and job/working" (Wells, 2003, p. 4). Not all of the themes may be applied to the evaluated works, as Wells exclusively focused on contemporary, realistic young adult books. The initial three themes hold significant importance in both book series, whereas the subjects

pertaining to familial affairs bear little relevance. This is due to the fact that the main characters in these series are predominantly orphans, thus their companions assume the role of their biological family. Due to the peculiarities inherent in immersive fantasy, the characters exhibit a distinct lack of care towards matters of popularity. In fact, they purposefully evade any association with popularity, as well as academic performance and educational institutions, unless visiting such an institution (i.e., a library) may propel the plot forward. The exploration of the issue of death is a recurring motif in both literary works, while the theme of neighborhood might be interpreted as the characters' profound concern for their local and broader communities.

### **1.3. Diversity and representation in young adult literature**

Young adult literature is well recognized for its substantial popularity and significant influence on many groups of readers. This underscores the significance of diverse representation, as it serves the purpose of enabling young readers to identify with characters who mirror their own experiences while also fostering empathy and understanding among individuals from diverse racial, gendered, and cultural backgrounds by exposing them to alternative perspectives and unfamiliar cultures. Authors and publishers may contribute to the dismantling of stereotypes and the promotion of inclusivity by incorporating a wide range of representation in young adult fiction. This not only enriches the reading experience for young readers but also contributes to creating a more inclusive and accepting society as they grow into adulthood.

Regrettably, the matter of diversity in young adult fiction has been a longstanding one. Regrettably, the matter of diversity in young adult fiction has been a longstanding one. Snook (2020) found that 35.1% of the young adult novels published by HarperCollins in 2019 featured diverse characters and/or story elements, including aspects like ethnic and sexual diversity. The number of authors of color increased in comparison to preceding years, amounting to 17.6% (Snook, 2020).

This increase in diversity is a positive step forward, but there is still much work to be done to ensure that young adult fiction accurately reflects the diverse experiences of readers. It is crucial for publishers and authors to continue prioritizing inclusivity and representation in their storytelling.

The literary works that are the subjects of the study exhibit a complicated relationship in their depiction of diverse characters and storylines.

From the beginning, it is worth noting that both Leigh Bardugo, the author of the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, and Emily A. Duncan, the author of the *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy, belong to the demographic of white women. This particular demographic is seen to be the most prevalent among young adult writers, as shown by the findings of *The Diversity Baseline Survey* conducted by Lee & Low Books. Although the study in question was released in 2019, it effectively captures the situation of the young adult publishing industry at the time, including the previous four years and potential future developments. According to the survey, 76% of all young adult authors are white, and 74% are cisgender women (Lee & Low Books, 2020). The authors of the survey then compare the results with the first Diversity Baseline Survey, conducted in 2015, and claim that "there is no discernible change to any of the other racial categories. In other words, the field is just as White today as it was four years ago". (Lee & Low Books, 2020). The number of women in the field had minimal fluctuations, suggesting the field's relative stability. The genre of young adult fiction is well recognized for its notable representation of female authors and readership. This phenomenon may be attributed, at least in part, to the increasing desire for literary works that showcase female protagonists. These characters have proven to appeal to both adolescent readers who want relatable role models and adult readers who may have faced a lack of such role models during their own formative years and now seek comfort in retrospectively engaging with these kinds of books. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the genre's most impactful literary works, namely *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Twilight*, were authored by women. This undoubtedly served as a source of encouragement for numerous women aspiring to become published authors.

Additionally, it prompted a heightened interest among literary agents and publishing houses in discovering the next significant breakthrough among female writers.

Hence, it is plausible that writers belonging to the most prevalent categories may have a sense of motivation, duty, or accountability to include characters who embody underrepresented and marginalized communities, such as those from the LGBT+ community, diverse ethnic groups, or people with disabilities. According to Radulovic (2021), Leigh Bardugo acknowledged her failure to adequately depict marginalized cultures, saying: "I was really echoing a lot of the fantasies I'd grown up with, which were very white, very straight sort of traditional Chosen One stories". The *Shadow and Bone* trilogy does not overtly address the racial backgrounds of many characters, assuming them to be of Eastern European (or, rather, its book counterpart, Ravkan) descent. However, Bardugo has subsequently made efforts to enhance the diversity of her cultures and characters in her later works. This has been achieved through either providing further clarification about the characters in subsequent installments or introducing a new and varied ensemble of characters. Bardugo explains, "As I wrote, as I gained more confidence, I started to write a world that looked a lot more like the world around me" (Radulovic, 2021). Some of her later works, namely, the *Six of Crows* duology was highly praised for passing the Bechdel test, the Mako Mori test, as well as adding a wide range of characters of various races, body types, sexualities physical abilities (some of the characters are disabled) and neurodivergence (Aderhold, 2018).

On the contrary, the reception of Emily A. Duncan's work has been characterized by a wide variety of opinions about her portrayals of underrepresented groups. Upon the publication of her first novel, *Wicked Saints*, the author's depiction of people from diverse backgrounds, including people of color, members of the LGBT+ community, and characters with disabilities, garnered commendation from several critics (Isak, n.d.; Spoiler free review: *Wicked Saints* by Emily A. Duncan, 2019).

Over the course of the series' progression, the author faced scrutiny for incorporating anti-Semitic elements within her literary works, specifically through the inclusion of Vultures, a secret cult that sought to exert influence over the ruler of Tranavia (an equivalent to Poland in the author's fictional world) and abduct children from noble families for the purpose of conducting occult blood ceremonies. The story line in question reinforces the blood libel stereotype—"the false allegation that Jews used the blood of non-Jewish, usually Christian children, for ritual purposes". (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.) Furthermore, it is worth noting that certain members of the royal family possess names of Jewish origin. For instance, one such example is Malachiasz, also known as Malachi in English translation. Another example is Izak, which is a variant of the name Isaac. Lastly, there is Serefin, a name that can be interpreted as a distorted version of Serafin, derived from the name Seraphim. It is interesting to observe that two of these individuals with Jewish-origin names assume the roles of main antagonists within the series. Later, Emily A. Duncan issued an apology on her social media, claiming that "I did recognize the significance while researching and tried to handle this in a sensitive way, but I fell short". (Duncan, 2021). Subsequent analyses offered a more critical evaluation of Duncan's portrayal of marginalized communities, highlighting the little progress made in the depiction of characters, namely those of color and those identifying as LGBT+. This was attributed to the prioritization of the central narrative, which revolved around the romantic relationship between the primary protagonist and antagonist.

In conclusion, the question of diversity in young adult fiction in general and young adult fantasy in particular still remains a topic of discussion that needs to be improved and worked on. Authors must remain committed to authentic representation, learning from successes and failures. Publishers play a vital role in creating an inclusive environment, supporting authors in breaking away from traditional narratives. By collectively striving for more authentic representation, young adult fiction can contribute significantly to shaping a more empathetic and inclusive society for present and future readers. Readers have a pivotal role in generating a need for a wider range

of stories that include individuals from varied backgrounds. Hence, the establishment of a more inclusive environment within the realm of young adult fantasy necessitates a collective effort including all participants in the literary process.

#### **1.4. Eastern Europe as a young adult fantasy setting**

The average American resident often lacks comprehensive knowledge about the names and boundaries of most Eastern European nations and has much less familiarity with the intricacies of the various cultures prevalent in this area. The aforementioned factors, in conjunction with historical occurrences that resulted in the isolation of a significant portion of Eastern Europe from international relations throughout the 20th century, have contributed to the development of an appealing aura of mysticism that continues to captivate authors and readers from the Western world.

Despite the relative interest in the books set in Eastern European settings, there has been very little discussion of the phenomenon in general and the books in particular. Sure, there is an occasional list of book recommendations, but that's where the discussion ends. In this section, I will attempt to look at the most popular books in the category of 'Eastern European young adult fantasy' and deduce what common traits they may have in common.

Typically, writers exhibit a distant and somewhat superficial association with Eastern Europe, along with a desire to investigate or reestablish ties with their familial heritage in that region.

Leigh Bardugo, the novelist renowned for her *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, which is sometimes referred to as the Grisha trilogy, has familial connections to Eastern Europe. Specifically, her maternal lineage includes Lithuanian-Jewish and Russian-Jewish heritage (Johnson, 2015). The narratives relayed by her maternal ancestors served as a persuasive catalyst for her decision to draw upon Russia as a source of inspiration for her novels.

Naomi Novik has a similar story. She is an acclaimed author recognized for her literary works, *Spinning Silver* and *Uprooted*. These literary works might be considered the most renowned instances of young adult fantasy, taking place in Eastern Europe. The author asserts that her stories draw inspiration from her familial lineage, whereby her mother comes from a lineage of Polish Catholics, while her father comes from a lineage of Lithuanian Jews.

In an interview, GennaRose Nethercott, the author of the novel *Thistlefoot*, released in the fall of 2023, discusses the influence of her familial origins in the shtetl of Rotmystrivka, located in the Cherkasy region. Nethercott highlights that the historical experiences of the Jewish community residing in this settlement served as a significant source of inspiration for her literary work (Yu, 2022).

Katherine Arden, the author of the highly acclaimed series of novels known as *The Winternight Trilogy*, does not possess any discernible familial connections to Russia. She resided in the capital for a period of two years and thereafter obtained a degree from a Russian program at the university. The author's profound interest in Russian folklore served as a catalyst for the creation of the story (Speakman, 2017).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Emily A. Duncan does not have any personal affiliations with Eastern Europe; yet, she has acknowledged Leigh Bardugo's work as a significant influence on her own writing. This is likely the reason why her inclination for exploring a culture lacks strength and substantiality and diminishes as the series progresses.

It is evident that among the novels examined in this topic, only the works of Naomi Novik do not present themselves as narratives centered on Russia or its culture. Nethercott's work exhibits a degree of ambiguity in its book synopses. According to the Goodreads platform, *Baba Yaga and her dwelling* were located in Russia. However, the summary provided by Amazon asserts that the events took place in Ukraine, namely in close proximity to Kyiv. In her opinion post titled "An Insider's Guide to Slavic-

Inspired Fantasy," Theo Bileta asserts that, "An outsider cannot be as easily accused of being biased and favouring one Slavic nation over the other, and isn't likely to be labelled a [...] nationalist". (Bileta, 2020) Nevertheless, upon initial examination, it is evident that writers mostly focus their descriptions on a single Eastern European country, while the other countries in the region are often given little attention or mentioned briefly without much consideration. The possible explanation for this will be examined in the subsequent section.

Another notable characteristic of these works is their location in a secondary world that employs an eclectic approach to worldbuilding. This method involves the combining of diverse Slavic components, resulting in a setting that defies easy categorization within a certain temporal or geographical context. This strategy is favored by writers since it allows them to include several linguistic and historical inconsistencies without facing significant backlash.

In the field of Western literature, Eastern Europe continues to be an enigmatic and unexplored territory. The limited number of writers who venture into a literary exploration of this region, whether driven by personal motivations or otherwise, adopt a consistently eclectic approach. Their intention is not only to offer a fresh perspective on Eastern European cultures, but also to streamline their research process and save precious time. The intricate and frequently overlooked geopolitical context gives rise to authors who neglect to thoroughly depict a place, thereby exhibiting bias towards a specific country while disregarding crucial subtleties. Consequently, individuals who possess prior knowledge of the cultures involved may find reading such books to be a less satisfying experience.

## **Conclusions to Chapter 1**

In summary, it can be said that young adult fantasy fiction has had a significant influence on the global book market, extending beyond the borders of the United States. In its first iteration, it was a proposal to enhance the availability of safe and



good books suitable for the adolescent demographic. However, it has evolved into a highly favored literary genre, appealing to individuals across many age groups. The genre saw a significant influence from the emergence of social media, resulting in heightened exposure and increased appeal. Nevertheless, this phenomenon has also sparked inquiries over the growing homogeneity of prevalent trends and the possible danger of diminishing variety in both authorship and the substance of books. The genre of young adult fantasy fiction is characterized by its ongoing evolution and the constant emergence of new challenges. Nevertheless, the genre has shown remarkable flexibility in accommodating evolving reader tastes, new developments in technology, and the capacity to cultivate a devoted community of fans. This genre often extends beyond basic entertainment and functions as a potent instrument capable of influencing attitudes and views among possibly the most susceptible segment of society, teenagers. This genre of literature influences individuals' views and self-perception, as well as their perceptions of those within their own society and those outside of it, particularly those who possess different traits. Hence, it is essential to ensure that there is plenty of substantial representation for diverse groups of people. Authors and publishers have a crucial responsibility to maintain a steadfast dedication to inclusivity and representation in the stories they create. This commitment is essential in order to facilitate the ongoing development of young adult fiction as it adapts to meet the evolving needs and preferences of its audience.

Undoubtedly, despite earnest efforts towards inclusivity and the portrayal of diverse peoples and cultures, young adult fantasy fiction sometimes fails to fully meet these objectives. This characteristic is very prevalent in literary works that attempt to establish their narrative in an Eastern European setting. Insufficient understanding on the part of writers may result in an inaccurate depiction of the place and the perpetuation of preexisting damaging stereotypes. The following chapter will go into the origins and interpretations of these stereotypes.

## CHAPTER 2: PERCEPTION OF EASTERN EUROPE IN LITERARY WORKS

### 2.1. Imagology: Definition and Framework

Throughout history, humans have always strived to differentiate themselves from the foreign and unfamiliar. It is evident, even from the names we give ourselves. Numerous ethnic groups worldwide chose names for themselves that convey the meaning of "human," "same," or "language user," while frequently using terms for the Other that signify "enemy," "different," or "speaker of an unfamiliar language." These perceived distinctions between other groups were ingrained in our collective consciousness, influencing how we view and engage with those who are different from us. Furthermore, the need to categorize others may reflect our shared desire to choose an appropriate category for ourselves. Ultimately, it is more convenient to establish the definition of anything based on what it lacks or how it differs rather than its resemblance. In his work *Imagology: On Using Ethnicity to Make Sense of the World*, Joep Leerssen argues that "a nation is most characteristically itself in precisely those aspects in which it is most different from others" (Leerssen, 2017, p. 17).

Imagology, as described by the editors of *Studia Imagologica*, Joep Leerssen and Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, refers to "the study of cross-national perceptions and images as expressed in literary discourse" (Leerssen & Rodríguez Pérez, 1992). The principal focus of imagological studies is the investigation of "attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices about our own and others' national characters; attitudes which govern our rhetoric, discursive representation, literary activity and—ultimately—international relations at large" (Leerssen & Rodríguez Pérez, 1992). This definition of the field of study not only includes the wide range of topics that imagological studies have explored throughout their existence, but it also includes the main subjects of interest for researchers who aim to integrate imagological studies with other literary theories. This definition has been firmly established and is widely acknowledged.

Imagology deals with a wide variety of issues that are considered to be quite delicate, and it is imperative that these topics be addressed with caution and reverence. Despite the fact that we live in a postmodern society that strives to move away from isolated nationalistic groups and toward a globalized and unified community, it is still important to exercise caution while dealing with national stereotypes and preconceptions.

Hence, it is important to have a framework to effectively engage with these subjects.

In his work *A Summary of Imagological Theory*, Joep Leerssen highlights a crucial principle of imagology: researchers are not preoccupied with the veracity of a particular stereotype or whether it portrays a country in a positive or negative light. Instead, their focus should be on the origins of these ideas and the function they serve within the text.

Furthermore, he emphasizes the literary quality of national stereotypes by stating that these texts often do not depend on the author's direct experience but on the established reputation, which, in turn, is based on preexisting knowledge, thus establishing a text-text link. Leerssen contends that national stereotypes are not arbitrary or coincidental, but rather firmly entrenched in historical, cultural, and political contexts. He thinks that these stereotypes serve as a condensed method of expressing intricate notions and principles about a country or its inhabitants. Furthermore, he contends that national stereotypes are not immutable or permanent but instead undergo transformation and adaptation throughout time in reaction to changing social and political circumstances. In summary, Leerssen's theory of imagology provides a good framework for understanding the origins and importance of national stereotypes in literature and other areas.

## 2.2. The history of imagology

Numerous global cultures possess distinct perspectives toward themselves and their neighboring societies. When these perspectives endure over an extended period of time, they might evolve into stereotypes, which are characterized by the idea that certain character traits are universally inherent to all individuals within a particular group. This concept assumes the existence of a clearly delineated group, specifically within the scope of this research, a clearly delineated nation, and posits that each group possesses a distinct set of attributes that can be examined, deconstructed, and scrutinized to enhance awareness of a nation's "character," and in certain instances, is subject to evaluation.

Undoubtedly, the concept of explaining differences across diverse populations has endured for an extensive period of time. However, for the majority of its historical course, this notion mostly manifested in anecdotal form, transmitted via oral tradition and folklore. During the Enlightenment period, scholars made the first efforts to justify national characters, which is not unusual. Some of the significant pre-imagological writings of that period include Montesquieu's *Espirit des lois*, Hume's *Of National Character*, Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs*, and Vico's *Szienza nuova* (Hayman, 1971). These writings upheld the previous tradition and were mostly descriptive in their portrayal of the manners and traditions of other nationalities, relying on preexisting prejudices and anecdotal evidence.

In the nineteenth century, there was a reevaluation of past writings and beliefs. Cultural stereotypes were increasingly viewed as more than just ethnographic peculiarities of specific groups but rather as inherent anthropological categories: "as patterns of behaviour in which 'nations' articulated their own, mutually different, responses to their diverse living conditions and collective experiences, and which in turn defines each nation's individual identity" (Leersen, 2007, p. 18). This perspective was very compatible with the age of Romanticism, characterized by the emergence of strong national identities and Romantic nationalism. This movement aimed to identify

a nation based on the shared characteristics among a certain set of people rather than the political authority that governs them. This was evident in the enthusiastic fascination with the local cultures. In his 2013 article titled "*Notes Towards a Definition of Romantic Nationalism*," Joep Leersen describes romantic nationalism as "the celebration of the nation (defined in its language, history, and cultural character) as an inspiring ideal for artistic expression; and the instrumentalization of that expression in political consciousness-raising (Leersen, 2013, p. 28).

The intense desire to meticulously outline every facet of a culture, with the aim of not just identifying its inherent traits but also as an act of othering yourself and giving a certain nation a sense of historical tangibility, has given birth to the field of comparative studies. This field also seeks to define distinct boundaries between other countries, characterizing them as independent and mostly incompatible entities.

This perspective has long dominated the study of comparative literature. The prevailing assumptions about nations remained unquestioned and were accepted as a given. They were used as instruments for clarifying the variations in the literatures of different nations, although the source and basis of these assumptions were never investigated. Consequently, literary studies were seen as a means of identifying the true character of a country, as reflected in its historical and contemporary literature.

The belief that national stereotypes are immutable and inherent attributes of an entity reached its zenith with the concept of positivistic determinism, as articulated by Hippolyte Taine in the introduction to his book, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (*History of English Literature*). The author not only asserts the permanence of national prejudices but also classifies them as a fundamental component of the "la race, le milieu, le moment" triad, which equips a literary critic with every instrument necessary to decipher the meanings of literary texts. "Le moment" was described by Georg W. F. Hegel as *zeitgeist*, which refers to the set of characteristics that represent the "spirit of the age" at the time when the literary text was published. "Le milieu," or environment, pertains to the author's own environment, including social and, notably, geographical

aspects. Taine argues that an author's upbringing in a certain milieu strongly influences their literary styles and inclinations. Lastly, "la race," or race, refers to "inherited disposition or temperament that persists stubbornly over thousands of years," specifically referring to national stereotypes, or at the very least, the prevailing concept of national stereotypes at that period.

Nonetheless, the subsequent cohort of researchers criticized Taine's theories. Ernest Renan argued in his lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation* that nationality is not a fixed category, but rather a collection of deliberate decisions made by people. The concept of a nation based on voluntary ties was generally embraced, nevertheless, the notions of nations and nationalities were still seen as distinct and objective entities with well-defined boundaries. Consequently, the research throughout that period concentrated on mapping the evolving depiction and disposition towards a country. Leerssen coins the term "Stoffgeschihte" to describe this method and asserts that all works from this early stage of imagology can be categorized along a continuum: at their weakest, they are simply a record of themes and bibliographical information; and at their strongest, they can track the evolution of fashions, poetics, literary attitudes, and cultural values throughout the centuries (Leerssen, 2007, p. 20).

The significance of such studies is multifaceted. Firstly, they provide a collection of national stereotypes and beliefs that may be used in contemporary research as either a foundation for additional investigation or an examination of the historical era. However, this raises some unsettling questions: which nations were worthy of inclusion in these records? Do the nations included in the research possess more credibility as "genuinely existing" entities? Furthermore, the choice of nations included in these studies is heavily influenced by biases and power dynamics that were prominent at the time they were created. This can lead to apprehensions over the possible exclusion or marginalization of certain cultures or areas, resulting in an inadequate comprehension of global historical and cultural advances.

Following World War II, researchers began to distance themselves from essentialist classifications of national character. This shift occurred as it became evident that nations are not homogeneous entities with shared attributes and that national stereotypes do not represent immutable facts about a particular nation.

The first contemporary versions of imagology emerged during the 1950s in France and swiftly acquired popularity in Western Europe, namely in Germany, where dismantling nationalistic perspectives was seen as an important undertaking, considering their very recent past. The researchers shifted their attention towards national traits, seeing them as patterns of identification rather than fixed identities. Marius-François Guyard was the first person to propose this method in his book *La Littérature comparée* (1951). In the specific chapter titled *L'étranger tel qu'on le voit* (*The foreigner as we see him*), he focused on presenting national stereotypes from a fresh perspective. The information was not provided as impartial and objective historical truths, but rather as depictions and interpretations of many nations from the perspective of the French. Guyard's approach questioned the idea of national stereotypes as definitive truths, highlighting the subjective perspective through which they are formed. By framing these stereotypes as interpretations from a French standpoint, he underscored the cultural prejudices and preconceived notions that influence our comprehension of other nations. This change in viewpoint expanded the potential for comparative literature and cultural studies, prompting researchers to analyze national characteristics as flexible and developing rather than stable and immutable.

At the same time, American literary scholars prioritized evaluating the text critically rather than putting it within its historical and ideological framework. Furthermore, they exhibited a tendency to concentrate on distinct ethnicities as separate entities. This significantly diverges from the current practices of their European counterparts, who, as previously said, sought to dismantle the notion of countries and the associated stereotypes. According to Leerssen, the increasing focus on decolonization, which included the United States as a powerful global entity and a

former colony, led to a blurring of the distinctions between the terms 'states' and 'nations' (Leerssen, 2007, p. 22–23).

The developments in the discipline of imagology have been prompted by the fast shifts in the geopolitical landscape of Europe and the world since the late twentieth century. These changes have prompted a reassessment of the connection between states and nations, along with an acknowledgement of the influence of colonialism and decolonization on national identities. As a result, researchers have had to adapt their methodology and concepts to fit these changing dynamics. The interconnection of several fields of study, which characterizes contemporary research, was another significant factor in the development of imagology. There are scholarly works that aim to establish connections between imagology and several other disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, postcolonial studies, and gender studies. The use of an interdisciplinary approach has facilitated imagologists in acquiring a more profound comprehension of the construction and perception of national identities in a globalized society. Furthermore, the incorporation of several disciplines has also shown the intricate power dynamics and cultural interactions that influence these identities, enhancing the investigation of imagology.

### **2.3. Eastern Europe as the subject of imagological studies**

#### **2.3.1. Tracing the Origins of Eastern European Ethnotypes**

In order to ascertain the significance of Eastern Europe in the field of imagology, it is essential to first define the concept of Eastern Europe. The limits of Eastern Europe have undergone changes since the term was first used during the Enlightenment due to physical, geopolitical, and cultural considerations. The only unequivocal boundary of Eastern Europe is to the east, extending alongside the Ural Mountains. The western boundary of the subregion is less defined; however, there is a general agreement that it is delineated by the western borders of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria (Shvili, 2021).



As previously stated, the term was first used during the Age of Enlightenment to refer to the area that was inaccessible to the French or European Enlightenment. Consequently, intellectuals of that era, including Voltaire, classified this area as uncultured, savage, and completely impervious to the civilizing impact of Western culture. Subsequently, this concept gained traction among the general population and became deeply ingrained in the collective awareness, ultimately proving to be a very fertile environment for the development of various ethnotypes.

Liminality is a crucial concept for comprehending Eastern Europe and the fascination it evokes. Typically, it is used to describe an intermediate position. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as "of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The experts have long recognized the transitory and liminal nature of Eastern Europe. Larry Wolff, in his work "Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment," is credited as one of the first scholars to use the word "liminal" in reference to Eastern Europe. In this section, the author discusses the concept of "geographical liminality" that characterized Eastern Europe's location on the imaginative map of the Enlightenment (Wolff, 1994, p. 210). According to Wolff, the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment developed the notion of Eastern Europe by making comparisons between different nations within the region and then contrasting them with the established European civilization, namely Western Europe. The ensuing construct might be characterized as a "paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe" (Wolff, 1994, p. 7). This elucidates the liminal and transient essence of the area.

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, in his work titled "The Configurations of Postcoloniality and National Identity: In-between Peripherality and Narratives of Change," also highlighted the liminal nature of the area. He refers to it as being in a state of "in-between peripherality." He contemplates the region's inherent feeling of being different and in-between as a result of enduring external subjugation and control (Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1999).

The Cold War's impact on Eastern Europe's isolation is an additional issue to examine in the discussion of the development of Eastern European ethnotypes. It presented the region as having a homogeneous and unified culture, emphasizing its position of being in-between and transient (particularly for the nations that were not part of the USSR but were under its influence). This also emphasized the distinctiveness of Eastern Europe, a region characterized by foreign traditions and political systems, while also contributing to the historical succession of authoritarian and violent rulers that seemed to flourish in the area.

To summarize, the development of ethnotypes associated with Eastern Europe involves a multifaceted interaction of historical, cultural, and geopolitical elements. Since its inception during the Enlightenment, Eastern Europe has been seen as a transitional region with dynamic borders but characterized by a unified and homogeneous culture. The main allure of Eastern Europe lay in its close but distant nature to the observer, allowing them to both connect with their experiences and detach themselves from the depicted subject, while also suspending their skepticism towards the more exaggerated ethnic stereotypes.

Insufficient scholarly works exist that examine the many ethnotypes of Eastern Europe from an American perspective, despite the issue receiving considerable attention from the pioneers of imagology, namely the French and the Germans. Consequently, there is an opportunity for the field of research to expand and advance in order to construct a comprehensive classification of ethnotypes pertaining to Eastern Europe within the American consciousness.

### 2.3.2. Ethnotypes of Eastern European countries in literature

Ethnic stereotypes, also known as ethnotypes, are applicable to both Eastern Europe as a whole and to each individual nation within the area. This section will specifically examine Ukraine, Poland, and Russia to identify the prevailing ethnotypes associated with each country.

Ukraine is sometimes grouped with the former USSR nations due to the difficulty many people have in recognizing them as distinct and autonomous states. When the country is mentioned, it is likely to be in the context of resisting or antagonizing its neighboring countries in order to assert its right to self-determination or to free itself from their control. The upcoming chapter will provide a more comprehensive examination of how Ukraine is depicted in the artifacts under investigation.

The East-West split is present not just in Europe as a whole but also in its sub-regions. The absence of defined boundaries in Eastern Europe significantly impacts the self-perception of its inhabitants, as previously stated. Furthermore, the progressive adoption of Western culture and the increasing acceptance of nations situated farther away from Russia significantly impact the perspectives and attitudes of various areas within the area.

Our journey will begin in the west. Poland is known for having people who have a strong sense of national identity and a deep sense of national pride. In their examination of ethnotypes regarding Poles in the book "Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey," André Gerrits and Joep Leerssen characterize them as "a rustic nation of proud petty nobles [...] with a passionate sense of honour but little practical sense" (Beller & Leerson, 2007, p. 217). Another ethnotype exists as the link between Eastern Europe, namely its western region, and the Jewish population. The primary reason for this is the presence of the Pale of Settlement, a western territory inside the Russian Empire that provided Jewish people with the right to remain permanently. Consequently, a strong connection between the Jewish community and this particular area of Europe was established.

The religiousness of the Polish people is an additional ethnotype that can be interpreted as an extension of their nationalistic pride. Another noteworthy characteristic is the Poles' assertiveness in defending their autonomy and self-

governance. This assertiveness may be attributed to their extensive history of striving for autonomy and self-governance. Over the course of several centuries marked by foreign domination and political upheaval, the Polish populace has steadfastly strived to preserve their own cultural heritage and assert authority over their territory. Their tenacity and resolve have had a significant impact on their national character, which has led them to vehemently defend their autonomy.

Russia has a greater variety of ethnotypes compared to other Eastern European countries. This is because it is seen as a model for understanding Eastern Europe, mostly due to the influence of intellectuals from the seventeenth century. Primarily, the notion that Russia serves as the template for understanding the whole of Eastern Europe and its associated cultures is firmly embedded in Western perspectives and has influenced how people see and classify the area. Moreover, Russia's enormous size and significant historical impact have enabled it to establish a prevailing presence throughout Eastern Europe, reinforcing its position as a cultural focal point. In their survey article on Russian ethnotypes, Bruno Naarden and Joep Leerssen characterize it as "a backward, sparsely populated realm of nobles and serfs, with little political organization and no cultural or intellectual achievement" (Beller & Leerson, 2007, p. 227). Russia successfully established a presence in the Western world, and, for a short period of time, during the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, it even positioned itself as a legitimate peer of other European empires, governed by an "enlightened despot." However, as the Industrial Revolution got underway, its rivals significantly outperformed Russia, cementing the idea that it was a less advanced country, both culturally and technologically. The indicators of underdevelopment were the absence of commercial activity or industrialization, the dependence on serf labor for the estates controlled by the upper class and aristocracy, and the absence of a middle class or public sphere (Beller & Leerson, 2007, p. 227). The emergence of romanticism not only romanticized Russia but also bestowed upon it the esteemed responsibility of serving as a symbolic protector of Orthodox Christianity, as well as the guiding force

in the formation of a united pan-Slavic nation (with Russia naturally assuming a prominent position).

Simultaneously, towards the conclusion of the nineteenth century, the Russian focus on nationality and the perceived and self-appointed distinctiveness of Russian identity resulted in heightened tensions with other ethnic groups within the empire, particularly those located in closer proximity to the West, such as the Finns, Balts, and Poles. Furthermore, the emergence of Romantic literature further enhanced the perception of Russia; the Western world was captivated by the dazzling portrayals of the opulent and refined Russian royal court.

The apparent contradiction between different ethnotypes and the perceived skill of Russians to effortlessly merge them has contributed to Russia's "mystical character" (Beller & Leerson, 2007, p. 229). Furthermore, authors are captivated by the intricate fabric of these stereotypes, prompting them to endeavor to deconstruct (or reconstruct) them in their own literary works.

## **Conclusions to Chapter 2**

Ultimately, the examination of imagology, a field that explores intercultural perceptions reflected in literature, provides a vital foundation for comprehending attitudes, preconceptions, and biases about national identities. Imagology is a field of research that examines the dynamic nature of national stereotypes and how they influence our view of both others and ourselves. Despite the current movement towards globalization and the elimination of national boundaries, imagology continues to be a significant branch of literary theory. It is concerned not only with examining historical events but also with understanding how the past shapes both the present and the future.

Due to the intertwined histories of several European countries, the field of imagology has gained popularity in this region. This enables scholars to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the international dynamics between states throughout many centuries of shared history. Introducing several perspectives for evaluating

ethnotypes enhances the comprehensiveness of the field, resulting in a more holistic understanding of ethnotypes.

Shifting our attention to Eastern Europe, the prevailing historical view of this area as a transitory zone with ever-changing boundaries and a cohesive, uniform culture has endured since the Enlightenment. This persistent perspective offers a chance for more investigation and progress in developing a full categorization of ethnotypes associated with Eastern Europe in the American mindset. The East-West divide, which is apparent not only in Europe but also within its sub-regions, plays a significant role in shaping the intricate and ever-changing imagological environment.

One can observe ethnotypes that have evolved over centuries as a result of complex geopolitical circumstances by looking at specific cases, such as Poland, where their origins date back to the Age of Enlightenment. Following their inception, they have undergone modifications in alignment with the prevailing ideology; however, their fundamental perception has remained mostly unchanged, instead becoming more diverse and layered upon preexisting ideas.

Russia, within Eastern Europe, has a more diverse range of ethnotypes in comparison to other countries in the region. The West became intrigued by Russia's unique blend of backward and modern elements, its cultural hegemony over neighboring countries, and its aspiration to emulate European empires. The oppressive control exerted over its neighbors was regarded as a "special historical trajectory" and a mysterious manifestation of the Russian spirit, further intensifying public fascination.

With the ongoing development of imagology, there are fresh opportunities to examine well-established ethnotypes from novel angles, particularly in relation to American and Eastern European viewpoints.

## **CHAPTER 3: IMAGOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO FANTASY WORLDS: ETHNOTYPES IN THE SHADOW AND BONE AND SOMETHING DARK AND HOLY TRILOGIES**

The writers of the Shadow and Bone and Something Dark and Holy trilogies explore the intricate realm of fantasy, where ethnotypes are reinterpreted and elaborated upon. These books give an exceptional opportunity to examine the portrayal of many cultures and communities, questioning conventional preconceptions and presenting a new perspective on identity and diversity. Through the use of an imagological perspective, readers may gain a more profound comprehension of the complex connections between power, culture, and representation in these fictional realms.

Both trilogies take place in a fictitious version of Eastern Europe, including elements from real-world geopolitical events and drawing inspiration from authentic Eastern European traditions. In the following subsections, we will examine several ethnotypes and their portrayals in both series.

### **3.1. Geopolitical Ethnotypes in Fantasy Worlds**

As previously stated, both trilogies are set in a fictitious rendition of Eastern Europe. Both series fall within the genre of young adult fantasy literature. As discussed in Chapter One, young adult fiction often lacks the ability to effectively address real-life topics, particularly those that are difficult and unfamiliar to the ordinary American without a specialized education, such as the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe. Thus, they function as an ideal representation of the perceptions and ethnotypes within the region in question.

Initially and most importantly, Russia is the dominant power in the territories that are covered in the series. The only country in the fictional world that is subject to Slavic culture is Ravka, which serves as Shadow and Bone's equivalent of Russia. It is surrounded on all sides by adversaries who are continuously attempting to launch a war

of conquest against it. It should come as no surprise that this circumstance brings to mind a strategy that is often voiced by the Russian government. For instance, the Russian president has been known to assert that "the West" is attempting to "cancel russia." Despite the fact that Ravkan culture does not appear to be in danger, the ongoing conflicts that are caused by "border disputes" with all of Ravkan's neighbors, including Shu Han (which is based on real-life Mongolia and China) and Fjerda (which is based on the Nordic countries), are a reflection of the geopolitical situation in Russia and its military conquest, which have been going on for the past few centuries.

The state of internal affairs in Ravka is not significantly better. The kingdom is bisected by an enigmatic Fold, a supernatural chasm resulting from malevolent magic that effectively severs contact between the two halves of the country. Although the books start at a period of relative tranquility in Ravka, the narrative quickly descends into a civil war, marking yet another conflict for the nation. In the series, Ravka is depicted as having a culturally uniform society. However, the real-world events that may have influenced this portrayal are not limited to coups and attempts to overthrow rulers, or power struggles among medieval princes. They also include the numerous uprisings of nations and ethnic groups that were oppressed by Russia. The enslaved individuals under the rule of the Russian Empire were seldom shown as a subjugated "Other," but rather as estranged siblings who had finally reunited and become part of the empire. Undoubtedly, this situation caused confusion and distorted views in Western countries, leading to the portrayal of Russia as a uniform nation engaged in internal conflict with itself without any clear justification.

Consistent with the trends of young adult fiction, Leigh Bardugo depicted the world she constructed for her *Shadow and Bone* trilogy in a very generalized manner. She does not explore the complex political subtleties or intricacies of the country's global position. Instead, Bardugo prioritizes the individual objectives and interpersonal connections of her characters, using the setting of a fractured country to generate suspense and turmoil in her narrative. While this simplified picture may create



misunderstandings about historical truth for the intended demographic, it effectively functions as a narrative technique to attract and fascinate young readers.

Emily A. Duncan's *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy makes an intriguing choice for her creation of the fictional universe. While drawing influence from the actual world, much like Leigh Bardugo, she decided to reverse the East-West axis. Kalyazin, which serves as the fictional representation of Russia in the series, is situated in the west. On the other hand, Tranavia, the fictional counterpart of Poland, is situated in the east. This indicates a change in the roles between the two countries, which will be further explained. However, it does not alter the global standing of the nations. Furthermore, the text does not address the countries' connection with the global community, despite the fact that several individuals involved in the story belong to the royal families of both nations.

Kalyazin is under the rule of an authoritarian monarchy. The majority of authority is concentrated in the hands of the monarch, who bears a striking resemblance to the Russian monarchs of the 19th century. The impact of religion is significant, and it is treated with reverence. Kalyazin staunchly adheres to the orthodox interpretation of their faith and is willing to engage in warfare against anyone whom they see as heretics. This highlights the treatment of religion in Russia, where there is a self-appointed ruler and guardian of Eastern Orthodoxy. Kalyazin is portrayed as a nation that is very rigid in its customs and traditions, sometimes to an excessive extent. This aligns with the conventional Western understanding of Russia.

On the contrary, Tranavia is shown as a technologically sophisticated nation that has developed a superior and contemporary method of harnessing magic. Tranavia and Kalyazin have been engaged in a religious conflict for over a century. Although the initial perpetrator remains unknown, it is said that the conflict never reached Tranavian borders. The story starts with a Tranavian assault on a monastery located deep inside Kalyazin territory.

Presented here is a fascinating instance of role reversal. In this portrayal, similar to Bardugo's writings, the country comparable to Russia is seen as mostly innocent, enduring unfair assaults from its neighboring nations, while the country equivalent to Poland is portrayed as the instigator. Although it no longer accurately reflects the current geopolitical environment, it aligns perfectly with the stated foreign policy of the Russian government.

An ethnotype that exactly corresponds to the aforementioned ethnotype about Poland is its government. In Tranavia, the king has unlimited power, similar to Kalyazin, and is not elected, unlike its real-world equivalent. However, the noble households, known as "slavhki," have even more influence and authority. Throughout the book series, we see that the great families of Tranavia engage in perpetual plotting, either to overthrow the monarch or to fulfill their own petty ambitions. They adhere to established codes of behavior and place great importance on their social status, but this does not deter them from actively seeking to enhance it. They often participate in political scheming and manipulation. It aligns with the perception of Poland as "a rustic nation of proud petty nobles" (Beller & Leerson, 2007, p. 217) and reinforces that particular perspective.

The book series introduces a different ethnotype, which explores the power dynamics inside the nation and examines the real-world implications of the ethnotypes depicted by the writers. The Vultures covertly exercise power over the King of Tranavia. The Vultures lack any distinctive physical characteristics; nonetheless, their behaviors enable us to infer their corresponding ethnic group. The Vultures are a secretive group of humans who possess an extraordinary sort of sorcery. They exert influence on the king of Tranavia and, significantly, abduct children from aristocratic families for the purpose of conducting blood rituals. Moreover, the leaders are named Malachiasz (Malachi or Malachias when rendered in English) and Izak (rendered into English as Isaac). Both are the names originating in Judaism and commonly associated with the Jewish people. This brief summary enables us to recognize the description as pertaining to real-world conspiracy theories such as the notion of a "secret Jewish

government" and the blood libel. The ramifications of the decision were deliberated in Chapter One. It is important to emphasize that regardless of the veracity of the real-world motivations behind the Vultures, their presence in the book serves to reinforce the prevailing notions and perpetuate prejudices that might potentially become detrimental in the future.

Ultimately, although the geopolitical environment depicted in the works may not provide an exact representation of the real-world circumstances, it does effectively portray the prevailing ethnotypes throughout the period of their writing. To build the general feeling of the world and its politics, they depend on the established ethnotypes from prior traditions, using broad strokes. These ethnotypes, although fictional, provide readers with a familiar framework to understand the complexities of the geopolitical landscape in the book. By drawing on pre-existing stereotypes, the author effectively conveys the power dynamics and tensions between different groups within the narrative. However, it is important to critically analyze and challenge these ethnotypes to avoid perpetuating harmful biases in our own understanding of real-world geopolitics.

### **3.2. Religious ethnotypes in the *Shadow and Bone* and *Something Dark and Holy* trilogies**

The trilogies do not just convey the essence of Eastern Europe via implicit allusions to the geopolitical context of the nineteenth-century situation in the region. In the next section, our attention will be directed at a specific subgroup of ethnotypes, namely those that are related to the culture.

We'll start with religion. The religion in both trilogies is an interesting mix of traditionally Christian elements with recognizably pagan ones. Both book series use the cult of saints and traditionally Orthodox designs in the descriptions of churches and temples (and even on the cover art) while mixing in pagan elements like the polytheistic pantheon in *Something Dark and Holy* and, to a lesser extent, in *Shadow and Bone*.

Leigh Bardugo modeled her fictional religion after Orthodox Christianity with certain paganistic influences. First of all, the aforementioned cult of saints functions mostly like it does in Christianity, with people praying to saints in hopes of receiving a miracle, sharing stories of a certain saint's ascension, and using the same stories as moral lessons. However, unlike in Christianity, there isn't a higher power overlooking the saints, so they function as a quasi-polytheistic pantheon.

Another noteworthy characteristic often associated with Eastern Orthodoxy is the presence of a charismatic ecclesiastical head. In *Shadow and Bone*, this ethnotype is shown on two occasions. Firstly, via the character of Sankt Grigori of the Wood, a skilled healer and teacher who imparted knowledge to other magicians who eventually adopted his name as their namesake. The individual's name pays homage to Rasputin, a mystic and faith healer who had significant influence on the Russian royal family during their last years. Another portrayal is seen in the figure of the Apparatus, who serves as the spiritual counselor to the King of Ravka. However, he subsequently attempts to usurp the king and establish a cult centered on the Sun Saint. Furthermore, he endeavors to establish a theocratic monarchy with Alina, the heroine of the series, as its ruler.

The encounter between Alina, the Sun Summoner, who has the ability to manipulate light, and the Darkling, who has the capacity to manipulate darkness and shadows, reflects familiar Christian tropes and allegories.

In *Something Dark and Holy*, religion is less inspired by Eastern Orthodoxy and more by Slavic paganism, or, at the very least, *rodnoverystvo* (Slavic Native Faith), a modern religious movement that seeks to restore the pre-Christian Slavic religion. Kalyazin is not a theocratic society, but it is still heavily guided by religion. The only magic they recognize is the one bestowed to them by the gods and the people who received divine magic are venerated as saints after their deaths. The Church of Kalyazin has a strict order and is fashioned after the Eastern Orthodoxy with churches and

priests, monasteries and monks. At the head of the Church is the Matriarch who is treated as the mouthpiece for gods in the turbulent times.

Tranavia, on the other hand, practices blood magic, where people have to rely on the strength of their own bodies in order to gain mystical powers. It does not have any real-life equivalents, if we do not count the idea of blood libel, which was discussed previously.

### **Conclusions to Chapter Three**

This chapter examines the cultural ethnotypes found in both trilogies, which are regarded as the most important and prominent. Other cultural elements, such as food, drink, clothing, and everyday objects, contribute to the overall atmosphere of the established world. However, these details do not strongly reinforce national stereotypes and instead serve their intended purpose of creating a realistic setting. By including additional cultural subtleties, the fictional world is imbued with a sense of authenticity and complexity, so heightening the reader's capacity to fully engage with the story. They contribute to the overall atmosphere and help create a vivid and believable backdrop for the characters and events that occur.

Reliance on religious and geopolitical ethnotypes is an efficient method for building a global perspective and fostering a cognitive bond between the book and the reader.

Religious and geopolitical ethnotypes require readers to possess a foundational understanding of a nation and then simplify a wide range of attributes such as history, culture, and intricate social systems into clearly identifiable and comprehensible patterns. This strategy facilitates the reader's immediate understanding of a certain environment and its inhabitants, hence enhancing their understanding of the characters' motives and behaviors. Authors may effectively create a detailed background that boosts the reader's engagement in the tale by using religious and geopolitical characteristics. Moreover, these ethnotypes may also function as a method of delving

into more profound topics and social concerns within the storyline, adding intricate levels of complexity to the entire reading experience.

Drawing on pre-established preconceptions may make it easier to establish a conflict and identify underlying themes in a literary work. By using references to historical events, the author may provide a sense of authenticity and enhance the audience's emotional connection to the portrayal of events and people. Overemphasizing ethnotypes may reinforce damaging preconceptions and restrict the inclusion and variety of a story. This might result in simplistic and superficial depictions of personalities and inadequately represent the intricacies of actual people or cultures. Moreover, relying on preconceived preconceptions might impede the investigation of fresh viewpoints and impede the advancement towards a more comprehensive narrative. Although religious and geopolitical ethnotypes may facilitate efficient communication, it is crucial to handle these representations with delicacy, refraining from oversimplification and the maintenance of stereotypes. An in-depth comprehension of a nation's culture, history, and variety surpasses these ethnotypes and is essential for a more precise and considerate depiction.

## CONCLUSIONS

The genre of young adult fantasy literature is very adaptable and responsive to ever-evolving reader preferences. Originating as a modest collection of suggested novels aimed at cultivating moral values and social propriety among adolescents, this genre swiftly ascended to become one of the most influential categories in the book industry.

The objective of this study was to develop accurate definitions for the terms "young adult" and "fantasy literature." Kim Wilkins, who promoted the use of reader-response theory, proposed an ideal method for defining these extremely broad genres. This technique not only considers the unique characteristics within the text itself but also takes into consideration external factors, such as the interaction between the readers and the text. In this manner, we can guarantee the variety and advancement of the genre, along with its ongoing modernization.

Imagology primarily aims to investigate cross-cultural interpretations expressed in literature and provide a crucial basis for understanding attitudes, preconceived notions, and prejudices about national identities. Imagology is a scientific discipline that explores the fluidity of national stereotypes and their impact on our perception of both foreign individuals and our own identity. The primary focus of contemporary imagology is not to simply describe stereotypes or ethnotypes (ethnic stereotypes), but rather to investigate the origins and implications of ethnotypes, their interplay with one another, and their impact on interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The allure of Eastern Europe has always fascinated visitors, scholars, and ordinary people. Historically, this region of Europe was often seen as uncivilized and resistant to the efforts of civilization, serving as a transitional zone between the mysterious East and the more familiar West. The state of being in a transitional or

intermediate phase makes Eastern Europe an intriguing enigma, particularly for authors, artists, and intellectuals. Regrettably, the same cannot be attributed to young adult fantasy novels set in Eastern Europe. There is a conspicuous dearth of literature about this region. There are many variables that may contribute to this.

- In the era of rejecting traditional literary works, both authors and audiences may like to explore more unique and unexpected settings rather than the well-known regions of Europe.

- Some authors may believe that the intricate and multifaceted history of the area necessitates a sophisticated approach that cannot be adequately conveyed in a young adult fantasy novel, which often has shorter lengths, fast-paced narratives, and limited worldbuilding.

The primary focus of this analysis is on the use of ethnotypes in the young adult fantasy trilogies *Shadow and Bone* and *Something Dark and Holy*. These ethnotypes serve the purpose of evoking a sense of the world and minimizing the amount of time dedicated to worldbuilding. The use of ethnotype significantly aids the author in establishing a familiar and credible universe.

Nevertheless, the preconceptions that both writers depend on are seldom impartial. Although many religious stereotypes about Eastern Europe are innocuous and depict it as a vaguely recognizable place with fantastical elements, the geopolitical ethnotypes can be seen as more detrimental. These ethnotypes perpetuate the notion of Russian exceptionalism, which in turn supports the expansion of Russian colonialism. Emily A. Duncan used a damaging stereotype that reinforced longstanding notions about Jewish people possessing a covert global governance and engaging in blood libel. Although these stereotypes may not be explicitly harmful or radicalizing, they nonetheless provide a negative or unjustifiably idealized portrayal of many populations.



To summarize, more investigation in this area is necessary to examine the need of critically analyzing the entrenched ethnotypes and their impact on society. Through analyzing the influence of these deeply ingrained ethnotypes, we may get a more comprehensive comprehension of their role in perpetuating systemic discrimination and prejudice. Moreover, it is essential to confront and challenge these preconceptions in order to cultivate inclusiveness and advance a fairer society that values people irrespective of their cultural or ethnic heritage.

## SUMMARY

Young adult fantasy literature is an emerging literary genre that has gotten little scientific attention outside of theoretical or educational contexts. Additionally, current discourse lacks imagological evaluations of popular literature and discussion of its impact on readership.

Chapter One examined how young adult fantasy fiction became popular, as well as pointing out its distinct features: volume, topics, and worldbuilding and characterization approaches. We also discussed the genre's depiction of diverse demographics and its importance to its primary audience. Finally, we examined the popularity of Eastern Europe as a setting for young adult fantasy and why authors choose it.

Imagology as a literary criticism field was defined and explored in Chapter Two. The study traces the history of imagology from Enlightenment ethnography to Romanticism's anthropological classification of nations to modern imagology and its effect on the literary process. We examined the stereotypes about Eastern Europe and its states as a liminal space where modernity and history, stagnation and progress, and Eastern and Western influences meet. Most stereotypes developed during the Age of Enlightenment and grew into a complicated, often conflicting picture of the place.

Chapter Three examined some of the ethnotypes in current young adult fantasy literature. The *Shadow and Bone* and *Something Dark and Holy* trilogies by Leigh Bardugo and Emily A. Duncan were examined. Our investigation has shown that utilizing national stereotypes to establish a literary piece's setting based on audience knowledge and expectations is efficient. The authors of the examined novels did so by constructing their settings around well-established ethnotypes. The majority of ethnotypes used in the works accomplished just that by using well-established ethnotypes and constructing the world based on them.

We concluded that literary ethnotypes demand additional care and attention for two reasons. Young adult fantasy fiction targets teenagers who are developing their worldview. Authors who portray outdated or negative ethnotypes may negatively impact readers by shaping their attitudes. Writers may improve their work and attract curious readers by critically analyzing ethnotypes in their stories. We also suggest this field deserves additional research and examination.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Підліткова фентезі література — це новий жанр у літературознавстві, що ще не отримав достатньої уваги від наукової спільноти поза межами теоретичного та освітнього контекстів. Крім того, сучасному літературному дискурсу бракує імагологічного аналізу популярної літератури та обговорень її впливу на читацтво.

У першому розділі ми розглянули, як підліткова література стала популярним жанром, вказавши також її особливі риси: об'єм, тематику, підходи до побудови світу та характеристики персонажів. Ми також дослідили, як у жанрі відображені різні демографічні групи та яке значення це має для цільової аудиторії. Насамкінець, ми розглянули популярність Східної Європи як сетингу підліткового фентезі та чому автори цікавляться саме нею.

У другому розділі ми знайшли визначення імагології та дослідили її як галузь літературознавства. У роботі простежено історію імагології від етнографічних досліджень Просвітництва до антропологічної класифікації націй доби Романтизму і до сучасної імагології та її впливу на літературний процес. Ми розглянули стереотипи про Східну Європу та її країни як лімінальне місце, де змішуються сучасність та історія, стагнація та прогрес, Схід та Захід. Більшість стереотипів сформувалися в епоху Просвітництва і переросли у складну, часто суперечливу картину цього місця.

У третьому розділі ми дослідили деякі етнотипи в сучасній підлітковій фентезі літературі. Були розглянуті трилогії "Тінь і кістка" Лі Бардуго та "Щось темне та святе" Емілі А. Дункан. Наше дослідження показало, що використання стереотипів для створення сетингу, ґрунтуючись на існуючих знаннях та очікуваннях аудиторії є ефективним. Автори досліджуваних творів досягли цього, будуючи свій світ довкола усталених стереотипів.

Ми дійшли висновку, що літературні етнотипи потребують додаткової уваги й обережності з двох причин. По-перше, підліткове фентезі орієнтоване на підлітків, що тільки формують свій світогляд. Автори, які зображують застарілі або негативні етнотипи, можуть негативно вплинути на читачів, формуючи відповідні погляди. Письменники можуть розширити межі своєї творчості і привабити зацікавлених читачів, критично аналізуючи деякі з етнотипів у своїх творах. Ми також вважаємо, що ця сфера заслуговує на додаткові дослідження та аналіз.

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