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Evil versus Evil: The Sense of No Good in

***Vicious* by V.E Schwab**

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Dedication

To you :

Dreamers, achievers, stargazers.

To you :

Angels with no wings

“Ars longa vita brevis”

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To my seven beautiful birds; thank you for cheering and encouraging me, and though you are far away from me, you are always near here in my heart.

To all I say: thank you.

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the sense of viciousness and the absence of generated goodness as a whole using V.E. Schwab's *Vicious* as a case study. *Vicious* is a fantasy novel that revolves around two best friends; Victor and Eli; who once acclaimed superpowers turned to sworn enemies. The novel has subverted the general understanding of the duality of good and evil. Hence, this study attempts to discuss this ancient rivalry of heroes against villain and to throw the light on the new trend adopted by fantasy novels. This trend centers on expelling the sense of goodness out of the protagonist leaving him/her more of a villain than a hero. Since evil versus evil is the center of this study, both Victor Vale and Eli Ever will be discussed both through a psychoanalytical perspective dwelling on their motives, beliefs, and psyche to determine who is the real villain.

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Introduction

Literature is one of the many manifestations of what is known as the *fine arts*. It is that sophisticated body of poems and prose. It is what descends through time and space. Literature has a lot of genres and types that are celebrated throughout the world, fantasy is being one of them. Fantasy is the genre where pure imagination is the prime ruler, that free ticket, what grabs your hand granting you the ability to explore virgin lands and experience heartfelt events everywhere and every time. In the land of chivalry, the land of heroes and villains, the clash between good and evil never ends and that is what fantasy novels invest in conveying to its readers.

The concept of the rivalry between what is by nature good in the literary works and what is presented as the pure evil is somehow an old concept that is discussed by many writers and in many novels throughout the years. However, this concept is being modernized in the contemporary novels in order to satisfy the demands and fantasies of the new era readers.

V.E. Schwab is but one of many writers that attempted at this concept in her novel entitled *Vicious* (2013). In the novel the central conflict is not between what is good or what is evil, but the true clash is between what is presented as evil and what is a pure evil. The novel depicts the friendship of two male students; Eliot “Eli” Cardale and Victor Vale. As the story unfolds, this friendship turns to a journey of vengeance aided by the possession of superpowers at both ends and driven by the sense of both loss and betrayal.

This study will be concerned with discussing the theme of evil against what is evil in the fantasy as presented by V.E. Schwab in her novel entitled *Vicious*. This novel is considered to be one of the few novels that tackles this theme in an obvious way. It is tackled so greatly, that it leaves the readers at the edge of their seats, not knowing who is really the real and pure manifestation of evilness. The study seeks to answer the following questions: What is really a

hero? What is the clear and distinct good? How does the novel represent the absence of goodness? How does the novel represent the clash between evil and evil? Who is really guilty and who is innocent? And many other questions, using *Vicious* as a case study.

Vicious, being published in 2013, is considered to be a relatively a new and recent work, that none had worked on before. However, this thesis will be a humble contribution at analyzing this great work, exploring the message held by the events discussed in the book, and examining the fight that shaped the book in one of the few best that took this risk and succeeding in it.

V.E. Schwab is an aspiring American author, who made her debut in 2011 with *The Near Witch*. Then wrote *Vicious*, her first attempt at adult fantasy in 2013, to show and exhibit her love to the concept of rivalry between the hero and the villain, she experimented with super powers, her second favorite thing after writing, and comics to produce *Vicious*, where the strife is not between a hero and a villain but, between two friends, as equal as each other in terms of evilness. She wrote many other magnificent works that manifest her unique sense of fantasy.

The absence of the good depicted in the novel and the clash between the two once friends make the Psychoanalytic theory the most appropriate approach to analyze the novel. Psychoanalytic criticism is a literary theory that is influenced majorly by Sigmund Freud's works and inquiries related the conscious and unconscious of the human being. By using this approach the study aims to investigate what leads to the two friends dissections, and to understand their motives, beliefs, ideas, the sense of loss and betrayal they both experienced and led to the events as it is known in *Vicious*.

This study will contain three chapters. The first chapter will tackle the theories of the fantasy writings as well as the theme of evil in fantasy novels. The second chapter is

analytical and will try to analyze the absence of the good in the novel. The third chapter will be a continuation as an analytical chapter also tackling the theme of evil versus evil.

The first chapter in this thesis is a theoretical. The first part will deal with a detailed background of the fantastical literature, where a broad history about the origins, and the first fantasy novel, definitions, and what really characterizes this type of novels from other types will be discussed. Also an attempt is sought at answering one of the most asked questions regarding fantasy as a genre, which is to which category fantasy is suitable, children, young adults, or adults. It also discusses one of the great and prominent works of fantasy, *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R Tolkien; and how it was due to its publication that fantasy regained its popularity. The second part will be dedicated to the representation of the duality good and evil in literature, tackling in this regard this dichotomy, the how and why of its presence in each fantasy novel, discussing in the way both the two sides presenters, the hero and the villain.

The second chapter of this study will provide a brief biography, where the mastermind behind *Vicious* is introduced, and a summary to the events of the novel is served. This chapter also will mainly deal with the most important components that construct *Vicious* as one of the best novels, which is the superpowers presented, where it plays a grand role in setting the footing of what will happen between the characters as whole. Super powers also can be regarded in *Vicious* as the corner stone that V.E. Schwab has built her universe on, clarifying in the way the absence of good in the novel, that leads to its emergence as a super villain origin story.

The final chapter in this study will be a continuation of the second chapter and will deal in that sense with the battle of bad and worse that is created due to the thirst and obsession in obtaining superpowers and the lack of good in the *Vicious*' universe, tackling both parts of the

equation in this battle in the first part. The second part will be more of a deep, psychological analyses to the most intriguing character to determine if he is really a hero as he claims to be, or he is the devil in disguise.

Vicious is one of the most powerful fantastical novels that deals with the real essence of the humans and how they are easily manipulated. How at any spark of power, they lose that fragile control over the monstrous beast living inside each and every one of us, forfeiting in the process their humanity to the devil himself, dubbing the once good person to the most dangerous and fearful villain.

Chapter One: Into the Fantasy Literature: Heroes, Villains, and More

A map to a theoretical journey will be displayed in the first chapter. The first section will mainly be about exploring fantasy, its characteristics, and origin. This section will provide answers to a fundamental question concerning fantasy which is: Is fantasy for children, young adult? Or is it for adult? In this part also; the most important fantasy works of famous author will be served and tackled. The second section of the journey will shed light on the most intriguing part as the representation of good and evil in literature is discussed, tackling issues like, why is it always good versus evil at the core of the fantastical prose? What are usually the characteristics of a hero? And what are those of a villain?

I. 1. Origins and Definitions of Fantasy

I.1.1. The First Fantasy Literature

Literature with its genres is not the creation of today, it did exist with the dawn of human existence on this earth, it took different forms starting with the oral representation moving to the written form with the creation of a symbolic system and with the evolving of the humans. Fantasy as a genre of literature also started in fourteenth century with the oral literature “folktale”, which then was transformed and melted into the early works of the seventeenth century. In *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz states that “primitive fantasy was absorbed effortlessly ... from the oral tradition from the fourteenth century through to the seventeenth century” (15), among the famous works produced at that period are those of Shakespeare.

The eighteenth century brought a change to the literature body, introducing in the way more pragmatic events than those of fantasy, “in children’s literature, the eighteenth, nineteenth century, the age of pragmatism, saw a battle between the fantastic on one side and evangelism and flat-footed practicality on the other” (Hunt and Lenz 16). In other words, the

events depicted in most of the produced works at this period were of naturalistic nature, fantasy on the other hand did not clearly disappear completely, however authors learned how to incorporate pragmatic; realistic events with hints of romance and a flavor of fantasy. In the end works with fantastical traces produced during this period faced two alternatives either to be a “popular” fiction also known as the *gothic*, or to be labeled as the *orient* which means a passing fiction (Hunt and Lenz 16).

Literature in the nineteenth century as it was mentioned still celebrated pragmatism, however it was in this century that the torch of the fantastical literature was light up due to the publication of Lewis Carroll and Christian Anderson works. The authors were still influenced by Brothers Grimm’s story recollections. They both, however made alternative changes; as both authors discussed and incorporated the place “ here” and time “now” in their works, the result was the emergence of fantastical worlds highly believable and independent, in other words, “this creation of words of enchantment is what sets literary fantasy apart from the cultured tale of the past” (Gates et al . 4). This contribution is what opened the doors to more new experiments in the fields of the fantastical resulting in the creation of more authentic and creative works.

The twentieth century was highly effected by both the First and Second World Wars, adding to that the Vietnam War in America, the result of all this distraction and mass deaths led to the only path known and was resulted in the fantasy downfall. Fantasy was neglected and lost its popularity in America more than in Britain. By the 1920’s and 1930’s writers in a way started documenting their reactions, mainly fear, towards the First World War events and results by hiding and creating according to Hunt and Lenz “(an) escapist worlds” (19), that attributed in the once again brought up flourishing upon the nearly dead genre. After the Second World War, fantasy succeeded even more. However, the production of this period were of contradiction to those work produced after the First World War, in the sense that the

literature in this period introduced as more uneasy and unsettling subject matters; writers tended to dive more toward the threatening and disruptive elements and events because, “the issues at stake are now generally much greater: battles between good and evil rage in and ate our world” (19). Both World Wars played a huge part in the fragmenting and upbringing of fantasy as a genre, it was once abandoned and neglected, to be once fully embraced as the escapism took over the fantastical universe.

The 1960’s was notably recognized by the rise of the adult fantasy to dominance “in its visible sword and sorcery form”, it is also a fact known that during this era, *The Lord of the Rings* by its author J.R.R. Tolkien became a huge success, resulting in many authors taking this incredible phenomena as an inspiration (Hunt and Lenz 18-20). The fantastical universes kept spreading and developing and in the way incorporating folklore, fairy tales and evolving in the fantasy known today.

Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, writers of *The Alternative Worlds in Fantasy fiction*, believe and explain that the one thing that can be said of the twentieth century fantasy is that, “how often it both reflects and transcends its time” (18). It is safe then to say that fantasy in the twentieth century is not only about unreal events, fairy tales and imaginative quests, yes fantasy can include all the aforementioned aspects, but it goes beyond all that to explore new worlds, new lives and new problems. In the end it can be said that fantasy in the twentieth century celebrated a futuristic views to a better situation especially after the destruction the World Wars brought to earth.

“Fantasy reached its peak in popularity” again when *Harry Potter* series to its author J. K. Rowling was published in the 1991, and being an instant hit, resulted in getting public recognition and wining fans of different ages all over the world which by its turn helped

fantasy to establish its importance and success as one of the most celebrated genre of literature of all time (Havirova 32).

I.1.2. Fantasy: Definitions and Characteristics

Defining the term fantasy is not that easy task, but the most important thing to take into consideration while doing so is to believe that fantasy is not only the written text, it is embedded in the everyday life, like paintings and sculpturing, music and theatre, and in many other forms of art. Despite all what have been said, hearing or reading the word fantasy generally will bring up those imaginary worlds and “(those) images of witches, fairies, dark woods, magic wands and spells, time travel, ghosts and dragons” (Gates et al. 1). Yes it is true that fantasy is all about unreality; imagination and fantasizing, and maybe what makes it even more difficult to draw a clear box to contain fantasy is that it is defined and seen through different lenses, lights, applying various life situations, interpreting it through dreams, opinions and even views, after all “... (O)ne person’s fantasy is another’s norm” (Hunt and Lenz 10).

Fantasy also is believed to involve mainly the mind, it is that act of creating and evoking non-existent and unrealistic events, characters, objects and even whole worlds, just to defeat boredom and merely for the purpose of having fun. In this sense Gates et al., in their book, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adult*, state the following:

Fantasy may refer to the end result of the mental process of fantasizing, in which case it is a by-product of the mind’s capacity to create images of objects not physically present or even possible. These images can be multiple or single, sequential or random. Fantasy may also be the content of daydreaming and reverie, the relatively harmless, short-lived kinds of fantasizing many people indulge in to help relieve boredom or

pass the time. (2)

Fantasy, as it has already been mentioned before, can be traced back to and was originated in the productions of the folktale, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Literature* defines fantasy as “a literary form related to mythology and folklore. Fantasy literature is typically set in non-existent realms and features supernatural beings” (60). In other words, it can be said that fantasy usually is the type of literature that depicts those different imaginative worlds where magic, monsters, fairies, heroes and villains and many other out of this world creatures exist. This view is also shared by Gates et al. as they stated that “(s)pringing from the depths of mythology and the Greek phantasia (making visible), fantasy literature represents our personal need and the universal quest for deeper realities and eternal truth” (1-2). Fantasy then, is the reason, the body of events that help us, humans explore and understand the real world, it provides answers to internal questions and helps in establishing visible and acceptable truths to fathom. What distinguishes fantasy as a power to be reckoned with is its dealing with the never ending struggle of good versus evil, which is deep-seated in the used myths and renewable (2).

Fantasy’s main aim then is to convey the battle between the two powerful forces of good and evil, and to represent the struggles and obstacles faced by every human being walking on this earth. This led Ursula K. le Guin in her collection of essays *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, to believe that “It is fantasy because fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul” (68). To Ursula then, fantasy is only fantasy because it follows that journey, it records the dispute, the fight between good and evil inside the human soul as it lives, evolves and as it encounters life with its obstacles and struggles, it is the answer to the quest.

To Colin Manlove, fantasy is “a fiction involving the supernatural and the impossible” (3). Manlove’s opinion and definition of fantasy is not that different from the other provided definitions by other scholars. He, however, believes that fantasy incorporates both the supernatural, with a of course a sense of impossibility to it in terms of events, creatures, or even the worlds depicted in the novel. Those two essential ingredients; the sense of impossibility and the elements of the supernatural, according to Manlove, are the core of a good produced work of fantasy.

In the end fantasy is the creation of the imaginative mind with flavors of supernaturalism mainly being good versus evil. However, it is impossible to mention and provide what is fantasy in literature without tackling the most perceived features and opinions that distinguish and characterize it as a literary genre.

According to many critics fantasy is nothing but a childish creation, Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz authors of the book *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy* share the same opinion, describing fantasy as “(a) formulaic, childish, and escapist” (2). To them and many others, those are the most famous characteristics that define fantasy, they also perceive it as being conventional, even though it is the product of the author’s pure imagination. It is in a way or another safe to say that, “fantasy can be imitative and derivative” (Gates et al. 5); in the sense that it uses the same repeated motifs and tropes over and over again, it is always; evil monsters, good but misfit heroes, the power of friendship and most if not all the time a happy ending, where good is triumphant.

Fantasy has always been deemed as of an escapist nature, it is impossible to mention fantasy without thinking of wandering in new universes; the relationship of fantasy and escapism is so strong there is no existence of one without the other. However, some view fantasy as of too escapist nature, and many writers deem this relation to have and leave on the

fantasy readers “(a) false impression of the world they live in” (Lewis 37). Jill Parton Walsh also believes that fantasy forces its readers “into a metaphorical state of mind” (qtd. in Hunt and Lenz 8). On the counterpart other critics believe that it is true that fantasy provides and compels its readers to an escapist ventures, however it mirrors the world in a fantastical settings and in doing so fantasy connects the imagination with reality; in other words, fantasy “has an inevitable role as a commentary on, or a counterpart to reality and realism”(Hunt and Lenz 8). They go to the extent of believing that fantasy can be seen as a tool to escape from reality to create fantastical and more lovable worlds and that it is the essence of fantasy which believes in the existence of such worlds. In this regard Tolkien insists that this is a healthy and harmless thing; stating the following:

What really happens is that the story-maker... makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside.
(qtd. in Hunt and Lenz 13-4)

Fantasy literature can also be characterized by its originality and creativity, because in the process of creating a fantastical work and due to the changing, recreating and rebuilding of what was once known and the overly consumed, a new aspects and tropes are created in the sense that “ it plays with what might be (and) makes what does not exists” (gates et al. 5-6), and since it helps in the creation and reconstruction of new images and new worlds out of the scrapes of the perished ones, fantasy is deemed as, “a conservative force” (5-6). In other words, fantasy preserves the core of the worlds with minimal changes to rebuild them again. It is also known that fantasy cannot accept restrictions and boundaries, its refusal of the

traditions helps in: “exposing (the) self interests often lurking behind convention and responsibility” (5-6). All that have been said then can help in conveying the truths and realities hidden behind masks and facades.

The one thing that should be, however, “remember(ed) that the one thing that can rarely said of fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality” (Hunt and Lenz 2). Fantasy has a great relation with reality, the core events discussed in those novels are usually linked to what we encounter in reality, but tightly woven in a magical, fantastical way.

I. 2. Is Fantasy for Children, Young Adults, or Adults?

The first question that comes to mind concerning fantasy is that of its target audience, is it suitable for children, or is it more of young adult literature, or maybe neither, or else it is suitable for adult readers? To answer this question, first a distinction between the three aforementioned factions will be provided, starting with children.

A child, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is “a young person from birth to the age of full physical development” (qtd. in Hofel 18).What distinguishes a child then is the constant development, growing and accepting new patterns, “during this phase, the state of relative psychological innocence and naivety ascribed to childhood is slowly replaced by self conscious state of experience ...” (Hofel 18). It is not known really when this phase starts or when it ends but it is labeled as puberty where the child starts to more resemble a young adult and even adults in coping and understanding the world around them (Hofel 18).

It is always believed and according to Hunt and Lenz view that the most “patronizing still is the view that for children the distinction between reality and unreality is blurred” (6), and due to this held opinion, it is noted that fantasy is a child's game. In a way or another fantasy has always been related to children; fairy tales especially are perceived since forever as an important part of their childhood and as they are growing up. However, some authors

contradicts this commonly held view, Tolkien being one of those, he "... demands a reversal. According to him fairy tales are much more suitable for adults rather than children" (Hofel 22). To unveil this dilemma, and to provide a satisfactory answer, an experiment conducted by Morison et al. in 1981, that thought to represent developmental changes in children's ability to reason about reality and fantasy. The experiment was to present sixteen chosen child ranging from 2nd, 4th and 6th grades to different books and were asked to choose the most realistic ones, then explaining their choices, in a reading to the experiment made by Morison et al. O'Railly et al. show that children start to develop a " healthy skepticism regarding the information that is presented to them" (50), and if this means and proves something it then exhibits the children's ability to discriminate between of what is perceived as reality and what is fantasy. Are children then able to read fantasy? Yes, children then can read fantasy, if the experiment can show something is that children can read and understand fantasy, usually it is with age that children develop this ability, and yes fantasy directed toward children is more or less childish in other words. And according to Peter hunt and Millicent Lenz, usually books of fantasy directed to children or young adult, for them, it " substitutes violence for discussion, friendship for love, romance for passion, magic for achievement –and even food for sex-"(6).

The second category to be discussed is that of young adults. A young adult or a teenager is defined according to *The Collins English Dictionary* as "(a person) between the age of 13 and 19 inclusive" (qtd. in Hofel 19). 'Young adult' then is the name that refers to the period that comes after the childhood, during this transitional period, many changes both physically and personally take place, and to deal and embrace those changes, comes the role of literature, as Hofel states it, "literature for this specific age group therefore has to accept the challenge of doing the splits between a certain degree of stability for its inherently insecure readership and the new, changing reality" (19). Fantasy, being the most incorporated and consumed genre of

literature in this period, tries to serve the solutions to raised questions about those changes, mainly presenting heroes in a transitional period themselves, being different and awkward, serving the same faced struggles and obstacles, is what distinguishes both the protagonists of the fantastical novel and its readers.

Hofel once again refers to one of the most important characteristics of young adult literature stating that, “literature for young adults tries to serve the needs for its audience which find itself in phase of transitional, simultaneously not belonging anymore and not belonging yet” (19). This once again is the core case of most heroes presented in the young adult fantasy today, the protagonists misjudged, misfit embarking in a long journey full of adventures, just to find, their essence, to know their worth, and finally to reclaim their place in the society they once did not belong to, does this sound familiar? Yes it does, because this is the case of most heroes depicted in literary works, and also this is the life of a young adult stuck between being a child and accepting the changes to be an adult. Fantasy then, with its repeated issues tackled, is mainly directed towards the young adults, as Bernice Cullinan suggests “(those) who never reads fanciful stories have a difficult time considering the possibility of fantasy. They are bound to the literal, the practical, the ordinary” (qtd. in Gates et al). Young adult then reading fantasy helps them to shun the difficult and horrible reality even for a just a period of time, they adopt the personalities in the fantastical world to deal with their reality (Gates et el. 2). Literature then to young adults is an important step in further accepting and acknowledging this transitional period, this is pointed by Hofel as follows:

literature for young adults revolves around central pints such as the desire for certainties and knowledge, construction of identity, awakening sexuality, friendship, further detachment from the parents, finding of individual perspectives, broadening one’s horizon and the future position in society. (20)

For both children and young adults, literature and especially fantasy, is nothing but a tool for further developments, for more experiences inside its alternative worlds, in order to find the right path, the right place one can fit in, the satisfaction, and of course answers to many real life questions. However, adults differ from both children and young adults. An adult according to Hofel is someone who, “has reached psychological, emotional and physical maturity and stability. Independence, personal responsibility, liability, rights and duties are some of the main characteristics an adult ought to have” (21). Since adults are perceived as reaching the final and complete stage of development, they are believed to be complete, independent, and understand how the world works around them. The literature served to this faction then is different from the two dealt with before, it is of more mature nature; dealing with more topics explicitly, in other words “literature for adults does no longer know any taboos” (Hofel 22). In other words, no more hidden messages, or replacing themes, like what happens always in children literature and sometimes with the young adults’ literary works. Adulthood is usually dubbed as the final stage of maturity, where it is highly regarded that most adults reach this stage as they learn, process and experience life, it is then only normal that adults are seen as people who “...are educated enough, cultured, and well informed”, and due to them reaching this level of maturity, and to their abilities to grasp how life works, adults are perceived as the “readers of serious or non-children literature” (Hofel 21).

In the end, and in order to provide an answer to the question in hands, it is safe to say that literature is for everybody and especially fantasy because of what it serves to the three factions. If the reader is child, young adult or teenager or even an adult, fantasy is full of diverse and serious topics in magical, imaginary and lovable settings to be discussed and for answers to be provided. In the way that fantasy for adults is mature and of serious content, literature for children especially fantasy can be recognized by “hav(ing) a child protagonist,

an adult character, or a human-like protagonist ---a talking animal, a toy come alive, some imaginary creature---with which a child can readily identify” (Gates et al. 9).

I.2.1. The Prominent Work of Fantasy

One of the prominent works that is still celebrated as one of the superior productions in fantasy is *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. This prominent fantasy work was published through three volumes; *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 1954, *The Two Towers* in 1954, and finally *The Return of the King* in 1955.

The publication of this fantastical epic and many others similar works at that time made it clear that fantasy “of the 1960 was dominated by the Tolkien phenomenon and the many imitations of *The Lord of the Rings*” (Hunt and Lenz 2). Many famous authors pay their respect to the series and its writer; Denis McKiernan, Terry Brooks are few of the many that admit to the influence the fantastical epic has on their own publications (McGarry and Ravipinto 13). If this can show something, it clearly then shows the place and the success brought by the publication of this work.

The publication of this work, however, made the classification of the work a hard deal, even though the author himself calls his “production as a tale” (Havirova 44). It is however known that with the publication of such work and sparking many other imitation, a new labeling was needed and high fantasy was born. According to Neil McGarry and David Ravipinto, high fantasy is “an inherently conservative genre, often revolving around the preservation or restoration of a status quo, usually in the form a patriarchal monarchy or autocracy” (13). In other words, high fantasy, in its core, discusses the society and how it is set up, a patriarchy ruled by a ruthless governor, and a bunch of misfit characters, who take it upon themselves to end their agony, embarking in a long journey to defy the cruel ruler and

restore peace and justice, those few lines seems to always define the heart core of a high fantasy novel, *The Lord of the Rings* is being no different.

What distinguishes a high fantasy novel of others is that “(it) chronicles the struggle between a transformative, conquering force understood to be evil and the hero who stand against it” (McGarry and Ravipinto 13). In other words, the high fantasy novels always depicts the conflict between what is known to be good and evil forces. The same conflict is projected in *The Lord of the Rings*; the story revolves around the powerful ring that Sauron “the evil power” wants and seeks in order to destroy and rule over the Middle Earth, however, “Frodo Baggins (who) finds himself the unluckily bearer of a dark legacy, the one ring. Danger comes to his home in the shire in the form of ‘Nazgul’ and Frodo must flee before he is discovered by Sauron’s minions”(14).

What characterizes fantasy in general is the stock of characters, how they are depicted, presented and even their past is crucial to the story. William Parton Ker argues that the successfulness of any fantastical epic “depends on the authors imagining and representing characters” (17). He further explains that presenting the characters as all important and not only the story is what recognizes the work as epic. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien introduces two sets of characters, those of the typical romance-like heroes “among those characters are the wizards, the kings or the elves”, they are presented as important and superior to the reader in the sense their deeds are admired (Havirova 49-50). The second set is depicted through those characters that “they are the same outsiders in the secondary world is” their importance lie in that they are the one that convey the story (Havirova 50).

The setting in the fantasy novel is distinguished and crucial to the development of the story: “In high fantasy such as LOTR (*Lord of The Rings*), the setting in secondary world (Middle Earth) is crucial for the story. The creation of imaginary world itself is thus one the

key element of the genre” (Havirova 58). It is then one of the important things that characterizes high fantasy, it is the secondary world where those worlds are made highly believable, with their own laws and every detail is laid out perfectly, for Havirova “not only the created setting and the events, but also the moral and emotional aspects of the secondary world must be plausible” (59). The secondary world must then be created as real as possible, because if any suspicion arises, the reader will reject the created secondary world. Tereza Havirova once again draws our attention to the tool used by many writers and authors, Tolkien being one of them, to give more credibility and reliability to the secondary world, stating that “(t)he most obvious equation of fantasy and reality in presentation of the secondary world is the map ... High fantasy tends to work with detailed spatial settings of imaginary lands; creating new maps is essential part of the fantasy genre because it is necessary when dealing with imaginary worlds” (62). In other words, authors do their best to give a sense of reality to their created secondary worlds, and maps of many other details provide this sense of the existence of this world.

I. 3. The Representation of Good and Evil in Literature

Literature all over the world, with different language and with its different and many genres, whether it was directed to children, adults or even young adults, celebrates the duel presented in the two powers. Fantasy is one of those genres where the two powerful forces confronts each other.

I.3.1. Good versus Evil as the Core of the Literature Prose

Evil has been present at the dawn of humanity, it can be rooted in the feelings of selfishness, revenge and all the bad feelings, it is then easy to say that, “ever since man began to contemplate his place in the world evil has been an issue” (Mooij 321). So if evil has existed with the existence of humanity it is then a good question to ask about what evil really

is? Mooij answers this question stating that, “(a)n enquiry into nature of evil cannot be separated from inquiry into what is good what is it that distinguish good from evil?” (321).

Evil then is “... the negative force manifesting itself whenever the good –which does have substance- is absent” (Mooij 328). In defining evil, the good presence is a trivial component. Evil is at its peak when good is absent, and this what will be discussed further in chapter two.

Mooij declares that “human subjects are creatures of desire” (68). He further explains that human beings are defined by their desires, these desires can be intensified by any loss or lack experienced, where those humans try to fulfill but not quite so, because “(a)fter at all the fulfillment of the desire would effectively put an end to the lack and consequently, to human subjectiveness” (Mooij 69). In other words evil inside of humans is derived by these desires. According to Mooij’s words, evil can be also measured by the intentionality of the act, where he states that, “extent of evil rises when the answer of the question is either the violent act is chosen or intended” (32). Once again evil is related to something else’s presence this time being the intentionality. Intentionality is described as “ ... being directed on an object. Rather than being locked inside internality, we find that our minds are oriented towards an object located outside ourselves” (Mooij 100), this can lead us to the notion of the other and how we perceive them in our lives.

The battle between what is good and evil is rooted in humanity since forever, writers and authors alike took it on themselves to represent this battle, shedding the light on the fight that is fought every and each single day since the start of humanity. Cooper states the following:

And beneath the high magic are two... poles... that we call the dark and the light. No other power orders them. They merely exist. The dark seeks by its dark nature to influence men so that in the end, through them, it

may control the earth, the light has the task of stopping that from happening. (qtd. in Hunt and Lenz 20)

According to Cooper this battle will never end as long as each power tries to recruit over as many followers in order to defeat the opposing power. It is a fight with no victorious, in Hunt and Lenz's words "... neither good nor evil will ever triumph totally, for there is something in each and every man" (20). However a question rises itself here, is it always good versus evil that is conveyed in novels? Is it really the fight between what is good and what is evil that corrupt us? Such and many questions will be tackled and answered in the analysis of the second chapter.

I.3.2.The Hero and the Villain in Fantasy Literature

As it was already mentioned before, "... fantasy frequently chronicles the struggles between a transformative conquering force understood to be evil and the heroes who stand against it" (McGarry and Ravipinto 13), if this quote can be elaborated anymore; it explains the hierarchy of the fantastical world, note that it was already mentioned that inside each and every one of us there is a little bit of both destructive 'evil' and constructive 'good' powers making this struggle between the two powers a never ending fight.

It is then of a high importance that in many works of literature we encounter those two magnificent powers which are present and represented by, the 'hero', who is a mere human being with godlike powers that usually are awoken during a journey, the hero is the manifestation of kindness and everything good in life, his sole purpose is to defeat the other. In McGarry and Ravipinto's words as they describe heroes in general, they emphasize that, "(t)hose saviors embody privilege; they are almost always white, heterosexual and (as Stross notes) male" (13). It is easy then to say that it is always but no more, the hero is a male,

strong man usually white. What further characterizes a hero, according to both aforementioned authors is the following:

The hero of ... fantasy is traditionally male and usually begins the story as a young man. The story then follows his development as he come into power... . The hero may be of a questionable parentage, an orphan who does not know his origins, In many cases, the hero is later revealed to be of noble or even royal lineage. (14)

To summarize the authors words, the hero then is as mentioned a strong white man, who does not know about his powers and about his past, he is usually orphan, or with edgy parental relationship, he is however always if not all the time of a high rank and of a noble background. The hero discovers all this and more while he embarks in a journey filled with danger and the unknown in order to discover himself and to help end the eruption of the evil powers. He usually gains the help of secondary characters who are there to help guide and nurture our hero, those characters may range from the love interest, the befriend or even those once perceived as bad.

The villain, however, is the manifestation of evil, of corruption, selfishness. Villains are usually those who surrender to their weaknesses, in other words, “The respective forces of evil are, interestingly, also led by figures that are only nominally male, who claim manhood but are no longer masculine in any substantial way” (McGarry and Ravipinto 16). They are the foulest creatures described as the sole power standing, and hindering the heroes of obtaining what they usually seek, *peace and justice*, they are usually defined as “ whatever force - personal or impersonal – that hinders the hero’s attainment of the object, the satisfaction of his search” (Arenas 7).

Arenas argues that, “Villains and Heroes have been created for us to suffer and celebrate them, for us to discuss them and speculate about their motives, their traits, their vices and virtues” (3). In other words, heroes and villains then are created for us to dwell on their every move. However, what if, “It is no longer clear right from the outset that the hero is purely good and his adversary purely evil. As in reality, the truth lies somewhere in between” (Hofel 105), what if the truth is that inside each and every one of us, heroes included, there is a sleeping devil.

Fantasy as a literary genre existed since the dawn of humanity, serving magical lands, fantastical events ever since. Fantasy however, quickly thawed out, as not many people were interested in its escapist nature. With the Second World War and the distraction it brought over humanity, fantasy, with the same reason it was hated for before, regained its footing, and with the publication of one of the best regarded works that has ever been produced, fantasy skyrocketed. Yet, it raised many questions, the most circulated one being, for whom fantasy was directed? With its nature, fantasy tends to discuss the duality between good and evil serving in the way the qualities of a hero and those of a villain.

Chapter Two: The Thirst for Super Powers and the Sense of No Good in *Vicious*

The journey will be resumed in the second chapter of this thesis. This chapter will be analytical in the sense that it will take a deep dive into the novel stressing the main theme. The journey will be divided into three sections. The first section will deal with an overview, a brief introduction to the mastermind behind the novel, and a summary to one of the best novels. The second section will tackle mainly the superpowers and their wielders, the dynamic of acquiring a super power; what is a superpower, and who are the main wielders? These kinds of questions and many more will be answered in this section. The last but not the final section of the journey, will focus on the sense of no good in *Vicious*, the no existence of what is good, the rivalry between the main characters of the novel.

Vicious to its author V. E. Schwab was praised by many other authors and readers.

II. 1. Introducing the Author and the Novel

V.E. Schwab (1987), the production of a British mother and an American father, is an American author. Her starts were in poetry, where she was inspired by many poets of them William Blake and Baudelaire. Her first novel entitled *The Near Witch* published in 2010, is a rendition of a fairy tale. The year 2013 knew the publication of her first adult fantasy novel *Vicious*, which earned her a recognition and a palace on the authors' map. She has published many books after that; *Shades of magic* 2015, a trilogy revolving around magic, *This Savage Song* 2016. It was announced last year, that a sequel entitled *Vengeful* to be published on September 2018, making the stand alone novel *Vicious* a duology under the name of *Villains*. Apart from that Schwab is known to enjoy traveling and writing the most.

Vicious then is one of V.E. Schwab fascinating works that was first published in 2013 under Titan Books. *Vicious* is a fantastical novel that is divided into two parts, the first is

entitled, *Water, Blood, And Thicker Things*, while the second one being, *An Extraordinary Day*.

Since the novel is a bit of mixture of events that happened in the long past and what is happening now in the near present, the summary will be more of a neat representation of the events in its chronological order; which means starting from the past to reach the present.

Life – the way it really is –is a battle not between bad and good, but between bad and worse.

--- Joseph Brodsky.

Ten years ago in Lockland University, one of the prestigious universities out there, Victor Vale and Eliot –Eli- Cardale, two ambitious, intelligent, and on the opposite side friends met. Even though he was his friend and roommate, Victor really found Eli interesting as he always tried to nitpick on the real him, the one underneath all the made up façade, Victor hated, no, more of was jealous of Eli and his life.

When they both were to choose their senior thesis topics for the strict Professor Lyne module, Victor settled on Adrenaline, while Eli chose a topic that earned him a shocked and silenced class, Eli's choice was EOs also known as the ExtraOrdinary, a topic that will change his and Victor's lives forever.

After more and deeper researches, Eli found a pattern, it was clear that all potential victims, or EOs have experienced a NDE –Near Death Experience- they were all brought back from death, happy with this progress, he shared it with Victor, sensing that Eli was flying while he, Victor, was running, Victor made a bold move, while Eli commented that his thesis is only theoretical, Victor who was scared of being left behind, of being the sidekick, insisted on making an EO, volunteering himself as a subject. Eli was hesitant at first but, soon was convinced, and Victor found himself overdosing –mixing drugs with alcohol- Victor was in so

much pain and really wanted to quit, but he lost consciousness, Eli who got cold feet called the ambulance, leading to the failure of the experiment because Victor did not die. After three days in the hospital, and at his discharge day, Eli told Victor that he was going to try again and this time it was going to work.

In an ice filled tub in the two friends apartment, Eli Cardale was dead, Victor made sure of that by waiting few more minutes, then the hard work began, Victor tried to revive him, using his skills, heat pads, and three Epi Pens. The experiment almost went wrong when Eli drew his breaths pulling himself from death, the tension was so high after that and both Victor and Eli felt a sense of relief mixed with frustration.

They both deemed the experiment a failure, and went outside to drink away their disappointment, however, on their way home, they both discovered that they have created an EO, Eli's body can heal and regenerate itself instantly after any wound. When Victor asked for his turn, he was denied by Eli, so he got Angie to help him.

Angie agreed to electrocute him, Victor died and came back, and because his powers were uncontrollable he killed Angie, Victor immediately called Eli to tell him, however he heard him dialing 911, Victor fled. He was found and arrested, and he was held overnight for further investigation, however he broke out of prison using his pain power, heading to Eli. When Victor went back, he and Eli ended up fighting, Eli gave him three bullet holes in his body and left Victor drowning in his blood while he called the police, they believed his made up story, about how Victor was unstable this past few weeks.

Eli, then set to flee because Victor talked to one of the police officer about the EOs, Eli decided to destroy his thesis research which he succeeded in doing so and he also killed the Professor in his way out.

Eli believing that all EOs are degradation of nature and humanity, except for him, he decided to hunt and kill them all. And he did, except for one, Serena, whom he started a relationship with him. Serena convinced Eli to co-work with the police to find more EOs, she charmed the police officer Stell and the whole station convincing them that Eli was a hero.

Victor spent ten years in prison, planning for his escape and revenge, he befriended Mitch, the big guy, who was imprisoned for robbing a bank by hacking their system. They worked together until they successfully escaped the prison.

While they are in the stolen car, Victor sees a girl shot and bleeding on the side of the road, and he decides to take her with them. Victor, Mitch and the girl named Sydney check in a hotel in Merit city called The Esquire, where Victor helped Sydney to check her wounds.

After a while Victor starts to feel disappointed for not finding Eli. However, he finds him looking at him from a picture in a newspaper, Eli did not age a single day in those ten years. Sydney also recognizes him too, and starts telling them her story, how she and her sister Serena both died in the frozen lake and came back as EOs, and how one day her sister called her to the cemetery where Eli shot her to kill but missed.

Victor wanting to draw Eli to him, starts thinking of a plan, he convinces Sydney to tell him her power, which she does, as she brings back a dead dog. Victor's plan is ready and he decides to send Eli a message with one of his last victims, Barry Lynch, who is killed once again but succeeding in delivering the message, the note says ' I made a friend ' with drawing of both Victor and Sydney and their bullet wounds.

Mitch captures one of the officers, Dane, whom Victor interrogates and ends up killing him when he knows Serena's ability is to control the minds, then the dead officer's phone rings up and Victor picks it up, setting a date with Eli at midnight. On the other side, Serena charms

the police department of the whole city, convincing them that Eli is a hero and Victor is a bad and convict EO.

Eli keeps hunting EOs and Victor uploads his own file including the time –midnight- and place – Falcon Price high-rise- of the meeting. Victor, and to Sydney's begs decides to save an EO called Dominic, who can walk in shadows, he agrees to work with them because Victor took all his pain.

In *The Esquire*, Serena hears her sister's voice as she stands in the patio; she then coerces and forces her to go to a safe place, and safe to Sydney is where Mitch and Victor are. Sydney ends up meeting with Eli and shoots him, however he heals immediately and tries to shoot her but ends up killing the dog instead, Dominic helps in saving Sydney as he pulls her into the shadows, and she begs him to save the dog, which she resurrect for the second time. Victor on the other side, slits Serena's throat and dumps her in a pit of fire for Sydney's sake.

Finally, Victor and Eli both meet, they fight each other once again with guns and knives, Eli hears the police and so determined to kill Victor, he stabs him in the chest, they – Dominic, Mitch, and Sydney- know the moment Victor dies, because their pain comeback. As the police arrive, they find Victor's dead body and Eli covered in blood, Eli notices that Serena is dead and he had lost the control on the police. Eli keeps screaming for the police to burn Victor's body as he is arrested, but no one spares him a glance. After few days of the incident, Mitch, Dominic, and Sydney head to the cemetery, where they dig up Victor's body, and Sydney resurrects him, Victor Vale opens his eyes and smiles.

II. 2. The Superpowers in the Novel

What fantasy is all about can be summarized in what Philip Northrop Frye thinks. Frye argues that fantasy is “ of heroes, and gods and titans ... a world of powers and passion and moments of ecstasy far greater than anything we meet outside the imagination” (qtd. in Gates

et.al. 112). In other words, fantasy includes far more unhuman creatures, it is the land where human, fairies, monsters, gods, titans and many more creatures gather. It is also of high importance if not of necessity that a fantasy revolves around the powers; powers are always celebrated in this land, this is due to the never ending battles between what is good and what is bad, and the constant dwelling on what will succeed and what will withdraw.

In different settings through the fantastical universes, power is presented, claimed and inherited by none other than humans making them heroes, or they get possessed and consumed by those powers leading to their establishment as villains. It is then clear why fantasy is all about heroes and villains and the supernatural, and, how it does not matter what type of power it is, being it magic as in *Harry Potter* series, blood, manifested in ruins, as in *The Mortal Instruments*, inhumanly powers, the gods like powers as in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Power then is in the center of many if not all fantasy works. This being said makes *Vicious* by V.E. Schwab a no difference, where a friendship is ruined due to the obsession of obtaining super powers.

In her novel, Schwab calls whoever has a power an ExtraOrdinary. It is this word, “that started, ruined, changed everything” (Schwab 58). To be an EO in *Vicious* Universe, the one has to experience an NDE, Near Death Experience, in other words, to have those powers and to be an EO, the one has to experience the most difficult trauma according to Eli’s own research as he concludes and is mentioned in the novel; “Eli glanced at Victor. “Near death experience. What if an EO isn’t a product of just any trauma? What if their bodies are reacting to the greatest physical and psychological trauma possible? Death” (Schwab 43).

The theory is proven right many times in the novel. First with Eli Cardale’s staged death and his new acquired ability, “...---and the wound was nothing more than a wrinkle, a faint scar, and then not even that” (Schwab 81). He was able to heal any wounds by regenerating

his own skin. With Eli's new ability, Victor wanted to be next, which happened and he gained his powers too, his ability was to control pain; "In the sudden absence of pain, he found himself trying to remember how it felt,..., and as he did the switch clicked again, and the energy was there"(Schwab 107). The one would ask however how those powers are given, and to what dynamics those powers are generated, this too have been answered by Schwab in the novel as Victor Vale this time notes "(y)ou thought our powers were somehow a reflection of our nature ..., but you are wrong. ... It's about us. The way we think. The thought that's strong enough to keep us alive. To bring us back" (Schwab 123).

While nothing has been provided in the novel about what are Eli's last thoughts behind his new acclaimed powers, it is of prediction that it is in a way or another related to the scars on his back that were made by his father. Victor Vale's last thoughts were revolving around the pain and how to stop it; " 'Because all I could think about when I was dying was the pain.' ... 'And how badly I wanted to make it stop' " (Schwab 124). Victor Vale, then was able to feel, extract and bestow pain from and on whomever he chose, it was all due to the dial he imagined having, one turn, and the pain could disappear or hunt to oblivion. Victor is described in the novel to be able to sense pain like a hungry wolf could sense a prey, " Victor smelled pain the way a wolf smelled blood. Tuned to it" (37). Eli Ever, on the other hand, as it was already mentioned has gained the power of regenerating, healing and never aging again, his power was described throughout the novel, Eli was first seen by Victor after he escaped prison on the newspaper, and was described of not aging a single day over the past ten years. Eli's ability was once again described when Sydney shot him in the face, during the confrontation battle, "... and Eli straightened, jaw cracking and snapping and healing, leaving only a smear of blood on his skin as he raised the gun..." (Schwab 326).

Of the two characters that play a huge role in chapping the events of the novel are the sisters Clarke; Sydney and Serena both died and both came back as EOs. Sydney, on one

hand, regained the ability to resurrect the dead, “ she kept sinking, ..., and all she could think as she sank farther and farther...*come back, come back, come back*” (Schwab 131). Serena, on the other hand, had the power to control people’s minds. As it is mentioned in the novel, she told her sister her last thoughts as she was drowning, “I just remember thinking no, NO, not like this” (Schwab 132).

Both sisters discovered their abilities while in hospital; Serena figuring things out first, she used her ability to let the doctors discharge her, “when she walked up and said she wanted to leave, they stepped aside and let her pass” (Schwab 131), an ability she would later use to coerce Eli not to kill her and to be his partner in crime charming everybody in thinking that he is the hero the city deserves:

“Mr. Ever here is going to keep this city safe.” She told them, her blue eyes shining. “He’s a hero, isn’t he, officers?”

Officer Dane nodded. At first Stell only looked at Eli, but eventually, he nodded, too.

“A hero,” they echoed. (Schwab 234)

Sydney, however took longer to discover her ability as she gave back the life to a dead person, “ the sheets she was touching had been there to cover something. The something was a body. And when she brushed against it, the body twitched” (Schwab 133). It is of an irony that both sisters ended up in opposing teams, Eli versus Victor, Serena versus Sydney.

Superpowers, as it was already mentioned before, are of a high importance to the dynamics in building a fantastical epic. Powers are usually what helps in defining and setting a clear cut between the two strong powers, who stands at the good side and who will be showered by evil graces. Power then, is the responsible to draw that fine line between the two allegiances. In the fantastical universe, power is usually a trade, a trade that either would be “... with God or the devil...” (Schwab 201), shaping you into a hero, or leaving you a villain,

basically this is how the superpowers were presented in *Vicious*, a trade either with God, as in Eli's case, or what he like to believe, and with the devil as in all other EO's cases. In *Vicious*, obtaining power, was the main reason in peeling the humanity off both characters, where both hidden monsters set loose.

II. 3. The Sense of No Good in the Novel

Good has always been present in any novel and especially in those of fantasy, where good always stands in the face of evil, it is always the job of the hero. The hope barrier, to ensure that the right, morals and good will find its glory against the wrong, immoral and of course evil. Many novels had dealt with this plot, and celebrate this duality. Brian Horne notes this in the article *On The Representation of Evil In Literature*:

What one encounters in most of the stories is a narrative structure that depends heavily on a strongly on a dualistic interpretation of reality. The universe is presented basically Manichaeian terms: Darkness and light; Good and Evil powers oppose one another in almost equal strength. Conflict between these forces is at the heart of these narratives, and the universe of these tales is one in which the conflict between good and evil is usually finely balance and, often, never completely resolved. (34)

In other words evil and especially good are always the focal point in those tales and narratives, as in one of the famous fantastical series *Harry Potter* to its author J. K. Rowling, where a battle, famously called Hogwarts Battle, happens in which, "(t)he fight between them starts with evil forces trying to win over light with all the dark powers" (Szirbik 1-2). At the end of each of those powers we have Lord Voldemort and his followers and Harry Potter, the boy who lived, and his supporters, "the battle between Harry and Voldemort is a battle between two opposing powers: the forces of good and the forces of evil. The forces of evil use the Dark Arts, whereas the forces of good use Defense against the Dark Arts"(Baltzar 73). A

battle in which the forces of good triumphed because, “(n)aturally, darkness can never cover light” (Szirbik 2).

The battle between good and evil is ever present in the narratives, a fundamental part of the alternative world building, and this is due to the constant existence of this battle and the never ending rivalry in the real world. However, according to Brian Horne, a better comprehension of the essence of the word evil in the last decades, made it clear that; “(w)e should expect the representation of evil in modern literature to take an extremely etiolated and reductive form. But does it?”(30). Though he expect this to be the matter, it is however not. To answer Brian Horne’s question, an examination to *Vicious* by V.E. Schwab will be tackled as follow. Schwab and in one of the interviews, she stated that she was always fascinated by the concept of the hero and the villain and their dynamics, however with *Vicious* she wanted to produce a novel where there is no sense of good at all, a novel that revolves only around villains and evil.

In this sense, the first pages of *Vicious* starts in a peculiar way and it in a way or another foreshadows what to come. Where we learn about Victor Vale, presumably the Protagonist, who saved Sydney Clarke, a young girl who has been shot, and treated her wounds, sheltered her from the rain, it appears and of the first instance that it is a good natured deed. However, in the spam of events it appears that Sydney was saved only for a purpose;“ They should never have picked her up, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that she would come in handy. She had secrets and he planned to learn them” (Schwab 119), a purpose that she fulfilled perfectly, as she played an important part in his plan, helping him reach his goal, and luring Eli Ever out of his hide out. She was also a corner stone in his bigger plan which was revolving around destroying and avenging from his once best friend, Eli Ever.

Victor’s sense of no good can be shown and traced throughout the events of the novel, as his actions are always justified and calculated to spear him the repentance. As what happened

when he killed Angie Knight, the girl he was in love with, and the one who helped him to gain his powers.

Victor didn't revive Angie. He knew he should, or should want to, but the last thing he needed was more evidence of himself at the crime scene. He swallowed hard. Cringing both at his ability to be so rational at a moment like this, and at the thought of the term. Crime. Scene. Besides he could *feel* that she was dead. No charge. No energy. (Schwab 110)

His reaction to her death was really unnatural, he was cold, and was not panicking or scared, he did not try to revive her, even if she was dead, since it is the first thing a person would think about doing, even if there was no pulse, no heartbeat. Victor once again proves that he has no sense of good, or compassion as he called Eli, informing him of what happened:

"Angie's dead." Victor hadn't been sure whether or not he would say that, but the words had formed and spilled out before he could catch them. He'd expected them to hurt his throat, to lodge in his chest, but they flowed out unrestricted. He knew he should be panicking, but he felt numb, and the numbness made him calm. (Schwab 110)

Victor also treated Angie's death as a not very important issue, blaming it all on Eli, because he did not want to help him with his NDE, the conversation between him and Eli depicts not only Victor that was not really caring about Angie, but also Eli was indifferent to the matter:

Eli span up from the couch in a fluid motion. "Vic." "I'm disappointed," said Victor. "What are you doing here?" "You killed Angie." The words snagged slightly in Eli's throat. Victor was surprised by the emotion in his friend's voice. "Did you love her?" he asked. "Or are you just mad I took

something back?” “ She was a *person*, Victor, not a thing, and you killed her.” “ It was an accident,” he said. “ And it’s your fault really. If you had just helped me....”. (Schwab 122)

Even after spending ten years in prison, Victor Vale’s sense of good was still not there and he even became more colder, and more wicked than he was. All of his thoughts and his latent energy was directed only to avenge and destroy Eli and make him feel the same way he felt. While Eli was haunting EOs, Victor was haunting him. And they crossed roads as Victor was able to get access to the police base, discovering in the process Eli’s flagged and potential targets. Sydney begged Victor to save them, or at least to warn them to which he answered:

Victor shrugged. “No need. They’re irrelevant now.” He didn’t care about the blue haired girl, or any of them for that matter. He was more interested in what the dead proved about Eli than what the living offered *him*. He’d meant them only as bait anyway, to be dug up and used as lures, but Sydney herself—her gift, and the message they’d made with it—had rendered these EOs extraneous to his plan. (Schwab 170)

In a novel where the sense of no good theme is deep rooted in it, it is then of a normality to find that each and every character and event depicted in the novel is laced with it. Apart then from Victor Vale, there is Eli Ever, that one friend who turned to the sworn enemy, is one of those characters. Eli’s sense of good is somehow depicted in a way where his bad deeds are considered good to him, so in a way his sense of good is distorted. Eli, the self-proclaimed hero, is on a killing spree; killing each and every EO for no reason but to their abnormality.

Eli was described by his best friend Victor, as; “(t)he more interesting Eli, anyways. Not the one with perfect teeth and an easy laugh, but the one beneath that was glittering and sharp, like broken glass. It was in those jagged pieces that Victor saw something he recognized. Something dangerous, and hungry” (Schwab 26). From this description alone, the reader

can totally understand that Eli is a dangerous person, a force to reckon with. Eli proved to Victor and the readers that he is not really a good of a person when he tried to kill his best friend Victor Vale, making an enemy in the process, “(t)his time he didn’t miss. Victor felt the impact, and looked down at the hole in his shirt, glad he’d bothered to turn his pain off. He touched the spot and his fingers came away red. Distantly, he knew this was a bad place to be shot”(Schwab 125).

Eli shot Victor again to prove that he was not normal anymore, that he changed and he came back from his experience a different person. Eli, however, believed that he was different than Victor, than all the EOs actually, that he did not change; that death did nothing to him but took his fear and gave him power to fight the unnatural, and to prove his point right, “ (h)e fired again, the force nudged Victor back a step” (125). Eli’s outrage was at its peak as Victor kept denying his claims, Eli did not budge and kept repeating and believing in the process that he was different, all what he was doing was not his plotting but god’s own will, Eli’s sense of good went down the hill starting this moment onward and the last bullet that Eli fired hitting Victor on his back is a bare witness on the absence of good in Eli. “ Eli was talking, but he (Victor) couldn’t quite make out the words. And then he heard the gun scraping across the floor as it was lifted, cooked. Something hit him in the back, like a soft punch, and his body stopped listening” (125). Those bullets that Victor received from none than his friend Eli, marked the beginning of their fueled enmity.

Victor cherished the gift of his friend, three scars Eli’s gun has left on his skin, as they were a constant reminder of his friend’s real nature and his motivator to seek his revenge, “ He met his gaze in the mirror and began to unbutton his shirt, exposing the scars from the bullets of Eli’s gun one by one, he ran his fingers over them touching the three spots where he’d been shot the way a man would cross himself.” (Schwab 120), the scars were a declaration for Victor on what happened and what shall happen, they helped him to

concentrate on his mission, finding and torturing Eli Ever. “ He rebuttoned his shirt, and the scars vanished again, from view but not from memory” (120).

Eli’s distorted sense of good continued to play in his head. Still convinced that he is more important and different than any EO, and after the fight he and Victor had, Eli started his plan, and he had his first kill, poor Professor Lyne, taking into a consideration that his first murder was committed toward a human being and not an EO:

Eli stared down at the body, willing himself to feel horrified.

He didn’t. There it was again, that gap between what he knew

he should feel and what he did, mocking him as he looked down

at lyne. Eli wasn’t sure if he’d meant to push the professor down

the stairs, or if he’d only meant to push him away, but the damage

was done now. (Schwab 197)

Although Eli was not sure about his first intentions in pushing the Professor away, or down the stairs, the thing he was sure about after, was finishing the Professor completely, as it was depicted by Schwab in a heinous manner:

Eli knew what he had to do, felt it with a strange and comforting

certainty. He brought one hand almost gently under Lyne’s jaw,

the other cradling his chin. “This research dies with us.”

With that, he twisted sharply.

“Well,” said Eli softly. “With *you*.”

Lyne’s eyes emptied and Eli set his head gently back against the

Ground, sliding his fingers as he stood. (Schwab 198)

Eli as a character is a very complex one and highly controversial, a deep and further analysis will be provided on the third chapter, dwelling more on his ideas, ideologies, beliefs and many aspects that established him as a polemic character in *Vicious*.

Leading our way now to Serena Clarke, the once sweet loving sister, once Serena had become an EO, her life and perspectives have changed. Serena gained the ability to do and have anything she wanted just by opening her mouth. Hence, and with the help of her ability, she found herself inside exciting events, she met Eli, whom she convinced not to kill her, and helped him in his haunt and missions. Serena was not able to have a full control over Eli, and that excited her even more, the sense of defiance he was able to show against her ability was clear when he, Eli, lied and under her control, about killing her sister Sydney; “Her jaw clenched. Eli was getting better at fighting back, finding loopholes in her power. Redirections, omissions, evasions, delays. Not that she didn’t appreciate the small defiance—she did--...” (Schwab 179).

Serena helped Eli in establishing himself as a hero, and aided his quest solely due to her beliefs that she and every EO deserved to die and stay dead. While, she was in the hotel room watching the news as it showed Barry Lynch, the already dead EO, alive again, Serena deep down knew that this was her sister’s doing, which meant that Sydney was alive, memories of her sister washed over Serena, however she was convinced that the girl who Eli shot was not her once loved sister; “Serena knew the girl on the field wasn’t her sister, not really. Serena knew the girl who looked like Sydney *wasn’t* Sydney, the same way she knew that *she* wasn’t Serena” (179). What helped in solidifying those thoughts are Eli’s sermons and preaching, in the novel, Schwab alludes to Serena’s compliant with Eli’s ideas:

Eli said it best. He called EOs *shadows*, shaped like people who made them but gray inside. Serena felt it. From the moment she woke up in the hospital, she felt as if something colorful and bright and *vital* was missing. Eli went on to say it was her soul; he claimed *he* was different and Serena let him think that because the only other option was to tell him otherwise, and then he’d

believed. (179)

Aside from the fact that she was doubting herself, Eli further convinced her that even Sydney was a danger to this world, that she was not the sister she once had, this helped to play on Serena's sense of good, and resulting in turning her sister to the slaughter to get killed, "Sydney's sin, Eli claimed, was double. Not only was she an EO, unnatural and wrong, but she also possessed the power to corrupt others, to poison them by filling their bodies with something that looked like life, but wasn't" (Schwab 180). Though Serena knew that she was also an EO, that she was also different, that she was also unnatural, she in a way believed that she was different the way Eli did. And this helped to seal the deal. For Sydney, Serena helped Eli to kill her without a hesitation, after all she was the one who invited her to celebrate her birthday, while plotting to kill her with Eli, as it is narrated:

And then there was the Serena from after the lake. The Serena whose eyes were cold and whose smile was hollow, and who made things happen with only words. The one who lured Sydney into a field with a body, cooing at her to show her trick, and then looking sad when she did. The one who turned her back when her boyfriend raised his gun. (Schwab 40)

Sydney knew that Eli had convinced her sister that EOs were bad and that what he was doing was the right thing, she had conveyed her emotion about the incident to Victor, as he promised her that he would never let Eli hurt her again, Sydney told him the last moments before she was shot:

And then it cracked. "When he came after me," she said, "he told me it was for *the greater good*." She spat the last three words. "He said I was unnatural. That I went against God. That was the reason he gave for trying to kill me. I didn't think it was very good reason." She swallowed. "But it was enough for my sister

to hand me over”. (210)

Even though evil is a prominent power in *Vicious*, and all characters showcased the sense of no good in all their actions. Sydney Clarke, however can be presented as the glitch in the system. Sydney Clarke, the sweet girl who were, “A few days shy of her thirteenth birthday, and even for twelve and eleven twelfths, Sydney Clarke was small. She had always been on the short side, but it certainly didn’t help that she had barely grown an inch since the day she’d died” (Schwab 10). A twelve years old girl who had suffered since the day she died and came back to life, she found herself at shooting distance from her once loveable sister’s boyfriend, and being rescued by none other than that boyfriend’s once best friend who is seeking revenge, what a game fate was playing.

Though Sydney had died once, she was once again shot, because she cheated death and became an EO, Sydney met Eli Ever, as he was playing her sister’s boyfriend, and Sydney, while standing waiting for her doom was able to see what lurked inside of him, “Eli wasn’t quite as frightening, because she’d always been able to see the monster in his eyes. Now it finally stopped hiding. But the gun, and the way he held it, made him scary enough” (Schwab 146-7). After she had been shot, she was saved by Victor Vale, the other monster in the equation, and even though he saved her and treated her wounds; Sydney was able once again to sense the evil inside of him, “Victor looked down, and she saw something cross his face, like a shadow, and for the first time since the car pulled up beside her, she felt afraid. Not an all-consuming fear, but a low and steady panic spreading over her skin” (Schwab 50). She however, and after a period to get to know Victor, and due to the similar past they experience, they were both tormented by Eli, Sydney came to the conclusion that Victor was not the bad one, “ “You are not a bad person,” repeated Sydney, flinging dirt onto the moonlit grass. “But Eli is.” “Yes. Eli is.”” (Schwab 39). Sydney continued to show her innocence and her good natured soul, as she kept begging Victor to save the targeted EOs. However, the big

question to be asked here, will Sydney be able to keep these rare gift she owns, the innocence and the good natured soul, after the one she really trusted, Victor Vale, killed her only sister, a question will probably be answered in the next book. For now Sydney is the only dim light in all that darkness.

Vicious, as any other fantasy work celebrates the quest for and the demand of, and the obsession of power. As the readers can see a two best friends' friendship is ruined due to the thirst of gaining powers, this quest helped in setting a universe ruled by evil, as both friends lost their sense of good as price to those unnatural powers. However, and though the whole universe is colored black, Sydney Clarke, is that small white splotch, that either will cover everything in whiteness, or will get consumed by the darkness.

Chapter Three : Evil versus Evil; Victor Vale Vs. Eli Ever

This chapter will mainly stress the most important part of this thesis be it the sense of evil presented in *Vicious*. The first section in this chapter will be revolving around evil in the face of evil as depicted by Victor Vale Versus Eli Ever, shedding light on their motives, moves and psyche and how they end up where they are standing now. The second section will mainly deal with an attempt to provide a clear answer on who really is the real villain of this novel.

III. 1. The Battle of Bad and Evil

Evil has always made itself present in our life, fighting against the good since the dawn of humanity, trying to triumph no matter what the cost is. Brian Horne insists on the point that fantasy celebrates and is built on the rivalry, the duality of the powers be it good and evil and he comments; “I want to make a point about evil and the representation of evil. Just as wonder and mystery are at the heart of much of the genre of fantasy literature, so too, are concepts of good and evil” (34). However, what if there was no good, no heroes, what if all that matter was evil, what if the real fight was not between good and evil but evil and evil as in Joseph Brodsky’s famous quote which Schwab uses as an epigraph to her novel *Vicious*: “Life – the way it really is—is a battle not between bad and good, but between bad and worse.” What if that deep dark side inside us human woke, striving to control, to triumph. What if there was no two sided coin to flip, but only evil at both ends.

It is true that evil has always been the corner stone of the fantastical universe, because if there is no villain, no hero will be born, no good will try to subdue the dark forces. Brian Horne, in his article “On the Representation of Evil in Modern Literature,” emphasizes this point, as he states that, “(t)hese works of fantasy fiction rely upon the concept of evil as a basic component in the representation of their worlds” (34). Villains and evil as an act and

action are important to any world building concerning fantasy. In this sense V. E. Schwab, the author of *Vicious*, states on 175th episode of *The Author Stories Podcast With Hank Garner*, posted on Hank Garner's channel on YouTube: "I am a huge fan of comics and specifically of villains, and comics of anti-hero." She stresses the idea that she has always been fascinated by comic books and that her favorite character of all time is Magneto, who is a famous character in the X-men comic books, he is rather known for his rivalry with Professor Xavier. Hilary Goldstein, in *Xavier VS. Magneto: A Philosophical Debate*, states that:

Xavier strongly believes that the only way to live peacefully with Homo Sapiens is to show that while mutants may sometimes look different, they are still human beings. Aggression only serves to escalate confrontations with humans and further alienate mutants from the vast populace. ... Magneto has no desire to go quietly to camps and be exterminated by humans. To him, the only way to fight human aggressors is with a show of power.

Both characters, with different ideologies and thinking regarding the same issue, end up in a rivalry against each other, each trying to prove his point correct. A kind of relationship is depicted in- usually- most if not all fantasy books and novels; where good, the right doing, stands and face the evil, wrong doing. However, it is in this sense that *Vicious* is different, in this sense that it adds a twist to the usually consumed equation, where the writer declares that *Vicious* is an attempt at writing, "a supervillain origin story" (Garner), what explains the lack of good in the novel's unfolding events, and depicted characters.

Taking then into consideration the author's own clarification and orientation, where she states that; "I wanted to see if I could write a book where there was no heroes. I wanted to write a book cast entirely with villains. And still make you as the reader root for one of

them”(Garner), and this is how *Vicious* was born, an interesting plot; where two villains, Victor Vale and Eli Ever, and the sense of no good are magnificently executed.

It was discussed then in the second chapter that the book celebrates no sense of good, thus, this leaves evil as the only and most prominent power in the novel. Then it is safe to say that both Victor Vale and Eli Ever are evil in their respectful ways, they are both human beings that are bound by their nature and desires. Mooij in his book, *Intentionality, Desire, and Responsibility: A Study in Phonology, Psychoanalysis and Law*, emphasizes that it is due to a loss or lack that the desire is manifested and intensified as he explains: “This loss or lack produces a desire to resolve this loss, without any hope of fulfilling this desire. After all, the fulfilment of the desire would effectively put an end to the lack and consequently, to human subjectiveness” (69).

Both characters in the novel express this sense of either loss or lack, that consequently draw on their desires, taking the aforementioned and the following statements into consideration will help shed the light on Victor Vale’s lack, and Eli Ever’s loss. It is usually believed that villains are detected by their set of beliefs and desires which are normally presented as; taking control over a kingdom, a land, or even earth as whole, exterminating the humanity race, and vengeance, spreading evil in their wake. Those desires and beliefs are however connected with the actions the villains usually take to establish them, ranging from kidnaping, torturing and even plotted killings. Rises to fit this description is none other than Lord Voldemort, where, he who should not be named, conquered the dark magic to accomplish his desires and beliefs of keeping magic restricted only in the pure bloods, killing in the process all the resistance mainly manifested in Hogwarts. In this regard then it is safe to say that, “Many villains and their villainy could be successfully analyzed and discussed by applying the simple method of determining their likely sets of beliefs and desires, and the way they are interconnected with their actions” (Arenas 13).

Victor Vale has lived a kind of lonely life, his parents, who are successful writers, are always on tours, “The very same Vales who were currently on an international tour. The very same Vales who had budgeted just enough time in their busy schedules—even back before they were best-selling “empowerment gurus”—to produce Victor” (Schwab 13). Such detachment from his parents leads to Victor’s growing up with this sense of lack, that it is shifted and directed toward his best friend Eliot—Eli—Cardale in a form of jealousy.

Sigmund Freud defines jealousy as follows:

It is easy to see that essentially it is compounded of grief, the pain the pain caused by the thought of losing the loved object, and of the narcissistic wound, in so far as this is distinguishable from the other wound; further, of feelings of enmity against the successful rival, and of greater or lesser amount of self-criticism which tries to hold the subject’s own ego accountable for his loss. (Qtd. in Burke 213)

According to this statement, Victor’s jealousy is apparent in many stops in the novel, where he showcases his lack by expressing jealousy and desire to have a control over his friend’s Eli life. From the beginning of the novel, Victor is jealous because Eli steals Angie from him and vice versa, “Or rather Eli watched her go, and Victor watched Eli watch her, something twisted in his stomach. It wasn’t just that Eli stole Angie from Victor—that was bad enough—but somehow Angie had stolen Eli from him, too. The more interesting Eli, anyway” (Schwab 26). However, this jealousy once again grows further turning to an envy, a strong feeling that is known “... to occur when a person lacks what another has and either desires it or wishes that the other did not have it” (Parrot 4) This feeling takes control of Victor when he finds out that Eli is making a progress with his thesis and is ready to leave Victor in order to soar up with his discoveries. Eli remains over break to conduct more

research and Victor is not really happy about it: "... Victor didn't like it because it meant that Eli had a head start. Victor didn't like it because he had, of course, petitioned to stay over break, too, applied for the same exemption, and had been denied. It had taken all his control to hide the anger, the desire to pen over Eli's life, and write it into his" (Schwab 41-42).

It is safe to say by this point that all that matter to Victor is to have it all, he is controlled by this green monster that went further to even demand from him to claim his friend's life and success. In this regard, this hideous feeling has been further discussed and defined, White and Mullen are one of those who have provided a further explanation regarding jealousy:

Jealousy is often described as an emotion or blend of emotion.

Freud's (1922) definition includes feelings of grief and enmity.

Other theorists have included anger, aggression, hatred, rage, envy, revenge, fear, apprehension, anxiety, panic, suspicious, mistrust, expectancy, distress, depression, self-pity, guilt, love, and sexual arousal. (qtd. in Adams 13)

Jealousy, then, is most if not all those feelings, and both the friends, especially Victor, exhibit those feelings. During this battle; where Victor broke out of prison in order to punish Eli for turning him in as an EO and for killing Angie, Victor feelings of betrayal and enrage, helped in setting the monster loose, blaming his friend on everything that had happened; Angie's death, his arrest:

Eli ran his hands over his face. "How could you do this?"

"How could *you*?" asked Victor, lifting the knife fully from the Table as he spoke. "You called the cops and you accused me of Being an EO. I didn't rat *you* out, you know. I could have." He scratched his head with the tip of the knife. (Schwab 122- 3)

The fight continues, with Victor still torturing his friend, he feels a sense of control over Eli as he stabs him time after time. Furthermore, Victor feels a sense of joy as he hears his screams, Schwab describes Victor's feelings as he is inflicting pain over his friend in the novel as follows: "Eli screamed, and the sound made Victor feel good. Not in a sun-is-out-and-life-is-wonderful way, of course, but in punishing way. A controlling way. Eli had betrayed him. Eli deserved a little pain. He would heal. When this was over, he wouldn't even have a scar" (123). Victor's jealousy has turned him into a monster, a role he gladly accepts to play, as he decides to punish his friend on mistakes he is responsible for. While jealousy can be regarded as a natural feeling; it is once said that, "Jealousy has no limit, it is an evil continually enduring, and a sin without an end" (Roberts 493). Jealousy then is evil, and evil what Victor is now.

Victor then is plagued by both jealousy and envy. He is both jealous of his friend and envious of him. In this regard, it is argued that "part of the difficulty of understanding envy and jealousy is in seeing how they both map into the narrower categories... the two are defined in terms that includes the beliefs, motives, and emotional reactions" (Parrot 4).

The fight continues, reaching its climax, when Eli holds the gun in his friend's face. If Victor is controlled by jealousy, Eli is tormented by loss; he lost the girl he supposedly loves, his once best friend who is now standing in front of his loaded gun, "I don't know who you are, but you are not Victor. You are something that crawled into his skin a devil wearing him" (Schwab 124). However, the most horrific thing that Eli has lost is his humanity, and he confesses to Victor about this loss, that he feels different before shooting him three bullets, and framing him to the attack:

"We died Eli. And we both came back."

"No, no, I don't think so. Not entirely. Something's wrong.

Missing, gone. Can't you feel it? I can," said Eli, and he

actually sounded *scared*. (124)

This feeling of loss, however, is replaced by his desire to fill this void. This leads him in believing that he is sent by God to cleanse the earth from EOs, as he goes on killing and destroying each and every one he meets. He embarks in a killing frenzy and if “beating someone up could be considered as *little evil*, killing someone could be considered as *usual evil*, killing many people could be very evil” (Baltzar 76).

Ten years after their first fight, Eli and Victor meet again, evil confronting evil, as the once best friends now each other’s arch-nemeses. Eli is driven by his desire to set things right and Victor is led by his revenge. The friends fight again: “Victor did not hesitate. He fired three times into Eli’s chest, mimicking the pattern of the scars on his own body, the way he had imagined he would do for the last ten years. And it felt good” (Schwab 329). Shooting those three bullets is an utter bliss to Victor, he has worried it will not feel good but, as he is showered with satisfaction, he shares the fact he knows about Eli, “it’s why I let you stay,” said Victor. “Why I liked you. All that charm outside, all that evil inside. There was a monster under there, long before you died” (Schwab 330). Eli, the monster, feels outraged and claims that he is a hero, an angel sent by God and that none even Victor understands him. The next scene exhibits the confrontation between the two as they fight:

“Enough,” said Victor. Behind his eyes the dial turned up. Eli screamed. “You aren’t some avenging angel, Eli,” he said. “You are not blessed, or divine, or burdened. You’re a science experiment.”

... “You don’t understand,” gasped Eli. “No one understands.”
 “When *no one* understands, that’s usually a good sign that you are wrong”. (330)

Eli is consumed by his madness and evilness, and he adds a new victim on his already blood stained hands, as he drives the knife into Victor; killing him while still believing that he is a hero, and he is doing a good job:

He saw Victor's knife on the floor a few feet away and took it up,
crouching in front of him.

"Some hero," he heard Victor whisper with his two last, labored
breaths. Eli rested the blade carefully beneath Victor's ribs.

"Good-bye, Victor," he said.

And then he drove the knife in. (Schwab 334)

And he kills his friend, his enemy, he kills the evil, after all Eli is a hero, and angel sent by God. He kills Victor, the bad, and loses himself. These thoughts of him being a hero, of him being the slayer God has sent to cleanse the earth from EOs, keep weaving inside his head and solidifying with each kill, these thoughts are what shape the evil monster Eli has become. Both Eli and Victor, both friends, are of no difference, they both harbor evil inside of them, and they both are the two faces of that one coin be it evil.

III. 2. God Loves, Man Kills

The role of villains in the ancient time literature is nothing but the destructive force. The villain is the opposing power that stands in the face of the good, and the heroes, and usually ends up defeated by their hands. Anne-Katherin Hofel states in *Current Developments at the Intersection of Fantasy Fiction and British Children's Literature* the following:

Traditionally, the roles of evil in fantasy literature for children are clear-cut. In its quality as the opposite of good, evil embodies and unites all the negative characteristics the noble hero lacks by definition. That way, the hero is artificially elevated and purified, whereas the villain is reduced to wickedness. With pure good as one extreme and

pure evil as the mutually exclusive other, evil is exaggerated and condensed to a deterrent and a negative showcase model. (101)

However, the diversity brought by the modern literature gives villains and hero alike more depth, more character; it is a turning point, where both heroes and villains have more to them than to judge them loosely. Since the twentieth century, fantasy literature has and is still offering multilayered characters with a complexity to define each and every of them. Hofel believes that, “ an increasing number of villains can no longer be judged as either fully good or fully evil. Rather, villains and hero alike distinguish themselves by complex, three-dimensional characters that do no longer permit sweeping judgement” (108). In this sense *villains* are introduced in more varied, more complex and less foreseeable ways, authors’ gamble on the psyche of the villains which results in the creation of more enigmatic villains (Hofel 107).

With such complexity portrayal of the villains, it is hard to read their motives, actions, acts and even their beliefs, however with the help of psychology, this task is rendered at least feasible:

Familiarity with psychology will not help us disclose the one and only undisputable truth about our villains. Such thing does not exist. Neither will psychology help us discover things we have never seen before, after so many centuries of exposure to fictional villains. But it may help us provide clear formulations of what we have already discovered and so often felt. A deeper sense of understanding concerning villainy will naturally emerge as we approach it through a precise and technical language, such as the one used in psychology.(Arenas 4)

In V.E. Schwab's *Vicious*, Eliot—Eli—Cardale also known as Eli Ever is an EO who believes he is a hero and it is his job to exterminate other EOs. He is of the cruelest characters depicted in the novel, and of the best twisted minded villain that are ever depicted. And Eli's behaviors, beliefs and his coiled actions throughout the novel are nothing but stand up witness to that.

Eli is a crucial character to the novel's universe, and a further analysis to this magnificent persona will help in understanding him as a villain and a pure manifestation of evil. A description at the beginning of the novel that is provided by none other than Victor Vale who opens the readers' eyes on this character:

But what fascinated Victor *most* was the fact that something about Eli was decidedly *wrong*. He was like one of those pictures full of small errors, the kind you could only pick out by searching the image from every angle, and even then, a few always slipped by. On the surface, Eli seemed perfectly normal, but now and then Victor would catch a crack, a sideways glance, a moment when his roommate's face and his words, his look and his meaning, would not line up. Those fleeting slices fascinated Victor. It was like watching two people, one hiding in the other's skin. And their skin was always dry, on the verge of cracking and showing the color of the thing beneath. (Schwab 17)

This description shows that Eli is no ordinary person, he has always been seen by Victor Vale as two people inside one, as the monster he really is.

Eli's life takes another turn when he survives the NDE, near death experience, changing him into an EO. And to better understand Eli's new character, an anatomy to his psyche is needed, a brief showcase to his Id, ego and superego will be dwelled on. According to Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey: "Whereas the id operates in pursuit of pleasure, and whereas the

ego is governed by the reality principle, the superego bids the psychic apparatus to pursue idealistic goals and perfection. It is the source of moral censorship and of conscience” (1).

In other words, the Id is the manifestation of the inner instincts, pleasures and desires that are installed in the human beings, the superego stands for the idealistic goals and beliefs, the ego is ruled by the reality principle, it is the moderator between the desires and the morals. Eli then as a person is more driven by his *Id*, since, his *Ego* is defected, Eli’s sense of reality is absent. His superego is no deference, and this resulted in a distorted ideals and beliefs, in which Eli manifests them in believing that he is doing good by fulfilling his holy task, this leads to the establishment of his *Id* as the sole controller, and this can be seen in Eli’s actions that are manifested in the kills he is committing.

Eli’s *Superego* is defected since his childhood, according to Raymond E. Fancher, "Freud reasoned that the source of this moral force in the psyche was acquired It also seemed to be based on some kind of unconscious identification with authority figures from the developing child's society” (12). So it is only normal to assume Eli’s relationship with his family especially his father, as it is mentioned in the book that the scars Eli wore on his back are created by his own father, it is also hinted by the author herself, “once upon a time, when the scars were fresh Eli told himself that they were wings, after all his mother thought he was an angel, even if his father said he had the devil in him” (@veschwab). It is safe then to say that Eli’s sense of morality has been honed in a wrong way. It is only safe to assume that his father has resorted to force and violence to cultivate him, or it was for other reasons. Whatever was the cause, Eli’s sense of morality has been flawed.

The *Ego* is responsible for reality, which Eli once again as he turns into an EO lacks completely. As soon he is an EO, he starts to believe that he is a hero, an angel sent directly by God in order to purify this land from other EOs, he believes that EOs are wrong:

EOs are wrong, and I am an EO, so I must be wrong. It was the simplest

of equations, but it wasn't right. Somehow, *it wasn't right*. He knew in his heart with a strange and simplest certainty that EOs *were* wrong. That they shouldn't exist. But he felt with equal certainty that *he* wasn't wrong, not the same way. Different, yes, undeniably different, but not wrong. (Schwab 201)

This certainty shows his belief that he is different. Such idea comes from his belief that they all make a deal with the devil, whereas his is with God. Eli's reality is upside down and he has done all it takes to convince himself that he is holly in a way, it is the only way to let the beast loose. In the novel, Eli continues weaving lies to himself: "He thought back to what he'd said in the stairwell. The words had spilled out on their own. *But it's a trade, Professor, with God or the devil...*" (200), and these thoughts are sealed as he sits down cutting himself, convinced that if God did not give him this power, he will take it back, he will let him kill himself :

... He cut deeper, through to bone, over and over, until the floor was red.

Until he'd given his life to God a hundred times, and a hundred times had it given back. Until the fear and the doubt had all been bled out of him. And then he set the knife aside with shaking hands. Eli dipped his fingertips in the slick of red, crossed himself, and got back to his feet. (Schwab 202)

After becoming an EO and believing that he is a holly hero, Eli starts to showcase some psychopathic tendencies, he starts, though to his own words he does not, killing EO. Eli Ever has become a sadist. Georges Bataille states in this regard the following: "The sadist, on the other hand, obtains pleasure from contemplating destruction ... if a man kills for material advantages his crime only really becomes a purely evil deed if he actually enjoys committing it, independently of the advantage to be obtained from it" (qtd. in Paulson 106). Eli has showcased the feelings of pleasure and enjoyment of killing both humans and EOs, through the novel, the following scene can really depict those feelings as he describes the killings: "he

did quite like the moment after. The glorious quit that filled the air as his broken bones healed and his tore skin closed, and he knew that God approved” (Schwab 207). Eli’s feeling after his first kill, which is not an EO but a human, also emphasizes the idea of him being a psychopath, “There was a moment with of such perfect quit, the kind he used to feel in church ... It was the first time he’d felt like himself, like *more* than himself, since he’d come back to life” (Schwab 198), this confession alone can prove what Victor has believed since the beginning, that Eli is nothing but a monster in a human disguise.

Vicious is a novel where the absence of good fertilized the universe to nurse one of the greatest villains literature has celebrated. Both Victor Vale and Eli Ever are of the same kind, they are both derived and shielded by their personal desires and pleasures, which helped in honing the monsters residing inside each one of them.

Conclusion

Literature being one of the fine arts that is known to be dynamic, accepting, and regenerated; and literature celebrates those qualities and many more through the books, be it prose or verse, published everyday. New themes and subjects are always ventured and celebrated in many genres under the literature stream. Fantasy in one of those glorified genres of literature, where it always seeks to praise the aforementioned qualities, introducing and dealing, in the process, with variety of new, enjoyable and even controversial subjects. Fantasy in specific and literature in general never disappoint; it is the land to where the readers escape from reality, and where they can find themselves.

V.E. Schwab is one of the writers that ventured in the fantastical genre, producing in the process, the novel, that this study is about. Schwab is an American author who made her debut with *The Near Witch* in 2011, she is known to be fascinated with monsters, villains and heroes, a fascination that lead her to produce her next novel entitled *Vicious*, a novel that celebrates the essence of the rivalry usually between what is good and evil, but with a unique twist. Schwab is still continuing with her unique sense in fantasy, producing and planning for many fantastical works in the future.

Vicious is a fantasy novel that was published in 2013, it is a novel that celebrates the use of superpowers, the sense of no good, and the controlling forces of evil. The events in the said novel unfold as the two once best friends turn sworn enemies once they both conquer superpowers. *Vicious* is a novel that mainly revolves around events painted with the sense of betrayal, loss and revenge, it tackles the worst a human being could be and embody, it is one of the few novels that inspect the inevitable reality once good fades away.

Fantasy as it was aforementioned, is one of the many literary genres, it is the virgin lands where magic happens and unearthly creatures exist. Fantasy as a literature subtype is a

famous and highly regarded powerhouse. Of the main reasons of this success, and one of the characteristics that set it apart from other genres is the tendency this type of literature ventures in; mixing reality with magical aspects, creating in the process charming and mysterious settings that lure and draw the readers of different ages, children, young adults and even adults, to dive, wonder and explore its lands.

Fantasy has existed since the existence of literature as an art, however, it only knew prosperity with the eruption of the Second World War, and with the publication of one of the most famous and known works, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring*, fantasy skyrocketed. One of the most existing tropes in fantasy is its centeredness on the dichotomy, good versus evil, giving much emphases to both heroes and villains and their respectful and different journeys.

Since the rivalry between good and evil is of major importance to fantasy, many writers have dwelled on this topic with different representations and in different settings and universes. However, few writers have gambled into uncharted waters, as they have omitted and excluded the sense of good in their novels, creating in the way epics that revolve only around evil and its conquers. *Vicious* is one of those novels, where superpowers lead to the destruction of the generated good in each and every character in the novel, painting all events with a dark atmosphere.

Once good is written off of the whole *Vicious*' universe, both male characters have showcased unsettling behaviors, one is seeking revenge from the other who is seeking to establish God's words by killing mostly innocent people, they both confront each other in a pure battle between what is bad and what is worse. Their actions, beliefs and morals are put to test psychoanalytically in order to determine who of the two best friends is the real manifestation of villainy; the real monster in disguise.

Schwab's message from this unique novel, *Vicious*, is direct and simple. The novel's message is that in the end it does not matter what are your beliefs, thoughts and ideologies, because at the end of the day, each and every one of us is harboring a monster, a sleeping devil waiting to be awakened. We are all in a way or another, whether we admit to it or not, know how to conceal those horrid thoughts, those Satan like behaviors, after all and as Victor Vale says, "Plenty of humans were monsters, and plenty of monsters knew how to play at being humans" (Schwab 271).

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ملخص

الغاية الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة هي التحقيق في تأصل الشر و غياب الطيبة و الصلاح في كتاب شرير لكاتبتة ف. إ. شواب. شرير هي رواية خيالية تدور أحداثها حول صديقين مقربين يتحولان إلى عدوين لدودين بمجرد حصولهما على قوى خارقة. الرواية قد أحدثت تغيير في المفهوم المتأصل و المتداول حول الثنائية شر-خير, وعلى هذا الأساس هذه الدراسة تحاول مناقشة العداوة المتداولة بين الأخيار و الأشرار، و ذلك بتسليط الضوء على الاتجاه الجديد المؤيد من طرف رواية الخيال الأدبي. هذا الاتجاه متمحور حول تجريد البطل من كل الأحاسيس الطيبة و بالتالي تحويله إلى شخص بدون رحمة وترك زمام الأمور للشرير بداخله. بمأن هذه الدراسة مرتكزة على موضوع الشر ضد الشر, فإن كل من فكتور فايل و إيلاي أفر سيتم مناقشتهم من خلال منظور التحليل النفسي و بالتحديد مناقشة دوافعهم, معتقداتهم, و نفسيتهما لتحديد هوية الشرير الحقيقي من بينهما.

Abstrait

Le principal objectif de cet étude est de détecter la grandeur puissance de mal et l'absence de bon dans la nature humaine dans le roman *Vicieux* de V.E. Schwab. *Vicieux* est un œuvre d'imagination qui se déroule autour des deux amis proches Victor et Eli, qui s'opposent l'un de l'autre dès qu'ils acquissent des forces extraordinaires. Ce roman a bouleversé la notion bien connue depuis l'antiquité de pair mal et bon. Et de ce fait cette étude a comme objectif de discuter l'hostilité entre les bons et les méchants en se basant sur la nouvelle direction de la fiction littéraire, qui se concentre sur le décapage de le caractère principal des bons sentiments et lui transformant en une autre personne impitoyable au cœur gelé, sans aucune miséricorde. Donc tant que cet étude a l'intérêt réside dans le thème mal contre mal, les deux caractères principales Victor et Eli seront mise sous la loupe de l'étude psychologiques en analysant leurs points de vue ; leur croyance, afin de connaître qui est le vrai vicieux parmi eux.