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Feminist Science Fiction: Cherie Priest's *The Clockwork Century*

Feministická Sci-fi Literatura: *Mechanické století* Cherie Priest

MAGISTERSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí magisterské práce (supervisor):

Mgr. Pavla Veselá, PhD

Zpracovala (author):

Bc. Petra Nováková

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Declaration

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned and properly cited, and that this thesis has not been used in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma at this or another university.

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Tímto souhlasím se zapůjčením této diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

Abstract

Marleen S. Barr, one of the pioneers of feminist science fiction criticism, is an outspoken commentator on gender inequality in this genre. In *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* and *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, Barr defines feminist science fiction as metafiction about patriarchal fiction. She speaks out against both authors and critics who recycle narratives restricted by a patriarchal view of the world in which women are silenced and/or relegated to the position of an accessory of the male hero, made to behave in a stereotypically feminine manner. While Barr does not include steampunk fiction but focuses on science fiction oriented towards the future and space exploration, her analysis of the female character's plight is nonetheless applicable to the steampunk genre. In this respect, feminist steampunk fiction can be read as a meditation on established gender norms.

Cherie Priest's work is a prime example of such an innovative re-examination of gender stereotypes that Barr calls for in her critical work. As both a woman and a writer of science fiction, the author has adopted a feminist approach in her steampunk series *The Clockwork Century*. Among other things, Priest examines the role of gender in nineteenth-century America. She portrays the struggle of women for equality of opportunity while, at the same time, having to constantly re-assert their own identity. *The Clockwork Century* novels all feature strong female protagonists who, in their own ways, challenge established notions of femininity and masculinity.

The aim of the thesis is thus to examine feminist attitudes in *The Clockwork Century* series, and to discuss how they impact and redefine women's place in Priest's fictional rewriting of the American Civil War. Barr's feminist science fiction theory will be applied to identify and analyze how Priest's heroines rebel against the perceived status quo. I will argue that the author emphasizes gender equality through conscious self-empowerment of her

heroines who liberate themselves from gender constraints by refusing to submit to the conventional feminine roles assigned to them by the patriarchal Western culture.

Key Words

Cherie Priest, gender roles, feminism, Marleen S. Barr, science fiction, steampunk

Abstrakt

Marleen S. Barr, průkopnice feministické kritiky vědeckofantastické literatury, je otevřenou komentátorkou genderové nerovnosti v tomto žánru. Ve svých dílech *Feministická fabulace: Vesmírná / Postmoderní beletrie* a *Budoucí ženy: Kritická antologie* Barr definuje feministickou science fiction jako metafikci o patriarchální literatuře. Vymezuje se vůči autorům i kritikům, kteří recyklují příběhy limitované patriarchálním pojetím světa, a odmítá se podílet na propagaci literatury, v níž jsou ženy umlčeny či se stanou pouhými módními doplňky mužského hrdiny, které se chovají stereotypně ženským způsobem. Přestože Barr se zaměřuje na sci-fi literaturu orientovanou do budoucnosti a na zkoumání vesmíru, její analýza situace a postavení ženských postav je aplikovatelná i na žánr steampunku. Z tohoto pohledu může být feministická steampunk literatura chápána jako meditace o zavedených genderových normách.

Tvorba Cherie Priest je zdárným příkladem inovativního přehodnocení genderových stereotypů, k čemuž Barr vyzývá ve svých kritických esejích. Jako žena i spisovatelka vědecko-fantastické literatury zvolila ve své steampunk sérii *Mechanické století* feministický přístup k science fiction. Ve svých románech zkoumá roli pohlaví ve Spojených státech amerických v devatenáctém století. Autorka vykresluje úsilí žen o rovnost příležitostí a jejich neustálý boj o prosazení své vlastní identity. V *Mechanickém století* figurují silné ženské protagonistky, které svým vlastním způsobem zpochybňují zavedené pojmy ženskosti a mužnosti.

Cílem této diplomové práce je tedy prozkoumat feministické postoje v *Mechanickém století* a okomentovat, jak ovlivňují a redefinují postavení žen v kontextu alternativní verze Americké občanské války. Feministické pojetí vědecko-fantastického žánru Marleene S. Barr bude aplikováno při analýze toho, jak se hrdinky Cherie Priest bouří proti zavedeným konvencím. Budu argumentovat tím, že autorka zdůrazňuje rovnost pohlaví skrze sebe-

uvědomění a seberealizaci hlavních ženských postav, které se osvobodí od genderových omezení tím, že se odmítnou podřítit tradičnímu pojetí ženských rolí, které jim přiděluje patriarchální západní kultura.

Klíčová Slova

Cherie Priest, genderové role, feminismus, Marleen S. Barr, sci-fi literatura, steampunk

List of Abbreviations

Throughout this thesis, I have used only the American editions of Cherie Priest's work. For brevity's sake, the following abbreviated forms will be utilized when quoting *The Clockwork Century* novels. Page references will be included in parentheses in the text.

- (B) for *Boneshaker* (New York: Tor Books, 2009)
- (C) for *Clementine* (Michigan: Subterranean Press, 2010)
- (D) for *Dreadnought* (New York: Tor Books, 2010)
- (F) for *Fiddlehead* (New York: Tor Books, 2013)
- (G) for *Ganymede* (New York: Tor Books 2011)

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Introduction

Science fiction is in its nature a subversive genre as it offers alternative views of the past, the present and the future of humankind. The genre “is at the intersection of numerous fields. It is a literature which draws on popular culture, and which engages in speculation about science, history and all types of social relations.”¹ Largely relying on potentiality and imagination, it enables us to examine the contemporary world through its fictional reflection. In *Feminist Fabulation* and *Future Females*, feminist scholar Marleene S. Barr claims that science fiction provides the perfect mode in which reality can be critically questioned and experimented with because of its unique ability to “influence cultural constructions.”² Despite the perceived advantages of science fiction there are drawbacks to the genre: the anti-feminist representation or outright exclusion of women. Barr states that “science fiction has in a sense maltreated women by ignoring them. [...] Authors, both female and male, have trivialized women characters.”³ Barr’s feminist theory aims to rectify this issue by re-conceptualizing contemporary science fiction. She proposes the creation of a “new canonical space in which the constructed nature of patriarchal reality, as well as possibilities for new feminist cultural reality”⁴ could be challenged.

Subsequently, Barr is critical of texts that promote patriarchal views of the world and continuously stresses the responsibility of the writer not to conform to the status quo in regards to gender stereotyping. There has been much written about “science fiction’s depiction of women as insignificant helpmates or sex objects.”⁵ What is needed is an

¹ Edward James; and Farah Mendlesohn, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) i.

² Marleene S. Barr, ed., *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) xiv.

³ Eric S. Rabkin, “Science Fiction Women before Liberation”, *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, Marleene S. Barr, ed. (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981) 9.

⁴ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation*, 4.

⁵ Marleene S. Barr, ed., *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981) 2.

imaginative space in which labels such as feminine and masculine are no longer the most defining attributes of a human being. According to Barr, science fiction can provide such a space as it “offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way.”⁶ For that very reason, science fiction ought to be appropriated by female writers and “form a major current in the contemporary stream of feminist thought.”⁷ In her view, the genre can be used to display the existing gender relations as well as to create new realities in which patriarchy is not the dominant mode. Barr asserts that “as a literature that imagines alternatives science fiction has a special obligation to imagine alternative roles for women.”⁸

Inspired by Barr’s work, I have wondered about the potential for steampunk fiction to function as a “postmodern challenge to patriarchal master narratives about such matters as stereotypes regarding male superiority and female ineptitude.”⁹ In this thesis, I aim to prove that steampunk novels can indeed be read as a daring foray into feminist literature. Contemporary steampunk writers such as Cherie Priest, Gail Carriger, or Karina Cooper have begun to bring women’s voices to the fore and their narratives offer new and refreshing visions of gender attributes reflecting a more modern approach to the portrayal of strong female protagonists. Steampunk heroines must fight for their place in the world within the nineteenth-century socio-cultural context of patriarchal dominance that is, however, viewed through twenty-first-century lenses. Due to this, the authors are able to present both the issues relevant to the past as well as the gender-based expectations women face today. By consciously disturbing the status quo of a particular fictional version of the nineteenth century, female characters can overcome the oppressive societal limitations placed on their

⁶ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 10.

⁷ Barr, *Future Females* 4.

⁸ Barr, *Future Females* 20.

⁹ Barr, *Future Females* 151.

gender by going against conventions and by actively embracing any and all opportunities available to them to become more than ‘damsels in distress.’

The purpose of this thesis is not to offer a clear-cut definition of steampunk but to prove that the genre can function as a unique medium for challenging the existing social hierarchy by presenting a different social structure, one that is continuously challenged by women. What Barr proposes in her work is that “a critical space where fiction is viewed in terms of women is needed.”¹⁰ She invents the term ‘feminist fabulation’ to cover this rather wide range of speculative fiction. This could also be applied to steampunk fiction as it similarly to other subgenres of science fiction enables writers to create whole new worlds for women to thrive in. According to Eileen Gunn, “science fiction, at its best, engenders the sort of flexible thinking that not only inspires but compels us to consider the myriad potential consequences of our actions.”¹¹ In the light of this, it is certainly possible to view past gender stereotypes through contemporary views of gender issues. This thesis’ premise is thus that steampunk can offer an imaginative feminist space in which contemporary understanding of gender stereotypes can be explored and contrasted with the more traditional views of gender prevalent during the Civil War era.

For the purposes of this thesis, Cherie Priest’s highly acclaimed series *The Clockwork Century* has been selected as a representative of feminist-oriented steampunk science fiction. The series is an example of the rise of strong female characters and active engagement with feminism in the genre. Priest’s work provides a complex material for analysis given its alternative steampunk rewriting of the Civil War and the focus on Industrial era science. Moreover, Priest shows awareness of the numerous failings of the nineteenth century such as gender inequality, slavery, racism or war crimes which adds yet another dimension to her

¹⁰ Barr, *Future Females* 1.

¹¹ Eileen Gunn, “Brave New Worlds: How America’s Leading Science Fiction Authors are Shaping Your Future,” *The Smithsonian Magazine* (The Smithsonian: New York, May 2014). < <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/may-2014/> >. Accessed April 20, 2017.

novels. She poses questions of gender and social transformation through conscious rejection of the established status quo. By providing a different version of well-known historical events Priest enables her heroines to both resist and subvert the hegemonic ideology they were born into. In this respect, *The Clockwork Century* can be read as feminist science fiction, a fantastic spectacle showing how women can successfully transcend their gender's limitations enforced by the societal pressure. This approach to the issue of gender equality is then in line with what Barr propounds in *Future Females* in regards to feminist science fiction. In her view, science fiction novels, feminist utopias and dystopias in particular, "challenge and correct biases about innate female nature"¹² and can also serve as a way to "counter stereotypes by emphasizing women's strength, courage and intelligence."¹³ In this respect, dystopias "challenge the assumption that women are weak and need male protection."¹⁴

Furthermore, while history is indeed important to the discussion of the changes that Priest proposes in *The Clockwork Century*, I shall restrict historical analysis only to facts that bear relevance to understanding the necessary context of the alternative version of the Civil War, i.e. the strained South and North political relations and how the prolonged conflict affects ordinary people on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Similarly, explanations of the scientific elements shall be limited as fictional technological innovations are not the focus of this thesis. As for the concept of gender, nineteenth-century views of femininity and masculinity will be taken into account and discussed in relation to contemporary preconceptions of gender as presented in Barr's critical essays on the relationship between feminism and science fiction literature. In this respect, the thesis can be situated within the broader range of gender studies, and the discussion of power structures and patriarchal domination within the context of the nineteenth century or rather its fictional version.

¹² Barr, *Future Females* 64.

¹³ Barr, *Future Females* 64.

¹⁴ Barr, *Future Females* 64.

The first chapter of this thesis presents a general overview of the steampunk genre and its origins. The establishment of alternative timelines is also discussed, as well as the scientific elements that distinguish steampunk from other subgenres of science fiction. Furthermore, attention is paid to the main differences between its European and American variations especially in regards to the Civil War which in Cherie Priest's *The Clockwork Century* series serves as a vehicle for technological progress in the sense that it forces people to create not only more advanced weapon systems and support equipment but also new means of communication and transportation in order to survive the war.

The following chapter moves on to discuss the different ways in which we can read steampunk fiction as a backward glance at an alternative version of the past in which women are enabled by technology associated with the Industrial Revolution to step outside the boundaries set by the nineteenth-century gender views on femininity. The concept of gender and the preconceived cultural perceptions of women in general, are discussed in this chapter with an emphasis on the nineteenth-century notions of masculinity and femininity and the possible means of subverting gender-based stereotypes. The author of *The Clockwork Century* is briefly introduced as well but the main focus is on how Priest portrays her female characters. In particular, the question of their motivation is explored as well as the various means they employ to reach their goals.

The heroines of *The Clockwork Century* series are examined in a chronological order in which the novels were published in the following chapters: three, four, five, and six. These sections offer an in-depth analysis of the characters of Briar Wilkes, the main female protagonist of *Boneshaker*, Mercy Lynch, the heroine of *Dreadnought*, and Maria Boyd, the infamous spy of *Fiddlehead* and *Clementine*. The way the above-mentioned protagonists subvert their socially ascribed roles is also considered, for example, their ability to adapt to new situations including a change in social status is also considered with regards to the

nineteenth-century gender stereotypes. In addition, to what extent their relationships with men and other women affect their life choices and define their personality is also explored in greater detail in chapters three, four, and five.

Chapter six offers a profile of the main antagonist, the villainous Katharine Haymes, who is analyzed in greater depth and contrasted with other characters. Haymes, the main antagonist of the whole series, represents a strong independent female figure, one who transcends the limitations of her gender not as a heroine but a villain. Instead of another maternal figure whose purpose is to protect and defend, Haymes becomes the negative force capable of wide-spread destruction. *The Clockwork Century* does not employ feminist attitudes of self-empowerment as the possible means of elevating women or even establishing a matriarchy, but as a way to reach equality between the sexes in all areas of life. In this sense, even the character of the villain/villainess serves his or her purpose in that it shows that both men and women can change the world, for better or worse. Indeed, what Priest shows in her novels is that women can become not only heroic figures but also monsters, same as men.

The final chapter provides an overview of how Priest's heroines successfully manage to subvert nineteenth-century gender stereotypes and liberate themselves from the shackles of oppressive societal stereotyping. Applying Barr's feminist theory, *The Clockwork Century* can be thus assessed as feminist speculative fiction and by extension, a narrative space where hegemonic structures are replaced by social relations based on the equality of sexes. In other words, Priest's approach towards feminism promotes equality between the sexes instead of 'black and white' view of gender relations. The author shows women in a positive light focusing on their ability to adopt both 'feminine' and 'masculine' traits. At the same time, she does not cast men as the female protagonists' 'enemies' that must be defeated but as their equals.

1. What is Steampunk?

The most defining feature of steampunk is its preoccupation with the past. Steampunk has a special place within the field of science fiction. As Steffen Hantke explains, it is a “science fiction subgenre that postulates a fictional event of vast consequences in the past and extrapolates from this event a fictional though historically contingent present or future.”¹⁵ This intentional breaking of the timeline establishes an alternate history to be explored and experimented with. The genre is hence not limited to observing historical facts but instead re-imagines particular events in new unorthodox ways. In the most basic sense, steampunk presents an alternative history of the age of steam. For that very purpose, it consciously produces historical inaccuracies in terms of how particular events might have gone differently and the subsequent changes it would have had on the fictional reflection of our world. The aim is not to imitate the past but to use it as an “opportunity to rewrite the past, not in the naive hope that it can be changed, but rather that retro-futurist speculations can affect the present and the future.”¹⁶ Therefore, the narrative construction is centered on similarities and discrepancies between the actual history and the deconstructed steampunk version. Through this comparison, the author can question the present and theorize on how to change things now and here. The speculative aspects of steampunk further serve to differentiate the genre from neo-Victorian literature and place it firmly within the field of science fiction.

James E. Gunn has defined the genre as a vast collection of narratives featuring “fantastic worlds of unfamiliar events or developments” that are “neither here and now nor there and then.”¹⁷ Gunn’s definition is well suited for steampunk fiction because it also takes

¹⁵ Steffen Hantke, “Difference Engines and Other Infernal Devices: History According to Steampunk,” *Extrapolation* 40.3 (Kent State University Press, Sept. 1999) 246.

¹⁶ Mike Dieter Perschon, *The Steampunk Aesthetic: Technofantasies in a Neo-Victorian Retrofuture*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Edmonton, Alberta, 2012) 11. <<https://era.library.ualberta.ca/public/view/item/uuid:bbd5ff78-459f-415c-ae2d-e14d6dae01ba/>>.

¹⁷ James E. Gunn, “Toward a Definition of Science Fiction,” *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, James E. Gunn; and Matthew Candelaria, eds. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005) 6.

into account experiments with time and space combining the concept of the Butterfly Effect and the Many Worlds theory, both of which are essential to the steampunk genre. In the light of this, steampunk can be defined as a re-imagination of history, technological innovation, gender relations, politics, and class. By reinterpreting the Age of Steam, a new purely hypothetical past is constructed which encourages the reader to imagine the potentialities of their own time. As Eileen Gunn wrote in her article for *The Smithsonian Magazine* in 2014, “the task of science fiction is not to predict the future. Rather, it contemplates possible futures.”¹⁸ Therefore, if science fiction poses the future-oriented question ‘what could be’, then steampunk fiction looks backwards and asks ‘what could have gone differently’ had we chosen steam as the primary power source. In this respect, steam becomes the starting point of all the new alternative pasts and can eventually lead to the development of other energy sources such as diesel or electricity.

In order to ensure that the reader can experience a ‘sense of wonder’ and at the same time connect to the text on a personal level, steampunk emphasizes the readers’ ability to recognize the main differences between reality and fiction. The formal aspects of the text and the subsequent interpretation of any science fiction text are one and the same, i.e. intrinsically linked through the concept of cognitive estrangement:

Cognitive estrangement is tied inextricably to the encoded nature of sf: to style, lexical invention and embedding. Cognitive estrangement is the sense that something in the fictive world is dissonant with the reader’s experienced world. On a superficial level, this difference may be achieved by shifts of time, place, and technological scenery.¹⁹

¹⁸ Eileen Gunn, “Brave New Words: How America’s Leading Science Fiction Authors are Shaping Your Future,” *The Smithsonian Magazine* (The Smithsonian: New York, May 2014). < <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/issue/may-2014/> >. Accessed April 20, 2017.

¹⁹ Farah Mendlesohn, “Introduction: Reading Science Fiction,” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 5.

Thus, steampunk writers consciously work with alternative realities that, while being different from the actual course of events, are still somewhat familiar to the reader. “How might the past have looked had its ‘future’ occurred before it was supposed to? This is the theoretical space inhabited by steampunk.”²⁰

Steampunk novels are generally set in the nineteenth century using Victoriana as an inter-text in the case of European novels and the Civil War era within the American setting. However, steampunk should not be classified as neo-Victorian fiction because it does not romanticize Victorian values nor does it attempt to imitate nineteenth-century literary styles, quite the contrary. Unlike neo-Victorian fiction, steampunk does not ignore the harsh socio-economic realities of the nineteenth century. Hantke explains that “what makes the Victorian past so fascinating is its unique historical ability to reflect the present moment.”²¹ Issues such as gender inequality, racism, war, child labor, colonialism and slavery are approached from a modern point of view and contrasted with either an alternative relevant to the past or the present situation regarding the above mentioned social ills. The nineteenth century is so attractive because what “we share with the Victorians are essentially the same social, economic and political structures.”²² In comparison, conventional Victorian novels focused largely on social interaction with emphasis on manners and propriety as reinforced by the class system in England, themes which can be traced back to class and gender conflicts.

In Steampunk, the tropes and themes typical of nineteenth-century literature had since then been adapted to new contexts and Victorian motifs such as the newly emerging scientific beliefs, the popularization of utilitarianism and poor conditions for the working class were appropriated and modified to make them more suitable for a modern readership. In this sense, Victoriana mostly provides the aesthetic context which steampunk writers use to juxtapose the

²⁰ Burgsbee L. Hobbs “Steampunk,” *Sense of Wonder: A Century of Science Fiction*, Leigh Ronald Grossman, ed. (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2011) 909.

²¹ Hantke 244.

²² Hantke 245

past and the present in terms of nostalgia, technology, and design. A cognitive estrangement then occurs when the author makes significant changes to history but it is still somewhat recognizable to the reader.

The meta-fictional elements consciously acknowledge the influence of the Victorian era while the displays of historical, thematic and/or structural anachronisms signify the self-awareness of the nostalgic and idealistic view of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. As a subgenre of science fiction, it too has an ambiguous relationship with facts, science and time as it largely depends on speculation. It “imagines how an alternate past would have looked if a pastiche of ideas from both the present and the present’s imagined future were fused with those of the past.”²³ Steampunk demonstrates, possibly more than any other literary genre, that history and imagination are not opposing terms and can, in fact, come together to form alternative past.

1.1. Origins of Steampunk

As the preceding section illustrated, a new subgenre of science fiction called steampunk appeared towards the end of the 20th century. However, the beginnings of the genre are not as easy to discern as one might assume. “Depending on whom you believe, steampunk has been exploding into the world for the last hundred years [...] or maybe the last twenty-five (when the term was first used by K.W. Jeter in a letter to the editor of *Locus: The Magazine of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Field*).”²⁴ Nonetheless, what is certain is that over the last two decades, the influence of steampunk has expanded significantly as it now includes fashion, music, art, design and even the movie and television industry; for instance the movies

²³ Burgsbee 910.

²⁴ Kelly Link; and Gavin J. Grant, “Introduction,” *Steampunk! An Anthology of Fantastically Rich and Strange Stories*, Kelly Link; and Gavin J. Grant, eds. (Somerville: Candlewick, 2011) vii.

Wild Wild West (1999) or *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003) are considered to be a part of the steampunk genre.²⁵

From a historical viewpoint, steampunk can be loosely connected to the works of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, two of science fiction's founding fathers. Wells' famous novel *The Time Machine* (1895) and Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (1870) both feature steampunk-like technology, i.e. a time machine and the submarine Nautilus, respectively. However, both authors focused on the scientific exploration of a new location rather than on the science that enabled the characters to journey there. Another notable precursor of steampunk appeared during the Georgian era: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), a novel greatly influenced by Romanticism. While Shelley combined gothic motifs with science, she was more concerned with the incursion into the darker recesses of the human psyche through which she presented contemporary social fears brought on by the socio-economic effects of the Industrial Revolution, i.e. the slow decline of the land-based aristocracy, the rise of the bourgeoisie and the mercantile classes, and the growing impoverishment of the working class.

In the introduction to *Extraordinary Engines: The Definitive Steampunk Anthology*, Nick Gevers mentions a number of other nineteenth and early twentieth-century authors whose works also served as an inspiration for steampunk fiction, for example Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Machen.²⁶ He also cites 'penny dreadfuls' "that echoed these canonical works"²⁷ as the genre's antecedents. John Clute adds authors like Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker²⁸ to the list because of the gothic aesthetics

²⁵ Paul Roland, *Steampunk Back to the Future with the New Victorians* (Harpenden: Oldcastle Books Ltd., 2014) 157-159.

²⁶ Nick Gevers, ed., Introduction," *Extraordinary Engines: The Definitive Steampunk Anthology* (Nottingham: Solaris, 2008) 7-11.

²⁷ Gevers 9.

²⁸ John Clute, "Steampunk," *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute; and John Grant, eds. (New Jersey: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 895-896.

which can so often be found in steampunk. Yet, while the works of the above-mentioned authors appear to anticipate certain key aspects of steampunk, they cannot be considered steampunk fiction. As Hantke states, “the shaping force behind steampunk is not history but the will of its author to establish and then violate and modify a set of ontological ground rules.”²⁹ The nineteenth-century narratives were all set in their own time, i.e. the Victorian or Edwardian era, and the featured technology was intended to be futuristic looking. In steampunk fiction, machines either mimic nineteenth-century inventions or use an alternative energy source in devices inspired by the twenty-first-century technology. Nevertheless, these works should not be omitted when speaking of the genre’s history as they did indeed serve as an inspiration for twentieth-century steampunk writers.

The true origins of steampunk lie in the late 1980s. The genre itself has been recognized by critics only recently as the term ‘steampunk’ was coined by K.W. Jeter in April of 1987.³⁰ Jeter believed that the new pseudo-historical novels that he himself and his fellow writers Tim Powers and James Blaylock were writing at the time would become popular only if there was a general term to define them.³¹ The next two decades proved him right as steampunk has gradually evolved into a cultural phenomenon leaving its mark on literature, art, music, architecture, and design. Jeter’s novel *Infernal Devices* (1987) is certainly one of the pioneering works of steampunk and it has since become a part of the genre’s literary canon despite being one of only a few steampunk novels Jeter wrote. Set in Victorian London, the story follows George Dower, a simple watchmaker and shop owner, and his mysterious and often dangerous customers who bring him various mechanical gadgets to repair, including a fully functional clockwork android that is a realistic copy of the protagonist himself.

²⁹ Hantke 248.

³⁰ “The Birth of Steampunk,” *Letters of Note Website*, Transcript of Jeter’s letter to the editor of *Locus*, posted 1 March 2011. < <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2011/03/birth-of-steampunk.html> >. Accessed March 2, 2017.

³¹ Cory Gross, “A History of Misapplied Technology,” *SteamPunk Magazine Issue #2: A Journal of Misapplied Technology* (Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, 2007) 57.

In 1990, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling popularized the genre of steampunk when they published *The Difference Engine* in which they explored an alternative history of the Information Age. In their novel, Gibson and Sterling broke the expected timeline by introducing a fully functional mechanical computer theorized already in 1822 by a famous nineteenth-century engineer Charles Babbage. Through this, the technological revolution was sped up by approximately a hundred years, which spurred on socio-cultural changes that are at the centre of the narrative. “The book has divided readers into those who were thoroughly immersed in its alternative history and those who strained to stay awake through the long dreary monologues”³² of Edward Mallory, the protagonist. Despite the obvious differences in reception, the excited half of *The Difference Engine*’s readers was more than enough to inspire a whole new generation of authors to begin writing steampunk fiction in earnest.

During the first wave of steampunk, a satirical dimension could be detected within the genre’s thematic range. However, over the past two decades, the genre has evolved into something else entirely. While there is still the element of social criticism present in steampunk fiction, it is not at the centre anymore. Nowadays, adventure and alternative histories are at the forefront along with contemporary issues of gender inequality, morality and racism. Jess Nevins has articulated this change of how to define steampunk as an on-going battle between “the prescriptivists, who maintain that only the Jeter/Nicholls definition is the correct one”³³, i.e. that steampunk is an exploration of alternative Victorian fantasies and technologies, and “the descriptivists, whose preferred definition of the term is far broader than Jeter/Nicholls and reflects its current (shambolic) status rather than its past (traditional)

³² Roland 34.

³³ Jess Nevins, “Prescriptivists vs. Descriptivists: Defining Steampunk,” *Science Fiction Studies* 38 (Nov. 2011) 513.

use.”³⁴ In Nevin’s view, contemporary steampunk is no longer “primarily a literary category [...] exhibiting a lack of lack of consensus and clarity.”³⁵

The 2000s and the 2010s saw a steady flow of steampunk novels featuring either magic, science or a combination of both. Quite often, these modern steampunks develop in a series of books offering a narrative diversity ranging from an in-depth exploration of an alternate history to a romantic adventure. Among the most notable examples of modern steampunk are: Stephen Hunt’s *Jackelian* series (2007-2012), Scott Westerfield’s *Leviathan* trilogy (2009-2011), Gail Carriger’s *The Parasol Protectorate* series (2009-2012), Jim Butcher’s *The Cinder Spires* series (2013-ongoing) and, of course, Cherie Priest’s *The Clockwork Century* series (2009-2015). In particular, the female writers represent a new wave of steampunk fiction as their works feature strong female characters. In *Feminist Fabulation*, Barr states that Anglo-American feminist science fiction writers are the ones who “generate future, feminist scenarios after observing present, obvious phenomena. They look towards science fiction to estrange readers from prevailing sexist roles and to reformulate those roles.”³⁶ While she speaks of space-oriented fiction, the same can be said to apply to contemporary feminist steampunk literature as well. The importance of gender is especially stressed out in the purview of the nineteenth-century gender stereotypes that Priest employs in *The Clockwork Century*.

1.2. The Science of Steampunk

Placing technological advances at the core of any society’s future progress or decline is common for science fiction. However, steampunk offers an innovative view of technological achievements by going against this trend and finding inspiration in the past

³⁴ Nevins 513.

³⁵ Nevins 514.

³⁶ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 6.

instead. James Gunn defines science fiction as a “branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places.”³⁷ In steampunk, the “historical point of divergence is the period immediately prior to the adoption of internal combustion engines and before the experiments in atomic physics.”³⁸ The main difference between steampunk and other science fiction texts, which deal with alternative realities, is thus the focus on seemingly ‘antiquated’ technology. Industrial Revolution provides a particularly rich source of potential scientific stimuli as it was “a period of rapid industrial growth causing a shift in focus from agriculture to industry.”³⁹

In the nineteenth century, the most common sources of energy were steam, gas, coal and eventually even electricity. In steampunk literature, futuristic looking inventions are generally powered by steam engines. While external combustion is the most common feature in steampunk technology; magic and alchemy can also be used to power extraordinary machines. In fact, steampunk may be science fiction-based, fantasy-based, or a blend of both genres. For the purposes of this thesis, only science-oriented texts will be examined in greater detail as there are no magical elements to be found in Priest’s masterpiece. In the simplest terms, *The Clockwork Century* can be defined as an adventure set in an alternative nineteenth-century America which firmly places the narrative within the science fiction field. This is in accordance with Gunn’s understanding of science fiction because “it often concerns itself with scientific or technological change.”⁴⁰

The legacy of the Industrial Revolution is re-imagined in a way that allows for an exploration of a bygone era through a twenty-first-century lens. “In both the historical

³⁷ Gunn, *Speculations on Speculation* 7.

³⁸ David Beard, “Introduction: A Rhetoric of Steam,” *Clockwork Rhetoric: the Language and Style of Steampunk*, Barry Brummet, ed. (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014) xxiv.

³⁹ Sonia G. Benson; and Jennifer York Stock, eds., *Development of the Industrial U.S.: Almanac* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006) vii.

⁴⁰ Gunn, *Speculations on Speculation* 7.

Victorian era (1837–1901) and the anachronistic, pseudo-historical world of steampunk, mechanical novelties continue to be manufactured with clunky gears and cogwheels.”⁴¹ The new inventions had an enormous influence on the Western world and proved to be the vehicle of social, economic and cultural change. “Industrialization fueled the national culture, economy, daily life, and politics, creating tremendous social changes.”⁴² It is precisely these tremendous changes that enable steampunk writers to gaze backwards and “imagine alternative Victorian past in which technological advances [...] radically alter the course of history and open up possible future techno-cultural worlds.”⁴³ The sheer amount of scientific discoveries and technological advancement form the basic framework as they are at the core of steampunk’s fascination with the nineteenth-century science. Indeed, steampunk machines range from a variety of delicate gadgets such as intricate pocket watches or handguns to gigantic trains and dirigibles capable of great destruction.⁴⁴

The types of materials used to construct fictional machines also tend to be historically accurate, i.e. wood, glass, metals like brass, copper, and iron. However, these materials are articulated in new frameworks and used in mechanical contraptions that are either based on existing objects or completely hypothetical. Technology itself is often reminiscent of modern machinery albeit altered in a way that makes it appear as if it could have been built by a nineteenth-century engineer. In this respect, steampunk technology is “simultaneously retro and forward-looking in nature,”⁴⁵ integrating past designs and present expectations of what man can accomplish when well equipped. In her examination of steampunk as an artistic movement, Stefania Forlini recognizes “that steampunk explicitly reclaims the right to tinker, to make—and to make, often by trial and error, things that are aesthetically pleasing even if

⁴¹ Burgsbee 909.

⁴² Benson and Stock vii.

⁴³ Stefania Forlini, “Technology and Morality: The Stuff of Steampunk,” *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3.1 (2010) 72.

⁴⁴ For visual images see Appendixes B, C and D.

⁴⁵ Jeff VanderMeer, *Steampunk Bible: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Imaginary Airships, Corsets and Goggles, Mad Scientists, and Strange Literature* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2011) 9.

not necessarily efficient or useful.”⁴⁶ While Forlini focuses on the aesthetic aspect of steampunk technology, she also correctly stresses the personal investment the engineers must put into each of their creations.

Today, technology is more of an extension of us, a way of being connected to the outside world at all times. It is also far too complex for an average person to comprehend let alone be able to fix or even handcraft machines by themselves the way it is possible in steampunk. Much of reality is virtual with knowledge and service being available online and therefore inaccessible in the physical sense. In the past, science was an instrument, a man-made tool with a transparent purpose. Also, nineteenth-century technology was far more simple and user-friendly than it is at present time. This difference in approach to what technology means to us and what it can help us achieve can be put down to a desire to “reclaim that earlier less complicated relationship to technology,”⁴⁷ i.e. to go back to a time when we could understand and even see how our technology worked. In other words, steampunk shows how our relationship to technology has changed over time and what influence science has had on humanity. Similarly to future-oriented science fiction, steampunk writers too “tend to exalt or despise technology and science, and to view them as the boon or bane of civilization.”⁴⁸ It can be argued that steampunk both rejects technology and revels in it.

1.3. American Steampunk and the Civil War

Nineteenth-century was a time of rapid scientific advancement which eventually transformed America into a modern country. The changes were accelerated by the Civil War which began about the same time that “the new era of rail and steam took hold in the Northern

⁴⁶ Forlini 76.

⁴⁷ Beard xiv.

⁴⁸ Barr, *Future Females* 165.

States.”⁴⁹ In American steampunk novels, the Civil War often functions as a vehicle for innovation especially in regards to the war industry and related technologies such as communication and transportation.⁵⁰ This is in accordance with historical accounts about the conflict: “The long and destructive nature of the Civil War combined with the immense stakes involved — the fate of the old Federal Union, the existence of the Confederate nation, and the status of slavery — made it a war of mass mobilization in both sections.”⁵¹ In other words, the demands of the war industry put a much stronger pressure on the people to gain any advantage possible in order to survive the conflict. In fact, during “the Civil War, some homes were still lit by candles and oil lamps.”⁵² Unsurprisingly, the introduction of “gas-lighting offered a welcome alternative to the dirt and odor of the kerosene lamp.”⁵³ Technology that had been the norm for decades before the Civil War suddenly became out-dated and eventually replaced.

In a true steampunk fashion, technology plays a major role in *The Clockwork Century* narrative and Priest views war as essentially progressive but also amoral because there is nothing that could justify the horrors of war. Throughout *The Clockwork Century*, Priest illuminates the moral and ethical complexities present in war practices such as the use of heavy artillery or chemical warfare. In particular, she offers several individual viewpoints through which she stresses the sense of responsibility and the necessity of empathy that the heroines exhibit. It is within this feminist framework that the author explores the grim reality of the Civil War and uses the conflict as a background for her narrative. By exposing the complexity of the linkage between politics and economy, Priest points out the potential for

⁴⁹ Benson and Stock 154.

⁵⁰ “The construction of the transcontinental railroad spanning the nation from one coast to the other [...] Where railroads went, towns and cities with bustling new commerce arose. The construction of the railroads spawned giant new industries in steel, iron, and coal.”

Benson and Stock ix.

⁵¹ Jon White, ed., *History of War: Book of the American Civil War* (Richmond: Imagine Publishing, 2016) 32.

⁵² Benson and Stock 113.

⁵³ Benson and Stock 113.

corruption and its consequences. The perspective Priest adopts is thus one that assesses violence as inherently evil and war as unethical.

The author's keen interest in Civil War history, the patent office's records in particular, enabled Priest to present a number of military advances that either copy or at least closely resemble strategies, weapons, equipment and fuels used in the real conflict: ironclad warships, repeating rifles, cartridge ammunition, revolving gun turret,⁵⁴ machine guns, and even identification tags for soldiers. In this respect, technology became an advantage and thus an inseparable aspect of war. Perhaps most significantly, the new telegraph lines and the transcontinental railroad revolutionized communication and transportation in the United States and significantly changed the dynamics of the war because it allowed for a faster and more secure transfer of equipment, supplies, mobilization of armed forces.

However, Priest does not limit technological progress to the battlefield but, as in reality, shows how it affected civilian life at large. In *Dreadnought*, Priest focuses on various medical improvements spurred on by the conflict: a new way of organizing the hospital staff, a modern patient classification system based on the severity of the wound and likelihood of survival and the importance of sanitation. The war also serves as a unique practice ground for doctors to develop new surgical methods such as amputations and the consequent improvement of prosthetic limbs. In this respect, Priest also remains faithful to historical accounts in terms of the all-pervasive sense of loss that permeates *The Clockwork Century* series from the very first page to the last. "The Civil War mobilized human and economic resources in the Confederacy and the Union on a scale unmatched by any other event in American history except perhaps World War II."⁵⁵ The medical progress thus reflects the

⁵⁴ For further reading see Spencer S. Tucker, *Instruments of War: Weapons and Technologies that Have Changed History* (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015) 96, 99, 101-2.

⁵⁵ James M. McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 46.

conditions of the Civil War and clearly showcases the terrible loss and horrors that both sides of the conflict had to cope with in the aftermath.

In the most basic sense, the political and social impact of Priest's fictional rendering of the Civil War mirrors reality thusly: the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery. This change had an impact not only in socio-political terms but it also significantly affected the American economy. The South⁵⁶ was largely dependent on agriculture and unpaid labor of slaves whereas Northern states relied on industrial production and rejected the institution of slavery. "Both sides had to find the human, material, and technological resources for waging a war at a time of rapid industrialization, with its railroads,⁵⁷ mass-produced weapons and equipment, and comparatively new technologies."⁵⁸ However, what the Confederacy had in terms of size and geographical advantages, it lacked in manufacturing capacity which "made it nearly impossible to provide its army with sufficient arms and ammunition."⁵⁹ In contrast, the North's "larger supply of natural resources such as iron and coal, and its greater economic strength enabled it to sustain the war for a longer time than the South ever could."⁶⁰ This economic and industrial divide between the two sides is precisely what Priest depicts in *The Clockwork Century*. Her pre-planned play on historical accuracy and the complexity of the narrative then allows the author to craft an alternate world that resembles the past one very closely.

As a representative of American steampunk, Priest's mechanical contraptions copy the historical accounts as they too are powered mostly by steam. In the novels, the author poses

⁵⁶ This thesis considers the American South and the American North, especially in the context of the Civil War, as culturally and historically distant regions. For that reason, capitalization will be used throughout the thesis.

⁵⁷ "The outcome of the Civil War was heavily influenced by the advantages the North gained from its industry. In 1859 the North had about 21,900 miles of railroads compared to the South's 6,600. In the North, railroads connected the fading and manufacturing centers, but in the South, railroads lacked direct connections between major cities. During the war the Southerners had problems getting supplies where they were needed and failed to get needed food to the armies in the field. The North had 90 percent of the nation's industrial capacity."

Benson and Stock 153.

⁵⁸ White 32.

⁵⁹ Benson and Stock 154.

⁶⁰ White 33.

the Republic of Texas as the center of scientific progress because of its innovative approach towards technology. The reason may be that in reality, in the explosive industrial growth spurred on by the Civil War, “the North possessed most of the country’s manufacturing capacity, including 97 percent of firearms production”⁶¹ and Texas was one of the most important suppliers of high-quality war machinery. In the author’s view, war is what drives technological progress “above all else”⁶² by pushing for the application of already existing inventions on a larger scale and by delegating resources towards new research that would be of use to the military in ending the conflict. In other words, necessity inspires innovation. As Priest stated in an interview for the *Locus Magazine*, having already decided on writing steampunk fiction, Priest asked herself: “In the 19th century in America we had a Civil War, [...] but what if it kept going? Let’s give it a full generation, 20 more years.”⁶³ *The Clockwork Century* is her answer.

Clearly, Priest was meticulous in her research of the Civil War era and thus some of the machines that appear in *The Clockwork Century* run on other more modern fuels such as diesel, coal, oil, and sometimes even electricity or hydrogen. In fact, the author herself claims that she found inspiration in “old patent databases from late in the war, 1864 or ’65 [...] tanks and crawling machines and elaborate guns.”⁶⁴ By means of updating the energy sources, Texas becomes the leading power in terms of research and development. It is this technological advantage as the source of Texas’ power that she continuously stresses throughout the series:

Texas done developed it, so it runs on processed petroleum. Can’t you smell it?

[...] Diesel. That’s what they call it, and that’s why our Hellbender’s gonna take

⁶¹ White 32.

⁶² Liza Groen Trombi, “Interview with Cherie Priest: Pornography and War,” *Locusmag.com*, *Locus Magazine* Issue 596, Sept 13, 2010. < <http://locusmag.com/2010/09/cherie-priest-pornography-war/> >. Accessed Aug 25, 2017.

⁶³ Trombi.

⁶⁴ Trombi.

down their... whatever they call theirs. Theirs just run on steam. They move all right, but they run so hot, they can't keep pace with ours, not for very long. Not without cooking the men who ride inside 'em.⁶⁵

Priest is able to paint a very realistic image of the striking differences between the South and the North by utilizing retro-futuristic technologies.

Priest highlights the correlation between the level of technological advancement and the standards of life on both sides of the Civil War. In *The Clockwork Century*, women can elevate their social standing by acquiring skills that are generally ascribed to men such as wielding weapons for personal usage and taking advantage of new means of communication (telegraph) and public transportation (dirigibles, railway system). After all, the North American continent comprises of “thousands of miles to be travelled in any direction [...] it is not so surprising that newer and more comfortable methods of long-distance travel might become more commonplace” (D, 55). Therefore, in *The Clockwork Century*, technology also serves as a way of attaining personal freedom for both men and women within the framework of patriarchal society of the nineteenth-century America.

Besides her refusal to perpetuate patriarchal modes of depicting female characters in a stereotypical fashion, Priest also aims to provide women with the means of protecting themselves without having to rely on men. After all, the dystopian world of *The Clockwork Century* features an inordinate amount of violence. Thus, the right to carry a gun as well as being able to use it effectively is an absolute necessity. It is by taking their safety into their own hands, in the most literal sense, that the women take responsibility of their own lives. The image of women wielding guns is not depicted as something negative, quite the contrary. It is a step in the direction of gender equality. Moreover, Priest has spent a number of years in

⁶⁵ Cherie Priest, *Dreadnought* (New York: Tor Books, 2010) 100. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

Texas where the right to bear arms is and always has been one of the key cultural aspects: “I spent a lot of time in Texas when I was a kid, and I understand the cowboys and the Wild West.”⁶⁶ It is thus logical that she chose Texas as the leading state of the weapon industry.

The first chapter provided the context of the emergence of steampunk fiction as a recognizable literary genre in the 1990s and its subsequent development. The introductory section also included a detailed definition of the genre and how it differs from its’ antecedents. Close attention was paid to Priest approach to history, especially in terms of how her texts relate to the real world. The American Civil War setting was explored in the sense that Priest employs it as a vehicle for technological progress which consequently allows for socio-political changes as well after the new advancements are integrated into people’s everyday lives. The author thus views the conflict as a catalyst for greater innovation. For that reason, scientific elements of steampunk were briefly introduced with emphasis on the weapons industry and the more significant changes to history that stemmed from a prolonged Civil War.

⁶⁶ Trombi.

2. Feminist Steampunk: Subverting Gender Stereotypes

In general terms, gender refers to social identities and expectations of women and men not necessarily connected to the physiological similarities and differences between the two sexes. The behavioral characteristics assigned to men and women on the basis of their gender are then divided into binary categories of masculine and feminine. In this sense, the gender-related concepts of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ “refer to the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men/women in any given society at any one time. As such, it emphasizes gender, not biological sex.”⁶⁷ The distinction between the social and biological view of a person’s gender is particularly relevant to science fiction as it affects how women are portrayed in literature. Moreover, the definitions of what is understood as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ dimensions are perceived differently in various cultures across the world. It is thus a matter of social constructivism as gender roles are “socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behavior and emotions of men and women”⁶⁸ and can change over time. Similarly, gender identity is also a fluid concept as it “involves all the meanings that are applied to oneself on the basis of one’s gender identification. In turn, these self-meanings are a source of motivation for gender-related behavior.”⁶⁹

A popular discourse in the past was that biological sex determines one’s gender identity and that the accepted and expected social behaviors were an integral part of the natural order. Most significantly, a “woman’s maternal function is seen as a species necessity [...] and thus the sexual division of labor based on biological differences is seen as functional and just.”⁷⁰ In the nineteenth century, gender was believed to refer to the biological make-up of an individual and the physical specifics relevant to each of the two sexes. Nowadays, what

⁶⁷ Michael S. Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 126.

⁶⁸ Dinah L. Anselmi; and Anne L. Law, eds., *Questions of Gender: Perspectives and Paradoxes* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1998) 195.

⁶⁹ Peter J. Burke, “The Self: Measurement Implications from a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 43 (1980) 18-29.

⁷⁰ Gerda Lerner, *Women and History: The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 17.

we must bear in mind is that biological sex remains a fixed point whereas gender attributes differ and are deeply rooted in one's socio-cultural environment defined predominantly by stereotyped expectations of gendered behavior for both men and women. In other words, while a person can be born either a male or a female (or both in rare cases) they do not necessarily have to identify as such. It is thus not surprising that intentionally destabilizing traditional notions of gender is a very difficult process because it is the society that enforces these stereotypes and individuals either conform or deviate from their assigned gender role. Gender stereotypes can then be understood as "over-generalized beliefs about people based on their membership in one of many social categories."⁷¹ There is a potential for change and transference of meaning because these terms are societal definitions,⁷² i.e. a female can see herself as 'masculine' and behave accordingly, and a male can be seen as 'feminine' and exhibit behavior generally associated with women.

In the nineteenth century, the 'feminine' and 'masculine' differentiation translated into a fixed social hierarchy, i.e. men were portrayed as strong dominant figures active in the public sphere of influence whereas women were relegated to the domestic sphere as homemakers.⁷³ This dual system of gendering and placing men and women into two separate spheres was transported from Europe to America with the immigrants' cultures and traditions especially in the context of middle and upper-class Americans. The definitions of what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be a woman were thus constructed to contrast with one another within a specific socio-cultural context. In the past and unfortunately in the present as well, the constraining power of the societal gender gives more authority to men.

⁷¹ Anselmi and Law 195.

⁷² "Gender revolves around these themes - identity, interaction, institution-in the production of gender difference and the reproduction of gender inequality. These themes are quite complex and the relationships between and among them are also complex. These are the processes and experiences that form core elements of our personalities, our interactions with others, and the institutions that shape our lives. These experiences are shaped by our societies, and we return the favor, helping to reshape our societies. We are gendered people living in gendered societies."

Kimmel 126.

⁷³ Marshall Sahlins, "The Origins of Society," *Scientific American* 203. 48 (Sept. 1960) 76-87.

This is type of gender politics that Priest challenges in *The Clockwork Century* by applying modern lenses to the nineteenth-century gender stereotypes.

While the untamed nature of the New World allowed for a certain level of flexibility in regards to crossing the boundaries between the sexes, the hegemonic structure was still the norm. Even though both sexes had to face dangerous situations on a daily basis and learn to make autonomous decisions in all aspects of life, women were still subordinate to men. The Civil War then sped matters along as women became an integral part of the war efforts as medical staff, factory workers, and spies, all of which were perceived as masculine occupations. Their involvement in the war also exposed them to a unique form of suffering, such as being burdened with caring for the wounded soldiers and having to cope with extreme violence and death on a daily basis. Also, as their male family members left for the war, the women left behind were much more vulnerable to violence as they found themselves without a protector and thus had to learn to defend themselves. Suddenly, assumptions about what was seen as proper ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ behavior were challenged when faced with the harsh realities of war. However, this change in gender dynamics was not as significant as what occurred during the First and the Second World Wars.

The connection Barr makes between science fiction and feminism is actually rather fitting when we consider that science fiction explores the consequences of people’s actions and decisions that are influenced by their specific backgrounds, gender roles and, of course, societal expectations. Feminist steampunk fiction consciously works with the nineteenth-century notions of gender, aiming to undermine the ‘Cult of Domesticity’⁷⁴ by making women

⁷⁴ The Cult of Domesticity or The Cult of True Womanhood refers to the value system of middle and upper classes of white in America during the antebellum period. It ascribed a certain set of virtues (piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness) to the female gender that ensured ‘domestic happiness’. The woman’s role was to serve her family, obey her husband and remain pure of mind and soul.

Lisa A. Keister, *Inequality: A Contemporary Approach to Race, Class, and Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) 228–230.

Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966)151-174.

equal to men in all areas of life, whether the outcome is positive or negative. In fiction, this may translate into women being presented not only as heroines (Briar Wilkes, Mercy Lynch and Maria Boyd) but also as villainesses (Katharine Haymes) embodying both feminine and masculine characteristics. Culture and the environment bear significance to women's participation in predominantly masculine spheres of influence, namely politics and economy. These fictional heroines subvert patriarchal authority by taking charge of their own lives in order to determine their future. By defining the gender-based assumptions of the nineteenth century, steampunk offers the opportunity for feminist writers to create genuine female characters who manage to defy the status quo and successfully negotiate their place in a world without losing their identity, as will be explained in the following chapters.

When Barr stated in 1981 that “the time for Future Females has come,”⁷⁵ steampunk was not what she had in mind as the genre was not yet popularized to the extent it is now. Moreover, it took decades for steampunk writers to actively challenge the male hero stereotype by featuring female protagonists who were more than mere damsels in distress. In steampunk texts, women are offered creative space in which they can challenge the position forced on them within a particular social order. This is partially done through a journey of self-discovery that leads to self-empowerment but also by measuring the heroine's capability against that of a hero. The female/male division appears to be unavoidable, but it is presented through twenty-first-century lenses and thus palatable, as well as relatable, to the modern readership. Consequently, both female and male characters are portrayed in relation to one another, which allows for a critique of past societal conventions and how they have changed over time or have not.

Nowadays, the steampunk genre has become precisely the free imaginative space in which women can explore alternative social structures not limited by gender stereotyping that

⁷⁵ Barr, *Future Females* 1.

Barr proposed in her work. As Beard wrote in his *Introduction to Clockwork Rhetoric*, “Gender is a vibrant dimension of steampunk dreams of the future. [...] Steampunk is often celebrated as a gender equalizing genre, in which heroines stand toe-to-toe with heroes.”⁷⁶ It is then through this potential to create an alternative past, present or future campaigning for equality of opportunity that steampunk connects the nineteenth century to our present by applying modern values and attitudes to the past, especially in terms of characterization and limitations placed on both genders. As had been argued already, this thesis aims to prove that the genre of steampunk can indeed allow for a unique interpretation of gender politics and relevant issues by applying a contemporary understanding of gender on an alternative but still more or less familiar past. The Victorian era is thus ideal for this type of explorative writing as the restrictions placed on both men and women were one of the key influences of the nineteenth-century Western world. By focusing solely on the work of Cherie Priest, this thesis will provide a detailed analysis of practices and processes necessary for women’s emancipation within the context of American feminist steampunk fiction. *The Clockwork Century* is unique in the sense that female characters are not represented as “a fainting heroine hidden away by villains through most of the action and restored to the hero’s arms at the last possible moment,”⁷⁷ but rather as wholesome persons with their own desires and agendas.

2.1. Cherie Priest

Cherie M. Priest is a prolific and versatile writer of science fiction. Her career took off with the publication of *Boneshaker* in 2009, the first part of *The Clockwork Century* series. *Boneshaker*, so far her most notable novel, was nominated for a Nebula Award and also for a Hugo Award, and it won the Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel and the Pacific

⁷⁶ Beard xxv.

⁷⁷ Edward James; and Farah Mendlesohn, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 33.

Northwest Booksellers Association Award. Priest has written twenty novels to date with four more in the pre-publication stage.⁷⁸ Her work offers thematic diversity ranging from environmental issues, the effects of industrialization and urbanization on the society, xenophobia, gender relations, feminism, and identity issues. In *The Clockwork Century*, the author does not express any overt statements in regards to feminism and the patriarchal oppression in the Age of Steam. Instead, Priest increases the importance and influence of female characters within the fictional framework to redefine the socially constructed notions of female identity. This approach fits well with Roland's claim that "human nature is basically the same now as it was in the nineteenth century and would be in a parallel universe and this consistency must be reflected."⁷⁹

Steampunk literature is a tangible proof that science fiction is an all-encompassing body of literature that continuously grows. Any idea, event, fact, thing or even another genre can be absorbed into science fiction and altered as the author sees fit. It is "the one field that reached out and embraced every sector of the human imagination, every endeavor, every idea, every technological development, and every dream."⁸⁰ However, while science fiction has an unlimited subgenre and thematic diversity, it is generally concerned with the future of humankind:

SF is essentially about utopian speculation, either through the positive construction of utopian blueprints or, more commonly in the American tradition, the negative depiction of the wretched dystopias that will arise "if this goes on."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Cherie Priest, "Cherie M. Priest." *The Haunt: The Official Blog and Home Page of Author Cherie Priest*. <www.cheriepriest.com/>. Accessed May 6, 2017.

⁷⁹ Roland 41.

⁸⁰ Ray Bradbury, "Introduction," *Science Fact/Fiction*, Edmund J. Farrell, ed. (Glenview: Scott Foresman; and Company, 1974).

⁸¹ Gerry Canavan, and Eric Carl Link eds., *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 10.

Indeed, a dystopian vision of an alternative past is what Priest explores in *The Clockwork Century* novels.

The author also exercises critical awareness when she makes the two most pressing discriminatory social problems - gender inequality and racism - an integral part of her fictional version of the Civil War era. Priest highlights the importance of self-identification by enabling her heroines to challenge the nineteenth-century views on masculinity and femininity that are nowadays seen as outdated and often quite absurd. In *Feminist Fabulation*, Barr claims that “woman must make her own new values, fitting her new objectives to a patriarchal system which gives her a secondary place in its systematic working, and which certainly does not care for her. Woman must create her future herself.”⁸² The question Priest poses is: What does it mean to be a woman? The answer reveals itself at the end of each book. Surprisingly, it is quite simple and applicable to the issue of slavery as well: be human, respect life and do not judge a book by its cover.

In *The Clockwork Century*, female agency is also increased significantly as opposed to mainstream science fiction where women are still often pushed to the sidelines. The female identity in Priest’s work is redefined and manifests in the numerous ways women can live and thrive outside the social confines of their gender. Her feminism is not centered on verbal protests against oppression or calls for emancipation but around direct acts of bravery in defiance of the authority of fallible men. In other words, Priest offers a unique and intuitive outlook on female-male and female-female relations at a time of war that raises questions still relevant to the present. The issues that Priest emphasizes are the advocacy of female power and the possibility of subverting patriarchy by taking responsibility for oneself.

Apart from a certain level of faithfulness to historical accuracy, *The Clockwork Century* also shows signs of what can only be termed as multicultural inclusiveness of non-

⁸² Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 11.

white ethnic groups that are often ignored in mainstream steampunk fiction. These include the above-mentioned former slaves, American natives from the Seattle area, the Chinese, and the Mexicans, among others. Priest's multiculturalism is thus related to race and how it is linked to the dominant culture's xenophobic view of marginalized minorities residing in its territory. In regards to the inclusive nature of her work, Priest is also very careful in how she portrays complex social interactions presented in her novels. The world she paints is not one of gender and/or racial equality but rather a semi-realistic representation of the past socio-political norms and expectations placed on both genders.

However, by altering the past and by rewriting selected female characters as strong independent women, the author manages to subvert the traditional views of gender stereotypes. Many of her characters, both male and female, express their sexist and racist beliefs which were commonplace at the time. For example, when *Fiddlehead's* heroine Maria shares her apparent disbelief over "a negro designing weapons for use against the North?"⁸³ Clearly, despite the abolishment of slavery, the white majority's prevalent negative attitudes towards African-Americans and other racial minorities have not changed much. In order to overcome this issue, Priest she introduces a black businesswoman, a black engineer and even a black pirate captain, all of whom are presented in a positive light as they either provide assistance to the female protagonists or become heroes in their own right. Through this, Briar, Mercy, and Maria re-evaluate their views of racial inequality which in turn provides them with allies. How exactly each of the heroines benefits from adopting a more open-minded approach to inter-racial interactions will be explored in later chapters.

⁸³ Cherie Priest, *Fiddlehead* (New York: Tor Books, 2013) 56. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

2.2. *The Clockwork Century's Heroines*

When feminist lenses are applied to heroism, it becomes obvious that it is indeed a gendered concept. In the past, science fiction featured mostly male heroes who embarked on a journey, faced numerous challenges, defeated the villain, and saved the 'damsel in distress.' This was also true for steampunk literature. For over two decades since the genre's beginnings, the male hero used to be the default protagonist. "Too often in literature, female characters have been restricted to roles defined in relation to the male hero: the sexy temptress, the damsel in distress, the virginal bride who is the object of his quest and the reward for his heroism."⁸⁴ In light of this, it can be argued that the most important change Priest did is to shift the focus from male heroes to women. Through this, the author at the same time subverts the dualism of gender and presents a uniquely female view of the Civil War. The conflicts the protagonists involuntarily participate in gradually transform their self-view as well as how they are perceived by others. Men, in particular, are forced to acknowledge the women as their equals.

When Barr states that "man's normal experience differs from woman's normal experience,"⁸⁵ she is referring to both the practical and the mental workload that women must deal with on a daily basis. In the nineteenth century, women were responsible for childrearing and managing the household. This left them with very little time let alone opportunities to broaden their horizons and step outside the domestic sphere. Through gender roles and stereotyping, the female sex was effectively silenced and purposely excluded from the public sphere. In *The Clockwork Century*, women also have "no foothold in the world of commanders and soldiers [...] the man-made world she has not made."⁸⁶ Briar, Mercy, and

⁸⁴ Christine Mains, "The Female Hero in Literature," *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Robin Anne Reid, ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009) 180.

⁸⁵ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 26.

⁸⁶ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 26.

Maria found themselves in a similar situation before the Civil War changed everything. In order to overcome their victim status, they had to become survivors.

Interestingly, Priest has not picked extraordinary women. Overall, the female protagonists are middle-aged, working class, battle-weary, and independent people struggling to survive the war which forces them to undergo a significant transformation. It is this personal struggle to find oneself that allows contemporary readership to connect with the characters. The figure of the villainess also represents a transformative process that each character must go through in order to grow on a personal level. However, Priest's characterization of the three heroines, as well as that of the villainess, is much more ambiguous and subsequently realistic because she does not deal in absolutes when defining the heroism of the protagonists or the destructive power the antagonist exercises for their own selfish purposes. *The Clockwork Century's* main female characters have complex motivations and their value systems are not black and white.

The Clockwork Century's heroines lead dangerous lives amidst the ongoing fighting on the Frontier and prove themselves just as capable as men, becoming a force to be reckoned with. Nonetheless, that does not mean that their male counterparts are less developed and their characterizations oversimplified, quite the opposite. Women in *The Clockwork Century* are no longer "trivialized as insignificant helpmates"⁸⁷ as Barr states in *Future Females* when she criticizes the situation in science fiction. Priest's novels feature heroic females who challenge gender stereotypes in a realistic manner. The female protagonists defy patriarchal control and through self-empowerment are reborn as wholesome people instead of conforming to what Barr defines as "sexist images which are made to represent women's reality."⁸⁸ They no

⁸⁷ Barr, *Future Females* 2.

⁸⁸ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 9.

longer judge themselves by the attributes of ‘True Idealized Womanhood’. Instead, Priest employs the ideas of self-reliance and independent thought.

The heroines share several attributes that enable them to survive the harsh conditions of a war-torn country. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Priest condones war in the sense that it is the vehicle for technological progress and subsequently for socio-political change as well. Despite the suffering and death on both sides of the conflict, the society benefits from the new technologies spurred on by the Arms Race during the Civil War. At a time of war, both men and women are faced with new challenges, choices, and opportunities, both negative and positive. In *The Clockwork Century*, the heroines do not fight to defend an ideal but to protect their loved ones first and their country second. They all come from families that were primarily patriarchal but the situation changes drastically after the death of their male providers. However, instead of seeking another male protector, Briar, Mercy, and Maria assume control of their own fates. Adaptability, iron will and the ability to multitask are, perhaps, the most defining traits each of the women possesses. In this respect, the Civil War represents a unique option for gender equality albeit more on an individual scale rather than a countrywide feminist movement.

To best show this change in character, Priest turns to the figure of the ‘Southern Belle’⁸⁹ whom she transforms into a frontier heroine equal to man in intelligence, skill, and bravery – all traditionally masculine attributes. The Old South’s ‘Ideal Woman’ represented the tradition and stability of the patriarchal system, especially in rural areas. The Southern regions believed themselves to be superior in culture to the North. The South put emphasis on

⁸⁹ The ‘Southern Belle’ character developed during the Plantation era in the agrarian South. The Southern Belle archetype is generally a white, young, single, upper-class woman focused on finding a respectable Southern gentleman to marry. She is virtuous, feminine and completely devoted to her family and her days are filled with self-cultivation, i.e. fashion and cosmetics. “The private sphere of women embraced femininity, beauty, simplicity, and submissiveness; the highest roles to which a southern woman could aspire were those of nurturing mother, dutiful wife, and social moral pillar.” The Southern Belle is fully dependant on her male relatives and they, in turn, depend on slave labor to sustain their lifestyle. Alexis Girardin Brown, “The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880,” *Historian* 62.4 (2000).

emulating the ideals of femininity and masculinity as presented for example in Barbara Welter's essay: a true Southern Belle was expected to be "beautiful, graceful, charming, virtuous, loyal to family, submissive to father and in need of men's protection."⁹⁰ She could also be "innocently flirtatious, winsome, spirited, haughty, spunky, mischievous and impulsive"⁹¹ but only to a certain extent that allowed her to retain her purity and respectability. A proper Southern woman's aspiration was to acquire a husband and bear him children, preferably male heirs. Essentially, women were seen as passive homemakers fully dependent on their father figures and later on their husbands.

Briar Wilkes, Venita Mercy Lynch, and Maria Isabella Boyd were not raised to be warriors, nor spies, nor leaders of men. Before the war, they did not question the socio-political status quo as they have been conditioned to see men as the dominant gender. After all, no woman is born a feminist. Indeed, Priest's heroines were raised with the nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood and their dreams matched their upbringing. Initially, they too wanted to fall in love, get married and have children but due to the Civil War, they seemingly failed to do so. In Welter's view, women were defined by their ability to project "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."⁹² And this is exactly how Briar, Mercy and Belle change their situation and take control of their own lives: by rejecting the feminine identity, whether by choice or out of necessity. This active approach is similar to Barr's statement about women in space who "change these codes and images by creating feminist signs which put them back together again."⁹³ The three heroines then become so much more than just daughters, wives and mothers, and their ambitions go beyond those of a homemaker. While the protagonists must first fight to survive, in the end, they choose to thrive.

⁹⁰ Carol S. Manning, "Belle," *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*, Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda H. MacKethan eds., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 95.

⁹¹ Flora and MacKethan 96.

⁹² Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966) 152.

⁹³ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 9.

Indeed, Priest creates truly magnificent heroines. However, she goes a step further when she introduces Katharine Haymes, the woman responsible for the weaponization of the poisonous gas. In Haymes, the author creates a perfect blend of feminine and masculine features which enables *The Clockwork Century's* antagonist to seize power in a way no gender-specific person could. By utilizing gender stereotypes to her advantage, Haymes successfully manipulates politicians into doing her bidding and is thus able to influence American economy and to change the course of the Civil War. It is through the villainess that Priest breaks the nineteenth-century gender stereotype of women as nurturers and angelic beings of virtue. Similarly, the three heroines too are not typically 'feminine' women and certainly do not fall into the Angel in the House category. Like Haymes, Briar, Mercy, and Marie are not delicate flowers in need of protection, and they are most certainly not subordinate to any man, quite the contrary.

The protagonists, as well as the antagonist, refuse to play the part imposed on them by the patriarchal authorities running the country. They do not withdraw from the patriarchal world; rather, they successfully navigate it and use the stereotypes attached to them to their benefit as a means of protection or as a way to manipulate men. Priest's female characters use their femininity to their advantage when necessary, turning societal expectations into a weapon only a woman can wield. For example, when they need protection, the women pretend to be weak and naive in order to lull others into a false sense of complacency and safety. It is then by adopting both feminine and masculine traits that they transcend the perceived limitations of their gender and successfully resist the traditional nineteenth-century views on women's social roles. Moreover, by becoming mediators between the feminine and the masculine, the women move beyond gender stereotypes. These women successfully redefine themselves as strong and independent people who rely on their own skills to protect them and their loved ones. Priest thus manages to position her readership against some of the

nineteenth-century attitudes towards gender by continuously challenging the traditional view of women as weak and submissive housewives.

2.3. The Importance of Being Clothed

In the Western world, clothes were (and still are) charged with gender markers, i.e. in general men wore pants whereas women wore skirts or dresses. In other words, the difference between genders was coded in one's clothing. Not conforming to this traditional view of fashion was seen as bizarre and inappropriate. While dress code did indeed deepen the male/female divide, it could also serve as a means of protection, especially at a time of war when clothing clearly showed to which social group a person belonged or to determine his or her occupation. In *Dreadnought*, Mercy uses her nurse outfit as a protective layer. This designates her as part of the medical personnel which in turn makes her invaluable to soldiers and civilians alike. For instance, when she travels alone, it is her uniform that protects her from strange men's inappropriate advances: "One of them called out to her, opening his mouth to say something dirty or childish. [...] 'Pardon me, Nurse. Ma'am, 'he said upon seeing her cloak and the cross on her satchel'" (D, 49). Similarly, in *Fiddlehead*, Maria also adopts a feminine style of fashion because the extra fabric helps her conceal weapons she carries on her person when she works as a spy for the South and later when she becomes a Pinkerton agent: "She slipped her hand around the gun, put her finger on the trigger, and felt its gentle resistance against her glove" (F, 243). Both Mercy and Maria consciously use their clothes to their advantage either to secure protection from the male characters or to make themselves appear harmless because women were not expected to pose a threat to men.

In general, clothing can become a subversive feature when these fashion rules are violated. By wearing what at the time was considered to be men's garments, women can challenge the notion of gender. Instead of constricting corsets, long skirts and petticoats,

Priest's heroines are more practical and often opt to wear pants and boots, wield weapons expertly and perform tasks that fell into the men's domain. For example, in *Ganymede*, the character of Miss Angeline is "dressed in her usual preferred attire, a man's shirt and pants cut down to size" (G, 31). By covering their breasts, the women veil the male gaze and in a way escape sexism by becoming whole non-feminized people, i.e. their 'feminine' features are not on display but hidden beneath protective layers of gender non-specific clothing. Nonetheless, this does not devalue their female identity; merely allows them to avoid the male gaze. In this respect, the women preserve their identity by refusing to wear gender appropriate clothing. As a result, they rewrite the patriarchal aesthetics by framing it in gender-neutral utilitarian terms.

At the same time, Priest articulates that her characters cannot escape their biological features which mark them as female and they, in fact, do not attempt to do so. There is nothing androgynous about Priest's heroines. Similarly, when Barr determines herself as a female, she does so with an explanation as to what characteristics her persona encompasses. She claims that "like most career-oriented women,"⁹⁴ in her case too "the 'masculine' characteristics circumvent the 'feminine.'"⁹⁵ That is not to say that "she cannot be characterized by feminine images."⁹⁶ She is after all, still a woman. In *The Clockwork Century* as in most steampunk novels, what is stereotypically defined as 'masculine' and 'feminine' aesthetics is visually easily distinguishable. The most significant gender distinguishing feature is fashion; for instance, a dress and a cloak worn by the Red Cross or a soldier's uniform - blue for the Union and grey for the Confederates. In this respect, clothes enable people to distinguish one another as either an ally or an enemy.

Steampunk aesthetics is certainly an important part of the genre's charm and Priest makes full use of this fact. There are several instances in which she introduces a character

⁹⁴ Barr, *Future Females* 150.

⁹⁵ Barr, *Future Females* 150.

⁹⁶ Barr, *Future Females* 151.

through their attire. One of the most notable is Jeremiah Swakhammer, an imposing figure reminiscent of a medieval knight dressed in a Victorian-styled mechanical armor:

He wasn't fat at all, but he was nearly as wide as the doorway - though the effect was enhanced by his armor. His shoulders were plated with steel, and a high, round collar rose up behind his neck to meet the helmet. Where his elbows and wrists bent, makeshift chain mail functioned as joints. Across his torso, thick leather straps held the whole thing taut and close. (B, 150)

The impression he makes upon meeting Briar is memorable, including the way he addresses her as a "lady" (B, 151) and assumes the role of her guide and protector. Jeremiah thus represents the stereotypically 'masculine' figure, i.e. he is physically strong, animalistic, highly skilled, courageous, honorable and brave. It is only later in the novel after Briar learns to navigate the poisoned city that they become equals, and eventually, their roles reverse when she saves his life.

Whereas Jeremiah's clothes serve a purely practical purpose, the antagonist of *Boneshaker*, Minnericht uses fashion as a smokescreen to hide his true identity but also as a statement of his unique status as the de facto ruler of the walled-off Seattle:

His mask was as elaborate [...] with a steel skull knitted together from tiny pipes and valves. The mask covered everything from the crown of his head to his collarbones. Its faceplate featured a flat pair of goggles that were tinted a deep shade of blue, but illuminated from within so it appeared that his pupils were alight. [...] The whole of his frame was covered by a coat shaped like a duster, but made from dark maroon velour. (B, 307)

He presents himself as an inventor and attempts to steal Briar's late husband's identity by stealing Dr. Blue's technology and by manipulating others to believe that he is indeed the 'mad scientist' himself.

2.4. Alternative Steampunk Civil War

Priest paints her fictional rendering of the Civil War as a complex conflict through which she can explore individual and national character, and the effects war in general has on people both as participants and witnesses to human suffering. By remaining more or less faithful to the way real history played out in terms of datation, location and historical figures relevant to the Civil War era⁹⁷ and by mingling facts with fiction, Priest manages to give her work an air of authenticity. Her approach to history thus fits well with Gunn's definition of science fiction and how it relates to reality: "Many people think that science fiction is only a made up story, when in reality many parts of science fiction are made up of real world experiences just transformed into a story by the author."⁹⁸ Priest explains her keen interest in the conflict between the North and the South thusly:

I'm from the southeast [...] Chatter about the Civil War — and alternate theories thereof — is a regional past time down here. Especially in the southern border states, like where I am now, every place is a battlefield. You can't swing a stick without hitting a historic marker, detailing who died here back in the 1860s during which particular confrontation.⁹⁹

The novels depict the nineteenth-century American landscape in which the Civil War has gone on for far longer than in reality. For over two decades the country had been wrecked by a violent conflict that begun as a fight for the abolishment of slavery but continued on as a fight for economic domination spurred on by natural disaster (the release of the poisonous gas that threatens the whole country). Mercy Lynch, the heroine of *Dreadnought*, sums up the situation thusly: "If anyone anywhere was fighting for state's rights or abolition or anything like that, you didn't hear about it much anymore. Those first five or six years [...] but after

⁹⁷ For more information on the Civil War see Appendix A.

⁹⁸ Gunn, *Speculations on Speculation* 7.

⁹⁹ Maggie Slater, "Interview with Cherie Priest," *Apex-magazine.com*, Apex Magazine: SF, Fantasy, and Horror, Jun 4, 2013. < <https://www.apex-magazine.com/interview-with-cherie-priest/> >. Accessed Aug 25, 2017.

twenty?" (D, 23). It is then the consequences of this alternate version of the Civil War that Priest explores:

Stonewall Jackson survived Chancellorsville. England broke the Union's naval blockade, and formally recognized the Confederate States of America. Atlanta never burned. It is 1880. The American Civil War has raged for nearly two decades, driving technology in strange and terrible directions. Combat dirigibles skulk across the sky and armored vehicles crawl along the land. Military scientists twist the laws of man and nature, and barter their souls for weapons powered by light, fire, and steam. But life struggles forward for soldiers and ordinary citizens. The fractured nation is dotted with stricken towns and epic scenes of devastation—some man made, and some more mysterious. In the western territories cities are swallowed by gas and walled away to rot while the frontiers are strip-mined for resources. On the borders between North and South, spies scour and scheme, and smugglers build economies more stable than their governments. This is *The Clockwork Century*.¹⁰⁰

The alternative history is established in the first novel of the series, *Boneshaker*. The novel opens with a brief overview of events that eventually changed the outcome of the war, i.e. the destruction of Seattle and the subsequent release of toxic gas called the Blight. Priest has done her research well and it shows in the numerous references to real historical figures and events that took place during the Civil War, although they are re-imagined and altered to fit the vivid imagery that the author employs in her narrative. As Margaret Rose wrote about historical representation in steampunk literature, Priest too combines the real with the fictional:

Factual people and events are frequently invoked to anchor steampunk fiction

¹⁰⁰ Cherie Priest, *Tanglefoot: A Story of the Clockwork Century* (Subterranean Press, 2011) 3.

in the real, only to have that realism exploded by the eruption of the fantastic, troubling the epistemological boundaries between history and fiction, between realism and speculative fiction, and between reality and representation.¹⁰¹

Priest's version of the nineteenth century is more or less true to the real historical account up until the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, April 14 in the President's Box at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. She re-imagines this event in a way that leaves Lincoln crippled but still very much alive and politically active in the extended Civil War. She then replaces President Andrew Johnson (who in reality took over after Lincoln was murdered as the 17th President of the United States) by Ulysses S. Grant, essentially exchanging a political figure for a military leader. This bears interesting consequences for the political side of the novels as Grant was a more military leader than a politician because peace negotiations were not his forte. Priest has repeatedly stated that she consciously mixes history with fiction especially in terms of characterization: "The fact is, nothing I could make up is half so weird as some of the things that have actually happened. It's also true of characters."¹⁰² In her view, she could not come up with more interesting people than the ones that really lived in the Civil War era. As Rose states, "such deliberate breaks with the realism of historical representation draw attention to the fictional (and fantastic) status of the story, and by extension, to the narrative-making processes at work in any representation of history."¹⁰³

Abraham Lincoln certainly represents one of the turning points when it comes to the most apparent changes Priest made to the Civil War era. Hantke claims that steampunk emphasizes the "textuality of history" by mixing "historical figures and fictional characters or

¹⁰¹ Margaret Rose, "Extraordinary Pasts: Steampunk as a Mode of Historical Representation," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 20.3 (International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, 2009) 323.

¹⁰² Bella Pagan, "Cherie Priest: The Five Question Interview," *Panmacmillan.com*, PanMacmillan Publishing, November 26, 2012. < <https://www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/science-fiction-and-fantasy/cherie-priest-the-five-question-interview> >. Accessed Aug 25, 2017.

¹⁰³ Rose 323.

when it fictionalizes historical characters.”¹⁰⁴ By keeping the ex-president alive, she enables him to become the voice of reason, a politician who advocates for abolition and peace between the South and the North even after the failed assassination attempt. Despite his handicapped state, he continues to command respect and inspire people:

His chair was a marvel of science, the only one of its kind. Propelled by an electric motor, it was manipulated with small levers and buttons, customized for the old man’s long, slender hands. Those fingers, which had once signed laws into being, were crumpled now, bending and unbending only with great effort; but they were firm on the steering paddle as he brought himself forward. (F, 33)

Even though he has withdrawn from society, Abraham Lincoln remains a hero to the African-Americans, a great man to the white majority regardless of his physical appearance or position within the government.

In contrast, the President Ulysses S. Grant is not shown in such a favorable light. The first impression the reader gets of him is that he is a semi-functional alcoholic and thus unfit to lead a nation. “Grant swallowed the last of his drink, but neither put the glass aside nor filled it again. He held it firmly, lest his hands shake. They often shook these days” (F, 35). Similarly to the real historical figure, the fictional Grant too becomes a president during a tumultuous time. However, instead of having to lead the country out of economic depression and deal with the aftermath of the Civil War, Priest reduces the once ruthless general to a political puppet who is unable to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict. Despite this, he at least attempts to protect his country by supporting the “Great Experiment” (F, 37) because Grant is a strong believer in democracy. To him, the only alternatives to a country governed by its own people are “chaos or kings [...] and he regarded both with equal dismay” (F, 37). Unfortunately, the fictional Grant is ill-suited for the world of politics and fails to comprehend

¹⁰⁴ Hantke 248.

the threat that Katharine Haymes represents to his people. Aware of his own shortcomings, he often seeks Lincoln's counsel. The two become allies opposing the corrupted senators who follow Haymes' orders.

Another important change that Priest made to history is that slavery was abolished almost a decade later than in reality with the last states caving to "English abolitionist pressure in 1872" (D, 110). According to historical accounts, slavery was officially abolished on December 13, 1865, when the 13th Amendment was officially adopted into the Constitution. This also marked the end of the Civil War. However, in *The Clockwork Century*, the abolishment of slavery resulted from the Southerners' need of having more manpower available to maintain the economy instead of having to fight on two fronts:

Like so many things, in the end, it had come down not to a matter of principle, but a matter of practicality. The Union had more warm bodies to throw at a war, and the Confederacy needed to harness a few of its own or, at the very least, quit using them to police its vast legions of imported labor. (D, 110)

This change is interesting for two reasons: a) the issue of slavery is no longer at the core of the reasons for the Civil War, and b) it enables Priest to explore a past where the African-Americans attained freedom that much later which she does by introducing several colored characters who underwent the transition from a slave to a free man/woman. However, Priest proves that she is indeed tuned to the precarious atmosphere of the era when she does not force the former slaves to fight in the war. In fact, on numerous instances, the African-American characters struggle against oppressive forces to retain their newly acquired freedom, continuously fearful of being enslaved again by the Confederate army. Historically speaking, the North aimed "to destroy the social and economic infrastructure of the Old South

(including slavery) and to build a New South on its ruins”¹⁰⁵ and the author too builds on this when relaying the strained relations between abolitionists and former slave owners.

In *The Clockwork Century*, the idea of changing the African-American status from slaves to citizens became quite popular in Texas and Florida, two states that were invested in inviting the ex-slaves to settle on their land. To Texas and similarly-minded states, the African-Americans were a way to increase their population and consequently strengthen their economic basis. “We need people to grow food, and we’ve got nothing but room to farm it, so bring in the free blacks and let them break their backs on their own land for a change” (D, 111). Regardless of that, the African-Americans were still considered the lower class as they did not have the necessary socio-economic background that could elevate them in terms of employment competition. “So they worked at the train station, and in the factories; they worked on the river, in the shipping districts” (D, 111). Moreover, the new black citizens were still seen as inferior to the white men who supposedly represented the peak of western civilization. As a result, attempts at educating the African-American population in the fictional world of Priest’s works were more amusing to the white characters rather than anything else. In *Dreadnought*, Mercy recalls one such incident reported in the newspaper:

There was even one school teaching young negro and mixed men to become mechanics and engineers. The school was rumored to be one of the best in the nation, and there were rumors that once in a blue moon, a white boy would try to sneak in. (D, 111)

However, none of the heroines share these beliefs, at least not completely. While Priest touches upon the issue of slavery in all *The Clockwork Century* novels, it is not the central theme but simply another way of making the narrative more complex and thus attractive to the readership.

¹⁰⁵ MacPherson 34.

2.5. The Minority Question

Priest is indeed well-versed in both the Civil War era and the Reconstruction. In line with the historical attitude towards the influx of newcomers, the author uses the immigrant narrative to her benefit. For example, she makes use of the Contract Labor Laws passed “in 1864 by the Congress [...] to encourage people from other countries to immigrate to the United States and join the country’s industrial labor force.”¹⁰⁶ By employing marginalized groups, she makes the novels even more captivating and realistic as she leans on history to lend her narrative an air of authenticity. The author often turns to history for inspiration: “Between 1860 and 1900 about fourteen million immigrants, many with little or no money, arrived in the country in search of a better life.”¹⁰⁷ That is a large number to chose from and Priest picked perhaps the most interesting group of them all, one that has only recently started to be recognized as relevant to American history. Instead of for example focusing on the problematic relations between the Native Americans and the white majority, she turns her attention to Chinese immigrants, an ethnic group that has been so far completely ignored in steampunk fiction. The Chinese immigrants represent ‘the other’, a non-white non-European community that has been exploited and discriminated against in more ways than one. Their situation is certainly one that women can easily relate to.

Firstly, they were a cheap workforce put to hard work on the railroad plan. Historical records show just how important the Asian immigrants were to the United States. “A crew of more than twelve thousand Chinese laborers worked on the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s.”¹⁰⁸ Secondly, Priest explores the anti-Asian sentiments that begun to spread in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In *Boneshaker* she presents a ‘bachelor society’ of Chinese men who have settled in the old Seattle as it was a space free of

¹⁰⁶ Benson and Stock 61.

¹⁰⁷ Benson and Stock 62.

¹⁰⁸ Benson and Stock 106.

discrimination, a place where one was judged for their skill¹⁰⁹ instead of their nationality. Here she uses “the Chinese Immigration Act which [...] made it impossible for the male Chinese immigrants to bring wives or families to their new home”¹¹⁰ to criticize the xenophobic attitudes of nineteenth-century white Americans.

Priest is certainly critical of how the Act separated one gender from another, effectively silencing the Chinese community by denying them the right to family. Moreover, because the men were not considered American citizens, they had no say in the political or socio-economic sphere and were thus unable to request an appeal of the discriminatory law. It is then by focusing on the fact that the Chinese women were not allowed on the American soil in order to control the Chinese population¹¹¹ that Priest points out the supposed danger that immigrant women represented to the federation. While this particular case could be interpreted as women having a specific kind of power based on their ability to reproduce, it also points to the unethical way of breaking families apart solely for the purpose of getting cheap labor and keeping said labor under control.

In *The Clockwork Century*, this particular ethnic group is represented only by a few male characters, all of whom are presented as Asian men indistinguishable from one another. Priest chooses not to subvert the Chinese stereotype and bases their ‘otherness’ on basic physical differences, indiscernible language, odd hairstyles, colorful fashion, and even cuisine. One of the first Chinese men introduced in the series is Fang, a mute crewmember of Captain Cly’s pirate dirigible, the Naamah Darling. “Fang was a small man [...] His black hair was so dark it shone blue, shaved back away from his forehead and drawn into a ponytail

¹⁰⁹ In *The Clockwork Century*, Priest generally works with the stereotype of the technology-oriented Asian men. In the figure of Yaozu the author manages to move past that simplistic characterization when she actually gives him a fully formed personality with hidden agendas and complex motivations.

¹¹⁰ Benson and Stock 106.

¹¹¹ In fact, by “1900s there were about ninety thousand people of Chinese ancestry in the United States, most of them men.”

Benson and Stock 106.

that sat high on the top of his skull” (B, 99). Regardless of his loyalty to the Captain and his apparent skills, he remains a symbol of the ‘other.’ Other Chinese characters are portrayed in a similar fashion fitting well within the nineteenth-century xenophobic views. They are generally viewed with wariness and distrust by male and female characters alike, both white and black. However, there are instances where the heroine adopts a different approach to the Asian question in order to acquire resources that most would not even consider (which will be explored in the next chapter).

In the second chapter, the nineteenth-century gender stereotypes were analyzed using a contemporary understanding of gender. The terms ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ were of the utmost importance since they served as the basis for identifying feminist attitudes in Priest’s novels. This chapter also detailed the particularities of the American Civil War setting and how it pertains to *The Clockwork Century* narrative in general. Moreover, the issues of racism and xenophobia were presented in relation to the differences between male and female views of racial minorities. Special attention was paid to how the heroines of *The Clockwork Century* subvert the male gaze by the means of gender-specific clothing.

3. Briar Wilkes: The Heroine of *Boneshaker*

The first installment in *The Clockwork Century* series titled *Boneshaker* has garnered a lot of attention upon its release in 2009. The prize-winning novel stands out for its exceptional depiction of strong female characters which makes Priest's narrative more than a mere adventure story with a steampunk twist. *Boneshaker* traces the metamorphosis of Briar Wilkes¹¹² into a warrior and an authority figure who earns the respect of both women and men. The novel is particularly engaging as Priest provides a very detailed background story for the main protagonist. She also emphasizes the influence that negative relationships with her father and her husband had on shaping her identity. Gradually, the reader discovers not only what motivates her actions in the present but also why her tragic past continues to haunt her. From a Southern Belle to a social pariah, from an exploited laborer to a reluctant heroine, Briar represents a woman transformed by her circumstances. She demonstrates courage and cunning, resourcefulness and practicality, stereotypically 'masculine' traits that eventually enable her to transcend the limitations of her gender. Moreover, she refuses to be a victim and instead becomes an agent of her own life, accepting full responsibility for herself and her child.

3.1. Southern Belle, Mad Scientist's Wife

The character of Briar Wilkes was raised on traditional nineteenth-century beliefs that men naturally occupied a dominant position in the world and thus held power over women in almost all areas of life. It is through flashbacks that Briar reveals her 'Southern Belle' past. In her youth, she believed herself to be a symbol of femininity and domesticity, a woman with no other ambition than to find a rich husband and bear him male heirs. As Barr states about the unequal male-female relations, "the world works for men in proportion to their ability to

¹¹² For a visual image see Appendix B.

keep women from working in a world which works for women.”¹¹³ Adhering to the Victorian notion of the ‘Angel in the House’,¹¹⁴ Briar lived a sheltered life and was willfully blind to the truth about her husband’s less than ideal personality. Barr asserts that women are kept from having ambitions let alone pursuing them by their gender. In the nineteenth century, a man was “not bound to the domestic and biological burdens coinciding with housework and children, he had the opportunity to devote himself fully to his career.”¹¹⁵ Briar’s relationship with her much older husband Dr. Leviticus Blue was thus based on gender inequality and Dr. Blue was seen as her superior both intellectually and economically.

Continuously, Briar proves herself to be an introspective heroine capable of self-criticism. In her present time, Dr. Blue represents the worst mistake of her life. She acknowledges that she married him because of his wealth and potential to rise up the social ladder. “She’d known he was rich — and maybe, in some small respect, the money had made it easier to be stupid.”¹¹⁶ She was also fully aware that he did not love her, to him she was nothing more but a beautiful accessory, a possession to be discarded at will. In this respect, Priest complies with the views of the male power that Barr explains thusly: “Men’s illocutionary force makes the world a male fantasy, a Disneyland for men. Within this male paradise, women function as ghostly talking mannequins, simulacrum components.”¹¹⁷ To Briar, her late husband is nothing more than a haunting memory that she is desperately trying to forget.

¹¹³ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 128.

¹¹⁴ The phrase ‘Angel in the House’ represents the repressive Victorian notion of an ‘Ideal Woman’ / wife who is passive, submissive, loyal, caring, selfless virtuous and pure. The phrase comes from the title of a poem written by Coventry Palmore in 1854. In the poem, Palmore put his wife Emily on a metaphorical pedestal and made her a symbol of domesticity and a role model all women should emulate.

Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 101-124.

¹¹⁵ Barr, *Future Females* 142.

¹¹⁶ Cherie Priest, *Boneshaker* (New York: Tor Books, 2009) 46. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

¹¹⁷ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 127.

Upon the destruction of Seattle, which sets in motion events that negatively affect the entire country, Briar loses her social standing due to her husband's crimes. For that, she is considered guilty by association and becomes persona non-grata outside the city walls. Dr. Blue's invention, the titular Boneshaker, a drilling machine¹¹⁸ designed to extract gold, is the cause of Seattle's ruin. During its first run, the infamous "Incredible Bone-Shaking Drill Engine" (B, 17) goes out of control and a toxic gas termed as Blight is released. At the end of the novel, Briar reveals that her husband felt no remorse for being responsible for the death of so many and wanted to run away, leaving his wife and unborn child behind. To him, she was nothing more than what Barr refers to as "the stupid wife [...] incapable of understanding any mathematics more complicated than a grocery bill."¹¹⁹ It was at that moment that Briar, shocked and angered by his apparent betrayal, shot her husband dead. While this violent act undermines the Southern Belle imagery, it does not liberate the protagonist, quite the contrary. The subsequent emotional trauma cripples her for years to come, especially in regards to her strained relationship with her only child.

3.2. Working Class Woman in the Shadow of Men

Apart from having to navigate and survive in a world broken by the Civil War, there was another reason to fear for one's life – the toxic gas seeping from beneath the city of Seattle.¹²⁰ "What was once a bustling metropolis is now a ghost town, surrounded by the

¹¹⁸ In the wake of the Alaskan gold rush the Russian prospectors had commissioned Dr. Blue to design and build a powerful drilling machine capable of mining even in the harsh Alaskan conditions. "In 1860, the Russians announced a contest, offering a 100,000 ruble prize to the inventor who could produce or propose a machine that could mine through ice in search of gold" (B, 16).

¹¹⁹ Barr, *Future Females* 50.

¹²⁰ Priest frequently employs Gothic features when imagining the setting. Moreover, she identifies what can be seen as a natural disaster with the use of technology as the release of the yellow sap was a direct consequence of scientific experimentation. The protagonists' fear is thus not a nameless horror but a very specific danger in the form of poisonous gas and reanimated corpses. The consequent quarantine placed over the Old Seattle area then results in significant changes to American history as we know it. The yellow drug that can be distilled from the poisonous gas tips the tides of war in significant ways as soldiers on both sides succumbed to addiction that eventually becomes a threat of pandemic proportions.

resettled population. These people are fugitives from their hometown” (B, 19). Like the rest of the citizens, Briar too was forced to leave all her earthly possessions behind. Having enjoyed the luxury her late husband’s wealth provided, she experienced a massive culture shock upon losing her socio-economic standing. Briar lived a pampered and protected life when suddenly she was thrust into a fight for the survival of both herself and her unborn child. The powerful influence of men on her life choices is undeniable. After all, her relationships, both familial and romantic, can be only described as dysfunctional. In fact, her entire adulthood was a struggle to separate herself from her father’s shadow and her husband’s tarnished reputation. Once her primary male providers died, she had no other choice but to take control of her own life.

For Briar, adapting to her new life was twice as difficult as for the other Seattle survivors due to her status of a social pariah. Being Dr. Blue’s widow makes the working conditions much worse for her as the survivor community targets Briar specifically to cause her pain as a form of punishment for her supposed involvement in Seattle’s destruction. She attempts to shed the taint of her husband’s crimes by taking back her maiden name: “She’d written WILKES there, but while she wasn’t looking it had been crossed out and replaced with BLUE” (B, 45). Despite the harassment she faces at the water purification plant every day, Briar continues to cope with animosity and open hostility, hoping to secure a better future for her son. Having no prior work experience, “she was so often hungry that she’d learned to think around it” (B, 34). Her struggle is thus domestic, economic and emotional.

On top of being negatively influenced by her relationship with her husband, Briar also has issues with her estranged father, Maynard Wilkes: “My father was a tyrant, and everyone he loved was afraid of him” (B, 21). The text shows that there are a number of similarities between herself and her father. For instance, Maynard was also a widower raising a child of the opposite sex. “He was the only parent I ever had, and he wasn’t much of one. He didn’t

know what to do with a daughter any more than I know what to do with a map of Spain” (B, 24). During the evacuation of Seattle, Maynard proves himself to be a man of high morals despite his lack of parenting skills. Briar’s father was a prison guard who went against the prison regulations and released the prisoners to save them from the toxic yellow gas called the Blight: “There were twenty-two people inside those cells, and Maynard saved them, every last one. It cost him his life, and he didn’t get nothing for it” (B, 31). For the people who live inside the city, Sheriff Wilkes is a legend, whereas for the people outside he is the man who freed the criminals.

Like her father, Briar also goes against the conventions and ignores the law when necessary. Over the course of the novel, Briar slowly begins to see her father not only as the strict authority figure she feared but also as the hero who defied the law he swore to uphold to save people’s lives. She is aware that if he had survived the release of the toxic gas, he would have been prosecuted for his insubordination: “tried for treason. Jailed, at the minimum. Shot, at the worst” (B, 25). Yet, she shows empathy when she claims that “my father and I had our disagreements, but I wouldn’t have wished that upon him” (B, 25). Moreover, Maynard Wilkes’ legacy of heroism and justice provides a certain level of protection for both Briar and her teenage son upon entering the walled-off Seattle: “It’s like a secret handshake, Maynard’s name” (B, 38). Through developing the characters of Dr. Blue and Sheriff Wilkes Priest incessantly emphasizes the pervasiveness of regret but also the possibility of forgiveness. Regardless, Briar is still negatively affected by the dysfunctional relationships with her father and husband. Her emotional state is one of perpetual turmoil and guilt at somehow having failed her son Ezekiel.

3.3. Single Mother, Reluctant Heroine

The epitome of the reluctant heroine, Briar is forced to accept her new social status and move forward less she too succumbs to the poison her husband released into the world. This change in circumstances marks the beginning of her transformation into an independent, capable and self-reliant woman. As a single mother, Briar has to divide her time and energy between the 'feminine' domestic side and the 'masculine' public side, i.e. become the sole caretaker and provider for themselves and their children with no external support. As Ezekiel's only parental figure, Briar supplies both the role of the nurturing mother and the provider which leaves her with little time to spend with her only child: "Her lack of interest might have been interpreted as a lack of caring, but it was only a side effect of permanent exhaustion" (B, 32). In the light of this, the protagonist can be read as a character motivated primarily by maternal love and, of course, the basic need to survive in a world where non-hetero-normative family models are frowned upon. In most general terms, Briar is portrayed as a single mother of a teenage boy struggling to find a way to communicate with her child without revealing that she was the one who killed his father. While motherhood could be seen as an ultimately feminine trait, in the case of Briar it is what makes her take on an active role and eventually undergo a transformation from an outcast to a heroine.

The protagonist purposely keeps Ezekiel in the dark about her past in a desperate attempt to protect him as much as to protect herself, but fearing he would blame her for ruining his life before it even begun. She distances herself from Ezekiel convinced that "sometimes, the kindest thing I can do is let you pretend I don't exist" (B, 35). This lack of communication is what eventually leads Ezekiel to try and find evidence that could exonerate his father by venturing into the poison ridden Seattle. The boy's rash decision to enter the old city forces his mother to act well outside her gender role and become a savior figure when she follows her son into the danger zone. Thus, her bravery is not a result of some ingrained sense

of justice. Briar's heroism emerges naturally out of the highly dangerous environment she lives in. Perhaps, it is the proactive way she chooses to deal with the issue at hand which makes her such a compelling feminist character. In other words, *Boneshaker's* heroine can be perceived as a woman, a daughter, a widow, a single mother, but most of all, a heroine of necessity.

At the end of the novel, both Briar and Ezekiel chose to stay in the quarantined Seattle, a place where they have reconnected with each other as a mother and son. Finding a new home among the city dwellers, the heroine demonstrates her ability to adapt in order to thrive in a place only a few dare enter.¹²¹ She successfully integrates herself into this new society as an individual not defined solely by her gender. Moreover, Briar accepts the position of the Sheriff there. While choosing to remain in the devastated city to enforce the law is overshadowed by her father's legacy, it is also a position of power that demands respect which she earned through the actions of her own. In becoming a law woman, she consciously subverts the traditionally patriarchal hierarchy of the Civil War era during which such jobs were exclusively held by men.

At first glance, it may appear that by accepting the sheriff badge, Briars also accepts male dominance since sheriffs were subordinate to the state. However, the old Seattle is not a part of the system as it is a quarantined zone where the survivors have a chance to form their own society free of outside interference. The protagonist's decision to stay in Seattle thus affords her a certain level of personal freedom and a position of power among the small community of survivors. In Briar, Priest creates a paradox: a female sheriff of a nineteenth-century Seattle who not only escaped patriarchal control but actually chooses a 'masculine' occupation. Also, when gender stereotypes are taken into account, then her physical

¹²¹ Although Seattle is depicted as a symbol of wilderness where no human can survive let alone thrive, Priest transforms the city into an alternate space in which women are given autonomy over their own lives.

appearance clashes with her new job: “A smallish woman in her mid-to-late thirties [...] who wore pants that were tucked into the top of her boots and a fitted waistcoat with a sheriff badge clipped to the watch pocket” (D, 378).

3.4. Female Bonds

Shortly after entering the city, Briar finds herself at a bar run and owned by Lucy O’Gunning. The bar is called “Maynard’s” (B, 178) in Briar’s deceased father’s honor. Both women are widows and survivors but unlike the main female protagonist, Lucy chooses to stay inside the destroyed Seattle and start over in a place where she lost her husband to the first wave of the yellow gas. Their shared experience in having to suddenly adapt to a dangerous world, where they have only themselves to rely on, as well as Lucy’s maternal-like behavior towards Briar immediately prompts them to form a strong female bond. For Briar, an outcast of the resettled Seattle community, “this was more friendly contact than she’d had in years, and the pleasantness of it smoothed the keen, guilty edge of her sorrow” (B, 190). Moreover, both women have a disability that makes their survival much more difficult than it is for other women: Lucy has a mechanical arm whereas Briar bears the burden of being Dr. Blue’s widow. When Briar comes to Lucy’s bar, the older woman offers her support and help in finding the runaway Zeke. She provides Briar with information and advice about the major players in the city and joins her when Briar needs to go the villain’s lair to find her child.

Like Briar, the barkeep too rejects the dictate of gender expectations: she wears stereotypically ‘masculine’ clothing and also exhibits ‘masculine’ traits such as self-sufficiency and bravery, runs her own business and assumes the role of the leader when necessary: “We don’t have too many women down here inside the walls, but I sure wouldn’t mess with the ones we’ve got” (B, 382). Her opinion of men is simple: “Boys are boys, they are. They’re useless and ornery as can be, and when they grow up they’re even worse” (B,

190). Despite her disability, she is a true leader of men capable of defending both herself and others. For example, when her bar is attacked, she takes charge and leads the patrons to safety. The men respect her authority and treat her accordingly: “Do we hold the fort or bail? It’s your call, Ms Lucy” (B, 197). However, Lucy is an exception to the rule because other women that arrive in the walled-off Seattle are generally prostitutes who never stay long. It is thus only the strong and independent females who remain in the city that can escape the nineteenth-century discrimination against women.

Moreover, unlike her male companions, Lucy also rejects the xenophobic attitudes towards Asian characters. While her disability is an actual physical impairment that is visible to all, the Chinese immigrants are, in a way, also ‘disabled’ by their racial as well as cultural background that is in stark contrast to what the American people were used to in the nineteenth century. It can be argued that this shared sense of ‘otherness’ enables Lucy to be on friendly terms with the Chinese workers within the city, refusing to accept the dominant patriarchal view of immigrants: “You can’t call them all bastards just for one bad apple. If I did that, I’d never be civil to any man again” (B, 265). Instead of viewing them with derision and distrust, she understands and appreciates their skills: “We can’t keep half this equipment running without them and that’s a fact” (B, 265). When she is in need of basic repairs to her arm, it is the Chinese engineers that she turns to instead of the white Americans who fused the contraption with her body because she trusts them more. Women in *The Clockwork Century* in general and *Boneshaker* in particular can relate to the Chinese bachelors because they too have to face discrimination every day.

3.5. Reversal of the Damsel in Distress Role

Upon entering the quarantined Seattle, Briar is woefully unprepared for the dangers that await her within its walls. Fortunately for her, she is soon found by Jeremiah

Swakhammer, an imposing figure of a man resembling a medieval knight wearing a mechanical body armor. Swakhammer immediately takes on the role of her protector for two reasons: a) she is a woman who doesn't know how to defend herself against the infected, and b) she is Maynard's daughter which automatically makes her an important figure to those living in the Old Seattle. "Maynard is the closest thing to an agreed-upon authority down here" (B, 173). At first, Briar plays the role of damsel in distress albeit one who is more than capable of wielding a firearm. Swakhammer refers to her as "a little woman with a big gun" (B, 155). Then, once she adapts to the dangerous environment, she and the only male hero of *Boneshaker* become equals, facing every threat together. Towards the end of the novel, he is grievously injured and unwillingly assumes the role of the damsel in distress: "She cared about Swakhammer, who wasn't bleeding with quite so much spectacular gore, but whose life was ebbing all the same. It might well be too late already" (B, 381). This time it is Briar who protects him and saves his life while risking her own: "I can't leave him here [...] he's been real helpful to me" (B, 374).

Together with Lucy and Miss Angeline, they manage to get Swakhammer out of the line of fire and into the tunnels leading out of Minnericht's place. It takes the three women and two men to move the fallen hero into a cart so that he can be safely moved. Briar fittingly claims that they "got trouble, and it's big, and it's heavy" (B, 382) referring to the man's impressive size. Moreover, after Swakhammer becomes incapacitated due to his injuries, it is Briar and Lucy who make the decision regarding the medical attention he so desperately needs. Despite knowing that he might "rather die than get cleaned up by a Chinaman" (B, 383) Briar sends Lucy ahead with the unconscious man. It is Lucy who makes the decision for him, consciously ignoring his xenophobic attitude: "It's not medicine like the kind you're used to, but it's medicine all the same, and right now, you'll both have to take what you can get" (B, 383).

Like most characters of *Boneshaker*, Swakhammer both distrusts and fears the Asian immigrants. However, the women's decision proves to be the correct one because Swakhammer does indeed survive due to the Chinese doctor's expertise as we learn in *Dreadnought*. It is the women's open-mindedness that enables them to forge positive bonds with their Chinese neighbors which in turn gives them access to alternative medical treatments. This apparent advantage is completely overlooked by the other characters who are unaware of the possible benefits stemming from treating the Asian 'other' with respect.

It is also in the sequel that we learn of Briar taking up the post of Seattle's sheriff: "If there's law in Seattle, I guess it's me as much as anybody" (D, 379). Quite possibly, she becomes the first female law enforcer in America. Through this, she becomes the de facto role model for other frontier women to imitate. While she is sequestered in the quarantined city, effectively cut off from the governing body, she is still in a position of power elected by the people to protect their interests. In this sense, by taking up the cop position and carrying a gun, she transcends the limits of her gender by exhibiting traits of both genders which makes her a more wholesome person than when she was merely Dr. Blue's wife.

3.6. The Heroine and the Villain

The main male antagonist of *Boneshaker* is not Dr. Leviticus Blue, but a man who stole his identity and calls himself Dr. Minnericht. For a decade since the release of the yellow gas, the villainous impostor was relentlessly building his underground empire. However, unlike Dr. Blue, he is not a genius inventor but has "been stealing Levi's inventions and retooling them for his own purposes" (B, 372). It is the dead scientist's mechanical contraptions and various system upgrades that enable Minnericht to seize control over Seattle. In fact, he is responsible for the release of Blight outside the city's walls:

Those airmen [...] They pay him taxes, sort of, in order to take Blight out; and

all the chemists who cook it in the Outskirts, they had to buy the knowledge off him. And the runners, and the dealers—they all owe him, too. (B, 268)

Ironically, “Minnericht has a thing about light. He loves it, and he likes to make it” (B, 304). A man who stole another man’s life’s work, as well as his less than stellar reputation, is fascinated by an all-revealing light.

The survivors view him as a “crazy genius” (B, 267) but they also fear and hate him. The uncertainty of whether he really is Dr. Blue is what keeps the balance. However, Lucy and others believe that “if Minnericht is Blue, then we have a right to hold him accountable for this place” (B, 266). Moreover, it is not only the possibility of Minnericht being the one responsible for Seattle’s destruction that makes the survivors’ wish for vengeance but also the abhorrent way he treats his employees that is revolting. In the initial processing of the Blight drug, Minnericht tested the substance on the Chinese workers: “he wanted them to treat it like opium. But he killed a bunch of them that way, and finally, the rest of them turned on him” (B, 267). While the Chinese are not trusted by the other characters, it is still unacceptable to treat humans as test subjects. The only Chinese ally he has left is “Yaozu. He’s Minnericht’s right-hand man, and he’s the business arm of the operation. He’s mean as a snake” (B, 267). In Yaozu, Priest creates an epitome of the nineteenth-century Asian stereotype.

Upon meeting Minnericht, Briar is faced with a figure that eerily resembles her dead husband both physically and in terms of his arrogant attitude. In fact, she did not kill her husband, she might have fallen for the villain’s act: “She couldn’t decide, or couldn’t remember, if his height was the same as Levi’s—or if he was shaped the same way” (B, 313). Briar is the only one who can either confirm or deny his claim on Briar’s late husband’s identity and she is more than willing to let him have Dr Blue’s name if it means finding her son: “You tried to convince me you were Levi, so that must be your goal—to make it official. It’s one hell of an identity to steal, but if you want it, I say you can have it” (B, 322). Thus,

she uses Dr. Blue's identity as a bargaining chip when she negotiates for their lives and their freedom: "If you let me and Zeke go, then you can be whatever legend you want" (B, 322). Fortunately for the heroine, Miss Angeline appears and takes her revenge on Minnericht: "With one slash, swift and muscle-slicingly deep" (B, 381) she slashes his throat, finally killing the man who murdered her daughter. By having Miss Angeline 'defeat' the villain, Priest allows Briar to retain her purity as she is not forced to commit murder.

The third chapter analyzed the figure of the 'Southern Belle' using the example of Briar Wilkes and the character growth that the heroine of *Boneshaker* went through after she lost her privileged position. The extent to which male-female relationships influence a person's identity were discussed with an emphasis on the nineteenth-century stereotypical views of women as daughters, wives, and mothers. Also, the relationship between achieving gender equality and successfully subverting gender stereotypes was considered in the sense that it is possible by adopting both 'feminine' and 'masculine' traits. This was proven to be advantageous for the women as the society does not expect them to be able to step outside their gender's boundaries. Most notably, the transformation of Briar-the-victim into Briar-the-heroine was analyzed with a particular focus on the woman's resilience and adaptability.

4. Venita Mercy Lynch: The Daring Adventurer of *Dreadnought*

Dreadnought, similarly to *Boneshaker*, also depicts a woman's journey to self-discovery and empowerment. Venita Mercy Lynch nee Swakhammer¹²² is a Southern nurse working at a hospital in Richmond, Virginia. Her character indeed fits within the stereotypically 'feminine' characteristics prevalent during the Civil War era. As a nurse, she embodies the image of a nurturing maternal figure when she tirelessly provides care and comfort to the injured soldiers.¹²³ Nevertheless, throughout the story, Mercy is consistently defiant of patriarchal authority and confident in her medical knowledge and her ability to survive on both sides of the Civil War. Her pragmatism allows her to deal with the constant presence of pain and suffering. Moreover, Mercy's medical expertise and deductive skills enable her to uncover the origins of a new drug called the Blight (also known as 'yellows sap') that is decimating the South and the North alike.

4.1. Civil War Nurses, Hospital Sketches

The *Dreadnought* novel is influenced by Louisa May Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* written in 1863 and based on her own personal experience as a nurse at the Union Hospital in Georgetown, Washington, DC. Priest openly acknowledges that she found inspiration in Alcott's work for both the characterization of the medical staff as well as the patients and the description of the Robertson Army hospital. Alcott's "collection of 'Hospital Sketches' was immensely helpful in imagining and re-creating a fictional version of the Robertson facility in Richmond" (D, 8). While Priest does indeed alter historical facts in a significant way, she

¹²² For a visual image see Appendix C.

¹²³ For example, a part of a nurse's job was writing letters home on behalf of indisposed and/or illiterate soldiers. This practice is also mentioned in Louisa May Alcott's semi-autobiography *Hospital Sketches* as one of the ways the nurses could comfort the patients. "The next task was to minister to their minds, by writing letters to the anxious souls at home." In fact, Alcott claims that "the letters dictated to me [...] would have made an excellent chapter for some future history of the war." Priest takes this literally and uses the letters Mercy writes on her patients' behalf as yet another way of giving her narrative an air of authenticity. Louisa May Alcott, *Hospital Sketches* (Free Classic Books, 2017) 30-31.

manages to evoke a very authentic atmosphere of a time when medical care was more or less non-existent.¹²⁴ For example, in *Hospital Sketches*, Alcott describes the hospital as a filthy over-crowded place with only the most basic equipment. In particular, Alcott focuses on “the vilest odors that ever assaulted the human nose, and took it by storm.”¹²⁵ Priest offers a very similar depiction of an inadequate medical facility: “The smell never ever went away. It worked itself into the wrinkles in Mercy’s clothes and lurked in her hair. It collected under her fingernails” (D, 15). The author also uses the sensory overload to point out the horrendous conditions the nurses and the doctors worked in.

At a time of war, there is no time for nonsense - be it emotional breakdowns, prejudices or modesty. This seems to be a recurrent theme in Priest’s novels and both Briar and Mercy are a fine testament to that. During her time at Richmond, Mercy becomes a professional with a perfect bedside manner who understands how the hospital works and thus has no difficulties taking charge when the situation calls for it: “No one else had been ready to step up to the task, so Mercy had swooped onto the scene to assist with pressing matters” (D, 29). In fact, she is the nursing superintendent of her own ward, which grants her authority over the new nurses and non-medical hospital staff. Like Alcott’s alter-ego, she too is “bent on performing [her] task vi et armis [by force of arms] if necessary.”¹²⁶ Her no-nonsense attitude and skill mean that “the surgeons liked her, and asked for her often” (D, 29). Mercy maintains composure under pressure and, due to having grown up on a farm, she is able to assist in physically subduing violent patients when necessary: “It wasn’t so different from hog-tying, or roping up a calf. The tools were different, but the principle was the same: seize, lasso, fasten, and immobilize” (D, 37).

¹²⁴ “Although death on the massive scale of the Civil War was a new experience for Americans, they were no strangers to death on a more personal and individual level. Life expectancy at birth was forty years, largely because of an infant and child mortality.”
McPherson 55.

¹²⁵ Alcott 23.

¹²⁶ Alcott 24.

4.2. Female Bonds

While Mercy figures as the main female protagonist of the novel, there are other noteworthy women who show an indisputable strength of character. Perhaps the most feminist figure is Captain Sally Louisa Tompkins, the de facto chief officer of the Robertson Hospital: “It was her hospital, and she legally outranked everyone else in the building” (D, 13). Captain Sally has forced her way into a world of men and became a symbol of medical perfectionism across the country; she was a medical officer first and soldier second. Fully aware of her unique set of skills and economic background, she forced the military to place her in a position of power previously awarded only to men. “Sally Louisa Tompkins would accept no superior, and she was too wealthy and competent to be ignored” (D, 13). By being recognized by the official authorities, she gained power over both the injured soldiers entering her domain and the medical staff employed at her hospital. “The Captain’ bit was not a nickname. It was a commission from the Confederate States of America, and it had been granted because a military hospital must have a military commander” (D, 13).

Captain Sally becomes not only Mercy’s mentor and protector but also her role model. The South and North distinction bears no relevance to either of them. They are first and foremost medical professionals because to them a patient is not defined by the color of his uniform. Captain Sally believes that “all of the boys, blue and grey alike. They all hope someone would do the same for them—that someone would tell their mothers and sweethearts, should they fall on the field” (D, 21). However, the female bond they share stems mostly from the female experience of gender discrimination and the incessant struggle to overcome it. As a war nurse, she inspires respect and her patients defer to her naturally not because of her gender but due to her commanding posture. This particular quality is something that Mercy strives to emulate, along with familiarizing herself with modern

technology¹²⁷ and new medical procedures. While the protagonist is mostly ignorant of the inner workings of the nineteenth-century machinery, she is more than capable of using it to her advantage to analyze the situation and to relate her findings to Captain Sally. In this sense, women successfully appropriate what Barr refers to as originally “militaristic communications technologies that can produce high-tech, gendered imaginations which relish competition and warfare”¹²⁸ and transform them into “feminist communicative modes that might encourage peace and cooperation.”¹²⁹

4.3. War Makes Young Widows

At the beginning of the novel, Mercy learns that her husband Philip Barnaby Lynch succumbed to his injuries at a prisoner’s camp at Andersonville.¹³⁰ While she had already suspected that he was dead, it was by no means less of a shock.¹³¹ It is Captain Sally who provides emotional support: Mercy “sagged back [...] into the arms of Sally Tompkins, who was ready with an embrace” (D, 20). The emotional support of another woman who is also an army nurse proves invaluable. After all, Captain Sally is someone who can relate to what Mercy is going through on a personal level. She remains by Mercy’s side until the young woman is able to collect herself and decide the course of her future. Moreover, Captain Sally writes Mercy “a letter of recommendation” (D, 46) which marks the young widow as a

¹²⁷ Mercy uses retro-futuristic means of relaying information (the telegraph and postal services) to communicate with Sheriff Wilkes and later to send her notes on the Blight to her medical superior.

¹²⁸ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 45.

¹²⁹ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 45.

¹³⁰ The Camp Sumter military prison at Andersonville was one of the largest Confederate military prisons during the Civil War. During the 14 months the prison existed, more than 45,000 Union soldiers were confined here. Of these, almost 13,000 died here. Like the real Andersonville, the fictional prison camp is also a place of suffering and desperation. Water pollution, diseases, overcrowding, exposure to the elements and/or malnutrition were the main causes of thousands of deaths. The soldier that came to convey the sad news attempts to soothe Mercy by stating that her husband’s death was a quick one. “He was hurt real bad when they brought him in, and he didn't last. I hope that can be some comfort to you, maybe. The camp was a terrible place, but he wasn't there for long” (D, 19).

¹³¹ “Neither the Union nor the Confederate army had an official procedure for notifying next of kin of soldier deaths. [...] Neither army provided soldiers with identity tags. More than half of the soldiers who died in the war were buried in graves—sometimes mass graves—without identification.”

McPherson 60.

Richmond nurse. By doing so, she provides Mercy with official protection for a larger portion of her travels as nurses have always been deemed valuable at a time of war.

Although Mercy's husband's death is the vehicle behind her decision to leave Richmond, he remains a mere memory of a man that she barely knew: "Been married eight months [...] and he went out to fight, and he was gone for two and a half years" (D, 19). Through their marriage, Priest addresses the moral dilemma that many Americans had to face at the time, the geopolitical divide that ripped families apart. Mercy describes the realities of the Civil War quite accurately:

Philip had fought for Kentucky, not for the Union. He fought because his father's farm had been attacked by Rebs and halfway burned; just about the same as how Mercy's own brother fought for Virginia and not for the Confederacy because her family farm had been burned down twice in the last ten years by the Yanks.

Everyone fights for home, in the end. (D, 23)

The young nurse was aware that "they'd been born on the wrong sides of a badly drawn line" (D, 24) but unlike Briar, she loved her husband dearly and refused to let the South/North division come between them. His demise affected her on a deeper level than Briar. In this respect, Mercy provides a female perspective on the horrors of the war and how the all-permeating presence of death affects individuals and also the nation as a whole.

4.4. Childhood Trauma, Absent Father

The parallels between Briar and Mercy become more obvious when Priest accentuates the problematic or rather non-existent, relationships the two women have with their primary male authority figures. Shortly after learning of Philip's untimely demise, Mercy receives a telegram from Sheriff Wilkes informing her that her "father Jeremiah Granville Swakhammer has suffered an accident [...] He wants you to come" (D, 41). By utilizing the devices of

coincidence and convergence,¹³² Priest connects *Boneshaker* with its sequel, building upon familial relations between the characters. Emotionally compromised due to her husband's death and driven by her childhood memories of a loving father who was the epitome of masculine strength and power, Mercy decides to go to Seattle. It is at this point that the novel turns into a travel adventure. However, the young widow's decision is not motivated by her wish to reconcile with Jeremiah but to get closure and to ascertain why he left his family over two decades ago.

Mercy's biological father has been absent for most of her life. "My daddy ran off when I was little. Went West, with his brother and my cousin, looking for gold in Alaska" (D, 40). Despite being traumatized by her father's abandonment, Mercy has never accepted her stepfather as a father figure. She consistently uses the emotionally colored term 'daddy' to refer to Jeremiah whereas she calls her mother's second husband by the neutral 'father'. Upon receiving the telegram from Sheriff Wilkes, Mercy re-lives the pain and fear she felt when she realized her father was not coming back: "He left me and Momma. He left us, and he never sent for us like he said he would" (D, 41). Her pain quickly turns into righteous anger when it is confirmed that Jeremiah did indeed abandon them: "That son of a bitch! All this time, he's been out West just fine" (D, 42). Having already lost her husband without being able to say goodbye, Mercy embarks on an adventure across the war-torn country to get closure.

¹³² "Formulated as spatial metaphors, the plots of coincidence and counterfactuality can be mapped as the opposing patterns created when vectors in time and space move together or move apart, tracing pathways that either converge or diverge. [...] Convergence involves the intersection of narrative paths and the interconnection of characters within the narrative world, closing and unifying it as an artistic structure. [...] Coincidence in narrative fiction is a plot pattern with fundamentally convergent tendencies because it creates relationships that interlink characters across the space and time of the narrative world."

Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008) 2.

4.5. Frontier Heroine, Daring Adventurer

Mercy's journey to Seattle begins aboard of a dirigible airship which crashes after being fired at by both of the Armies. Having crash-landed in the middle of a Union-Confederate battle, Mercy draws on her nursing experience and immediately takes control of the situation. Assuming leadership, she patches up the wounded passengers and ensures the survival of everyone by sending them to the nearby town. After reaching the safety of Saint Louis, she boards a Union war train, the titular Dreadnought, which carries a mysterious cargo guarded by Union soldiers. Eventually, the cargo turns out to be soldiers who died of exposure to the Blight. The lengthy journey across the states enables Priest to show the alternate Civil War America in greater detail. Priest uses Mercy's observations to paint a vivid picture of both sides of the border.

Having lived a solitary life, Mercy is used to being independent and resourceful, and her travelling alone fits her character quite well. Mercy's gender further ensures that she is viewed as a person in need of protection. Being the resourceful woman she is, Mercy uses the ingrained Southern chivalry to her advantage. For example, when the first dirigible she had ever boarded crashes in the middle of a battlefield, she allows the technician to shield her with his own body: "Ernie went for chivalry, flinging his right arm over Mercy's shoulder and pulling her under his chest; she ducked there, and wrapped her left arm around his waist" (D, 77). He also stays with her while she searches the area for survivors. "No way, ma'am. I'm staying with you. I'm not leaving a lady alone on a battlefield" (D, 93).

At the same time, the fact that she is without a male companion proves to be a hindrance as she is often viewed with suspicion. Staying true to the era's gender stereotypes about single women travelling alone, Mercy has to explain why she does not have a male companion/protector several times to both women and men. For instance, upon trying to rent a room in a hotel, the male receptionist regards her with disdain: "'Where's your husband?

[...] A woman travelling alone,' he observed, and lifted the edge of his nose in a distasteful sneer" (D, 113). She is viewed either as a prostitute or a spy. Mercy does not hesitate to defend her honor and uses her paperwork to prove that she is a respectable nurse: "'I'm on my way from the Robertson Hospital in Richmond,' she tried, since that place had opened doors for her before" (D, 113). It is precisely in such cases that her occupation provides a second protective layer as medical personnel was always held in high regard at a time of war.

4.6. Women of Color, the Slavery Debate

In *Boneshaker*, the thematic diversity includes the presence of the Chinese minority but Priest mostly skims over the topic of slavery as it is set exclusively in the Seattle area. In comparison, *Dreadnought* provides a much broader view of the slaves' situation in Civil War America since Mercy passes through several states on her journey west. At the beginning of the narrative, Priest establishes that African-Americans were emancipated in the early stages of the war. However, that does not translate into attaining equal rights and freedoms. People of color may no longer be treated as property, but they are still considered to be second-class citizens. The author does not directly criticize the past actions of slaveholders, instead, through the character of Mercy, she enables the reader to observe the social interactions between the white ruling majority and African-Americans. In particular, Mercy's fellow passengers are a diverse group ranging from elderly Southern ladies and Irish immigrants to Mexican investigators. The cultural and ethnic variety of viewpoints represents the prevalent attitudes toward people of color.

The most significant scene occurs after Mercy boards the *Dreadnought* train. Recognizing her attire as a nurse's uniform, "a mulatto woman" (D, 122) asks the protagonist to give first aid to her son. Mercy agrees to help them, but to do so she must venture into "the coloreds car" (D, 121). Both the white and the black passengers view her as an alien entity

trespassing boundaries that are supposed to firmly segregate the two races: “Most of the other women in the car shifted or adjusted their luggage, and either pretended not to look, or made a point of looking” (D, 123). This purposeful separation can also be seen in the economic differences as the African-Americans were allowed access only to the most menial jobs: “they worked at the train station, and in the factories; they worked on the river, in the shipping districts” (D, 111). Similarly to the other white passengers, Mercy also acknowledges that “treating small colored children with monied parents went right past her threshold of experience” (D, 125).

Mercy is rewarded for her kindness when Mrs. Hyde (D, 128), a colored woman, reveals herself to be a co-owner of a successful restaurant franchise. This comes as a shock to the young nurse as “she’d never heard of a woman owning” (D, 128) property let alone managing their own business. Mrs. Hyde explains that she is an ex-slave and used to “do all the cooking for the rich ladies, in the plantations” (D, 128) hence her success in the food industry. Moreover, she claims that she and her sisters wrote a cookbook which turned into a bestseller in Memphis. Therefore, the character of Mrs. Hyde is portrayed as a woman who used her past experiences as a slave to secure her future as a successful businesswoman which earns her Mercy’s “genuine admiration” (D, 128). In this respect, Mrs. Hyde represents a strong female character who managed to overcome not only her tragic past as a slave but also become successful in a world ruled by white men by utilizing her skills to their fullest.

The positive relations that Mercy managed to form with Mrs. Hyde proves to be quite useful later on in the novel when she takes the colored woman up on her offer of free food. After Mercy arrives at one of Mrs. Hyde’s restaurants, she discovers that it is “a firmly middle-class establishment, and a popular one” (D, 70). This does not come as a surprise to the nurse given the businesswoman high-quality clothing and leaves her feeling “embarrassingly underdressed” (D, 70) in her dirty clothes. Upon entering the restaurant, Mercy notes that the

white and the colored people eat in separate dining sections. She is seated among the white guests and when she compliments the food and calls the cook a “lady” (D, 71), Mrs. Henderson with whom she is sharing a table gives her a “glance of reproach” (D, 71) for treating a colored person with such respect. In other words, Mercy represents the new less racist attitude towards racial minorities whereas Mrs. Henderson becomes the voice of the pre-abolition past.

4.7. Fellow White Female Passengers

In *Dreadnought*, there are two more female characters worth mentioning: “Norene Butterfield, recently widowed, and [...] her niece Miss Theodora Clay” (D, 173). For the two women, everything is about appearances, from always being dressed smartly and immaculately clean, to having perfect manners in every situation. For example, when the *Dreadnought* train is being shot at by Rebels, Mrs. Butterfield remains calm and begins “ordering the other passengers into defensive positions” (D, 185) while, at the same time, ensuring everybody follows the basic rules of propriety. Her determination to act as a lady even when being shot at then certainly provides a comic relief: “On the floor, and careful not to flash anything unladylike!” (D, 185) Similarly to her Aunt, Miss Clay too pays attention to her countenance: “Miss Clay realized she’d been sitting with her mouth open. She covered for this oversight by pulling the cup of coffee to her lips and drinking as deeply as the heat would allow” (D, 184). Faced with these two upper-class ladies with perfect manners “made Mercy feel unkempt” (D, 173) given her dirty clothes covered in mud, snot and blood. They represent the ‘feminine ideal’, whereas the heroine looks as if she came straight from the battlefield, which she did.

In regards to the war, Mrs. Butterfield’s main worry seems to be the lack of potential husbands for her niece to choose from: “Sometimes I wonder that we’ve got any men left at

all, after all this time fighting. I despair for my niece” (D, 174). To the old lady, the war is what ruined her niece’s life: “Miss Clay had once been engaged to a highly placed and upstanding Union major, but alas, he’d been killed on the field less than a month before their wedding day” (D, 175). While the younger woman appears to purposely ignore her Aunt’s constant chatter and numerous attempts at pushing her towards unmarried men, she does take Mrs. Butterfield’s beliefs of marriage as every woman’s ultimate goal in life to heart. Mercy herself notices that Miss Clay spends a large part of the journey chatting with young soldiers and being escorted to the dining car and back, which Mrs. Butterfield readily approves of: “She might take to a husband yet! It’s not too late for her, after all” (D, 194). In fact, Miss Clay’s aunt is delighted by the prospect of her niece fulfilling her role as a wife and a mother which she sees as a woman’s duty: “There’s still time for a few children if the Lord sees fit to have her matched” (D, 194).

This chapter detailed the particularities of the American Civil War how it pertains to the wide-spread gender stereotypes but also to inter-racial relations. Attention was paid to the prevalent views of how what a proper woman was expected to behave and to the prevalent racist attitudes towards the colored people. The connection between clothing and the notions of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ was also considered, especially in regards to the female body and how clothing might enable women to enter domains usually reserved for males. The call to adventure that Mercy answered in *Dreadnought* led her across the war-torn country on a journey of self-discovery, which Priest used to show the desperate situation on both sides of the conflict. The frontier imagery present throughout the text then showcases what particular nineteenth-century challenges forced both men and women to reconsider the traditional gender stereotypes.

5. Maria Isabella Boyd: The Southern Spy of *Clementine* and *Fiddlehead*

Maria Isabella Boyd,¹³³ a recently widowed middle-aged woman, first appears in the novella *Clementine* set alongside the events of *Boneshaker*. She fits the pattern of strong and resilient women that Priest set in the first novel perfectly. For twenty-five years, she worked as a spy for the Confederate army. In fact, the main female character is based on a real Southern spy Isabella Maria Boyd.¹³⁴ The author pays homage to the notorious “Cleopatra of the Secession or the Siren of the Shenandoah” (F, 68) when she names the protagonist after her. Priest expressed her admiration for the spy’s courage, resilience and skill on several occasions: “She was so charismatic and so clever and capable and charming that men typically didn’t notice that she wasn’t beautiful.”¹³⁵ It can be argued that the accessibility of her text stems from Priest’s delving into the real spy’s autobiography *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison* (1865), which enabled her to paint a very realistic image of Civil War espionage and the aftermath of outliving one’s usefulness.

As the ‘Belle’ moniker suggests, with Maria, Priest once again employs the ‘Ideal Woman’ imagery, the ‘Southern Belle’ figure in particular. Unlike Briar, the heroine of *Fiddlehead* is not a true ‘Belle’. Instead, she uses the feminine ideal to her advantage. She is self-assured and confident in her abilities as a spy. In her years of gathering information for the South, she has acquired a unique set of skills and familiarized herself with modern technology. Maria has also become quite adept at psychoanalyzing her enemies and exploiting their weaknesses. The protagonist is well aware that “men are trained from birth to wait on the whims of women, even murderers expect it” (F, 243). Maria thus uses gender-based societal

¹³³ For a visual image see Appendix D.

¹³⁴ Isabella Maria Boyd, “Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison” (London: Saunders, Otley, and Co., 1865), *Documenting the American South Website*. <<http://www.docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/boyd1/menu.html>>. Accessed July 13, 2017.

¹³⁵ Jean Marie Ward, “Cherie Priest: Author of the Clockwork Century Series – Exclusive Interview,” *buzzymag.com*, Buzzy Mag: Science Fiction Magazine, Jan 21, 2014. <<http://buzzymag.com/cherie-priest-author-of-the-clockwork-century-series-exclusive-interview/>>. Accessed Aug 25, 2017.

expectations against her male adversaries. When necessary, she pretends to be the personification of the ‘Ideal Woman’ as presented in Welter’s previously mentioned essay. After all, as Barr writes “images of femininity are illusory conditions representing real women to their spectators.”¹³⁶ Instead of becoming the stereotypical nineteenth-century female figure (wife, daughter, mother), Maria breaks the boundary between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ by adopting knowledge and acquiring skills of each of both genders.

5.1. The Label of a Failed Woman

In *Dreadnought*, the protagonist is emotionally affected by losing her spouse. Through Mercy and Philip, Priest points out how the Civil War tore apart families regardless of their allegiance to one side of the conflict or the other. In *Clementine* as in *Fiddlehead*, Maria also has to face harassment for her Southern roots and also because her husband fought in the Confederate Army. Copying Mercy’s non-apologetic attitude, the ex-spy does not feel the need to explain herself to anyone, but she does defend her deceased husband’s honor: “Samuel was a good man, regardless of the coat he wore. Good men on both sides have their reasons for fighting.”¹³⁷ In the nineteenth century, widows and widowers were a common occurrence. On the other hand, divorced women were frowned upon, which is why Maria’s reputation is severely tarnished: “She was nearly forty years old and two husbands down—one dead, one divorced” (C, 21). Moreover, the protagonist is childless, which further marks her as an ‘incomplete’ person. According to Welter, a woman’s duty was to “raise virtuous,

¹³⁶ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 9.

¹³⁷ Cherie Priest, *Clementine* (Michigan: Subterranean Press, 2010) 25. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

patriotic citizens, all for the honor of her husband and the family's name."¹³⁸ By not reproducing, Maria essentially failed to fulfil her duty to the society.¹³⁹

Rejected by the Confederation, exposed as a spy and with no male provider, Maria finds herself in an economic situation similar to Briar's, who was also left destitute in the aftermath of the Seattle disaster. "The CSA no longer trusted her, and the newspapers accused her of terrible things. What meagre fortune her family possessed was lost in the war" (F, 51). Despite her upbringing, she does not see herself through the lenses of the nineteenth-century standards of womanhood. Instead, she endeavors to overcome her gender's limitations by choosing careers that were previously held exclusively by men. For instance, "she worked as a cab driver—one of the only women driving in Georgia, if not the whole continent" (F, 51). The protagonist's refusal to bow down to social conditioning showcases her strength of character.

5.2. Ex-Spy, Pinkerton Agent

During her career in espionage, Maria has had adopted a number of fake identities which eventually led to her becoming too recognizable to continue passing military secret across the border. Her reputation of a dangerous and cold calculating woman precedes her. In fact, it is her notoriousness that leads to her being exiled after she ceases to be useful to the Confederates. Instead of being retired, she is informed via a letter that her services are no longer needed. In the nineteenth century, women had very few career options available to them and after losing her Army pension, Maria finds herself without a steady income:

There was no money, and what was left of her family was starving. Maria

Boyd wrote a book and gave tours, speaking about her time in Union

¹³⁸ Welter 162.

¹³⁹ "The traditionalist explanation focuses on woman's reproductive capacity and sees in motherhood woman's chief goal in life, by implication defining as deviant women who do not become mothers." Lerner 17.

prisoner-of-war camps and retelling her adventures as a spy, but it wasn't enough to keep anyone fed. (F, 51)

She is desperate enough to accept a job at the Pinkerton National Detective Agency based in Chicago.¹⁴⁰ Her particular set of skills is of use to the Pinkertons but she has to constantly deal with distrust for being an ex-Southern-spy and prejudices aimed at her as an unmarried woman doing a man's job.

Bitter at being discarded so easily by the South, Maria works twice as hard to be recognized for her abilities instead of being defined merely as a woman or the ex-spy: "She hated looking weak like men hated looking foolish, and she worked studiously to prove that she was up to the same tasks as everyone else" (F, 49). She adopts the Pinkerton Code of Conduct (Integrity, Vigilance, and Excellence)¹⁴¹ and also picks up the mannerism and "the lingo like she's one of the boys" (F, 52). Regardless of her attempts to fit in among the Pinkerton agents, her gender inevitably sets her apart from them. This indicates that women in the nineteenth century were "excluded from the process of knowing"¹⁴² solely on the basis of their gender which prevented them from comprehending the world around them on the same intellectual level as men. This interpretation establishes "the male as the epitome of the knower, the female as the epitome of that which is known."¹⁴³

The concept of the performativity of gender that Judith Butler proposed in *Gender Trouble* (1990) is certainly at play in *The Clockwork Century*. Although Butler was not proposing her theories on gender in relation to science fiction, they are more or less applicable to any genre that deals with human interaction and consequently with gender roles. Maria, and

¹⁴⁰ "Pinkerton Consulting & Investigations, Inc. d.b.a. Pinkerton Corporate Risk Management." *Pinkerton Website*. <<https://www.pinkerton.com/>>. Accessed January 15, 2017.

¹⁴¹ "1) Accept no bribes, Never compromise with criminals, 2) Partner with local law enforcement agencies, 3) Refuse divorce cases or cases that initiate scandals, 4) Turn down reward money, 5) Never raise fees without the client's pre-knowledge, and 6) Keep clients apprised on an on-going basis." Pinkerton Consulting & Investigations.

¹⁴² Barr, *Future Females* 43.

¹⁴³ Barr, *Future Females* 43.

to a lesser extent Belle and Mercy too, take an active role in the narrative that in the masculine/feminine binary appear to be more suited for a male protagonist. However, steampunk views the past through twenty-first-century lenses and thus the heroines are enabled to take command of both their own bodies and the narrative as well. It is thus fitting that the author wrote Maria as an ex-spy/Pinkerton agent, i.e. a threat to the Western patriarchal culture. In other words, the heroine literally “performs her gender,”¹⁴⁴ using the ever-present male gaze to ensure her success. It is in her that Priest indirectly criticizes the limitation enforced by having to conform to particular gender roles.

Like Maria, the Scottish leader of the Pinkerton Agency is also based on a real historical figure. Priest remains true to the accounts of Pinkertons’ history, for example, the hiring of a first female detective in 1856 or the hiring of a first African-American intelligence agent in 1865.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Allan Pinkerton is a memorable character and his interaction with Maria showcases some of the prejudices that women faced at the time. Contrary to contemporary gender attitudes, he does not see nor treat her as a vulnerable woman. To Mr. Pinkerton, she is a valuable asset with a specific set of skill he can use to his own benefit. In fact, he is aware of how she uses her feminine attributes to manipulate others, men in particular: “I hope you didn’t think I was asking you to sit still and look pretty” (C, 32). He respects her abilities as a spy although he does wonder from time to time where her true loyalties lie. She certainly agrees with his assessment of her and sums up her personality, her actions, her motivations, and her life thusly:

Mr. Pinkerton, over the last twenty-five years I’ve risked my life to pass information across battlefields. I’ve broken things, stolen things, and been to prison more times than I’ve been married. I’ve shot and killed six men,

¹⁴⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 136.

¹⁴⁵ Pinkerton Consulting & Investigations.

and only three of those events could lawfully be called self-defense. I've been asked to do a great number of unsavory, dangerous, morally indefensible things in my time, and I've done them all without complaint because I do what needs to be done, whenever it needs to be done. But there's one thing I've never been asked to do, and it's just as well because I'd be guaranteed to fail. [...] I've never been asked to sit still and look pretty. (C, 32)

Maria is indeed an interesting combination of 'feminine' and 'masculine' traits. It is thus not only her gender but also her adaptability and a broad set of skills that set her apart from the other Pinkerton agents. Her portrayal certainly falls in line with Butler's claim that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."¹⁴⁶ She may have been born a woman and forced into the female category but it was her choices that led to her breaking the limitations placed on both genders based on the nineteenth-century ideas of biological determinism. And although Maria's performance is in no way meant as a parody, whether humorous or tragic, it is nonetheless a way to criticize the traditional male/female dualism that enforces gender stereotypes.

5.3. The Clementine Assignment, the Slavery Debate

The first assignment Maria is sent on is to ensure that a dirigible airship, the titular Clementine, reaches Louisville, Kentucky safely by any means necessary and without delay. However, Pinkerton's information about the mission turns out to be false. Suddenly, Maria is faced with a male adversary in the form of a pirate Captain Croggon Beauregard Hainey, a former runaway slave and a smuggler first introduced in *Boneshaker*. Their narratives remain separate in the first chapters, alternating between Maria and Hainey. After they both reach the

¹⁴⁶ Butler 33.

Clementine and discover that their goals coincide, they join forces for the sake of practicality. With Maria's knowledge of where the stolen airship is headed and Hainey's information about the dangerous cargo, they decide to stop the Union's plan to create a weapon of mass destruction.

This unique alliance between a white Southern woman and an ex-slave allows Priest to explore the socio-political aspects of the Civil War conflict. The flamboyant Captain Hainey is an interesting character especially when contrasted to Maria; both are very un-traditional protagonists defying their social status as a colored man and a female spy. To Hainey, Maria represents Southern anti-abolitionist views, and also a law-figure which immediately marks her as the pirate's enemy. However, their goals align and they are forced to work together towards a common goal, i.e. protecting their country. Eventually, they both re-evaluate their opinions of each other and towards the end of their partnership become equals.

As in *Dreadnought*, in *Clementine* Priest confronts the situation of African-Americans in a roundabout way rather than directly discussing it. The author makes her characters focus on the task at hand, i.e. the retrieval of the stolen airship and later stopping the attack on a group of civilians. At the beginning, the pirate Captain verbally attacks Maria due to his anger issues at being imprisoned for twenty years under a false accusation involving a white Southern woman. Moreover, he uses the word 'woman' as an insult. "Woman! Don't you antagonize me! Can't you see we're busy?" (C, 122). However, the task-driven heroine shows a high-level of self-control and pragmatism when she does not treat Hainey as her inferior but instead as her equal. In fact, the two earn each other's trust despite their different beliefs and life experiences, and at the end of the novel, Hainey refers to Maria as 'Belle Boyd' as a sign of respect.

5.4. The Heroine and the Villainess

The failed spy idea is certainly an engaging way of transforming a female character into a heroine of necessity. In the end, it is Maria who puts all the clues together and prevents the death of American citizens on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. In this sense, Maria is very similar to Briar and Mercy as she too did not plan on becoming a savior figure fighting for the future of America. Unlike *Boneshaker* or *Dreadnought*, where the danger was rather generic (the Civil War and the Blight), *Fiddlehead* has a very concrete enemy – a female villain no less. The introduction of a villainess figure is indeed an inspired move on Priest's part, the similarities and the differences between Maria Boyd and Katharine Haymes are especially engaging because they enable Priest to contrast the two women in an interesting way. The heroine shares many of the villainess' ruthless qualities and employs similar tactics to achieve her goals. Also, both Maria and Haymes are aware of how the society sees and treats women and use it to manipulate men. However, their personal goals are in opposition to one another because, unlike the Haymes, the ex-spy envisions a peaceful future. It is thus Maria's compassion and empathy that marks her as a heroic character and distinguishes her from the villainess.

Barr states that in order to overcome narratives in which the male hero generally triumphs over the male villain, feminist fabulators must “retell and rewrite” these “patriarchal stories.”¹⁴⁷ In the last pages of *Fiddlehead*, Priest does exactly that when she stresses the importance of female agency and “attempts to threaten the stability of patriarchal structures, the order of the world”¹⁴⁸ by moving away from the classical hero/heroine towards the modern anti-hero/anti-heroine. The development of the hero figure has been changing over time and nowadays leans more towards the ‘grey’ area in which committing a crime can be

¹⁴⁷ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 15.

¹⁴⁸ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 15.

viewed as acceptable if it is done for ‘the greater good’, an abstract concept that is just as vague as it is controversial. Moreover, unlike the traditional hero that has dominated science fiction in the past, Priest’s heroine is not presented as purely ‘good’. Instead, Maria’s heroism is defined by her motivations and her aims, not solely by her actions. In fact, the ex-spy is consistently portrayed as a morally ambiguous protagonist who is willing to commit a crime in order to defend her fellow Americans. This takes *Fiddlehead’s* heroine well outside the traditional view of heroism into the anti-hero territory.

The author further challenges patriarchal modes of engagement between the hero and the villain by posing Maria as the victorious heroine who defeats the unscrupulous villainess. Moreover, by rejecting the black and white view of heroism, Priest takes the subversion of patriarchal modes a step further. Her heroines are able to subvert not only gender stereotypes but also the unrealistic expectations placed on the hero figure, both male and female. This is perhaps most obvious when Maria effectively becomes the judge and the executioner when she decides to kill Haymes instead of taking her prisoner so that she could be publicly tried by male authorities. It is precisely at this moment when she chooses not to “heroically reject the power to impose one’s will upon another”¹⁴⁹ that she irrevocably alters her heroine status and becomes an anti-heroine instead. In fact, by having the protagonist kill the antagonist, Priest marks Maria as an outcast once again because the ex-spy is now compromised due to her “utilizing the methods and tools of the enemy,”¹⁵⁰ i.e. essentially commit a murder.

However, Priest does not portray the Pinkerton agent and ex-spy in a negative light because of her crime. Given the dystopian setting, it appears that Haymes’ elimination was the only way to ensure peace in a country run by corrupt politicians. The protagonist has been at the mercy of both sides of the war and thus knows that neither is to be trusted. In this sense,

¹⁴⁹ Mike Alsford, *Heroes and Villains* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006) 121.

¹⁵⁰ Alsford 121.

the anti-heroine is viewed in a positive light despite having to take drastic measures to ensure the safety of her country. She is a very complex character who, when faced with a life-threatening scenario, does not always choose to ‘do the right thing.’ Maria often employs underhanded tactics and even commits crimes in order to protect her interests instead of relentlessly working for an unspecified ‘greater good’ or even sacrificing herself to save others. This is in accordance with Barr’s criticism of the stereotypical view that “under patriarchy, women conform to the signs (or codes) of femininity.”¹⁵¹ Priest goes against this by enabling Maria to become the judge, the jury, and the executioner when faced with a threat of human extinction.

¹⁵¹ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 9.

6. Katharine Haymes: The Puppet Mistress of *The Clockwork Century*

In the figure of Katharine Haymes, Priest introduces a villainess who has the potential to destroy the country solely for her personal benefit instead of portraying yet another heroic figure. Moreover, unlike Briar, Mercy and Maria, she does not merely react to what happens around her and to her, but is pro-active and strives to change the world to fit her image. This is in accordance with Alsford's definition of the villain/villainess aspirations to 'conquer' the world: "The imposition of a single worldview or value system sourced from the mind of an autonomous individual free from the checks and balances of social or communal engagement is a dangerous thing indeed."¹⁵² Not only does Haymes break gender conventions by seizing control of the weapons industry, she also enters politics and through blackmail, intimidation, and assassinations, exercises her power over the world of men. The villainess is a schemer, one that has an elaborate plan to seize control of the United States of America. Haymes is the alien 'other' who inspires fear due to the economic and political power she wields so expertly. In fact, she turns out to be the 'evil mastermind' of *The Clockwork Century*, the vehicle behind the spread of the disease decimating the South and the North alike.

It is thus through Katherine Haymes that Priest breaks the nineteenth-century gender stereotype of women as nurturers when she portrays Haymes as an inherently immoral person. This approach fits well with Barr's insistence on creating feminist science fiction in which women are no longer portrayed "as insignificant helpmates or sex objects."¹⁵³ In this way, Priest provides an imaginative space where women are not defined simply by their 'feminine' or 'masculine' attributes. In fact, the men are unable to defeat her as they fail to comprehend her as a threat and consequently fall to their own preconceptions of women. Indeed, Haymes' unique position within the context of *The Clockwork Century* confirms Barr's claim that

¹⁵² Alsford 121.

¹⁵³ Barr, *Future Females* 2.

science fiction “offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way.”¹⁵⁴

In general terms, “the villain would appear to lack empathy, the ability to feel for others, to see themselves as part of a larger whole. The villain uses the world and the people in it from a distance, as a pure resource.”¹⁵⁵ Haymes’ motivation appears to be quite simple, as the sole owner of one of the largest manufactures in the South, her goal is to extend the war for her own profit. To that end, she commits treason also crimes against humanity, such as selling weapons to both sides or testing “chemical weapons on Union prisoners of war. As far as the North is concerned, she’s a war criminal” (F, 37). Priest consistently portrays her as a businesswoman without conscience who is powerful enough to sway the tide of war and turn patriarchal America into a dystopian wasteland. “The desire to recreate the world in one’s own image is a powerful motif in the characteristic of the villain”¹⁵⁶ and Haymes is an example of that desire.

6.1. Haymes as President Ulysses S. Grant’s Nemesis

The main female antagonist is extremely well-developed despite being described mostly through other character’s points of view. The one who interacts with her the most is President Grant, who has a very traditional view on women’s roles in the public sphere (or rather the lack thereof). In *The Clockwork Century*, Grant is depicted as a more or less functioning alcoholic, a former general more suited for the battlefield rather than the White House. To him, Haymes is an abomination of the feminine ideal but he is unable to adjust his thinking to understand her and subsequently to anticipate her political moves. Due to this, she

¹⁵⁴ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 10.

¹⁵⁵ Alsford 121.

¹⁵⁶ Alsford 97.

easily bypasses him when she manages to push through her “program to end the war” (F, 82) by bribing government officials including the Secretary of State. However, the true purpose of her plan is to prolong the war which would translate into more profit for her company.

A private contractor taking control of the public sector, a woman no less, thus forces the men to question themselves and their ‘masculinity’ as well as her ‘femininity’. Despite her lady-like demeanor, the President instinctively senses that she is dangerous but he is at first unsure as to why or how. He immediately distrusts her; in fact, his dislike appears to be almost physical: “He tried not to meet this woman’s gaze; those chilly green eyes unsettled him [...] unearthly eyes [...] Reptilian sprang to mind” (F, 80). He is not the only man to recognize her for the villainous figure she is: “The Rebs may not have held you accountable, but you may rest assured that Washington will. [...] She’s a war criminal” (F, 84). Nevertheless, while there are senators in the District that would see her prosecuted for her crimes, she manages to avoid imprisonment. In fact, she negotiates with the Secretary of State: “a formal, legal agreement which has been signed off” (F, 85) by the Supreme Court. An agreement that Grant was completely unaware of as the President was deliberately kept ignorant of it by his own people.

Upon questioning Haymes in regards to her war crimes, she manipulates the truth and places the blame on the Confederacy: “They were the ones who decided to use prisoners, not me” (F, 88). She tries to convince Grant that she was a scapegoat because the South needed “someone to blame for the breach in wartime protocol” (F, 88) and since it was her company that designed the weapon, Haymes was an easy target. Grant, however, is not so easily fooled: “She struck him as the kind of person who uses other people, not the reverse” (F, 88). And although he does consider the possibility that she might be telling the truth based on the fact that an ‘ordinary’ woman could indeed fall prey to powerful men, he resists her and sticks to his original negative assessment of her persona. To him, the villainess is a perverse image of

the ideal of femininity represented for example by his dotting wife. Sensing his distrust, the villainess plays the female card by seeking Grant's protection and requesting formal amnesty:

As you must know, it can be difficult for an unmarried woman to survive in this world, in this war. While my father was alive, I could rely on him — never my mother, who passed away when I was a child. So you see? I've been alone, without guidance or protection for all of my life. (F, 88)

Clearly, Haymes uses nineteenth-century gender expectations to her advantage by presenting herself as a respectable lady: "She was sitting decorously with a fancy beaded bag in her lap and her legs crossed at the ankle, offering a peek at a pair of boots that might've cost more than a horse" (F, 82). Moreover, she claims to have no affiliation to either the South or the North and attempts to prove it by defining herself as "Southern, yes. Confederate, no" (F, 83). Moreover, she pretends to have only the best interest of the American people in mind, which is why she is offering her weapons to Washington: "I am here to offer you the keys to victory" (F, 83). Grant remains unconvinced by her speech and seemingly unthreatening attitude: "Miss Haymes—do explain why a Confederate woman of means has such an interest in seeing her nation defeated" (F, 83). Her response is to paint herself as a victim and a heroine at the same time: "I am a patriot, Mr. President, but I have fought for my own survival long enough. It is time for me to fight my country: the United States of America" (F, 89). However, the President sees through her façade. After all, how could he trust a Southern woman who tested chemical weapons on prisoners of war?

His suspicions are proven correct when she begins negotiating for her future using the very same weapon that turned the Union against her as a bargaining chip. When her sociopathic nature shows, she fails to conceal her true feeling regarding the suffering she caused thousands of people. To her, soldiers and civilians are nothing but collateral damage of

no importance, a means to an end. Her argument for the use of the Blight is that it might end the Civil War:

Terrible things are necessary sometimes. One might argue that any means to the end of hostilities might call itself a virtue, no matter how frightful the initial cost. If we kill a few thousand people in the South and they tremble before the Union's military might. (F, 90)

Grant is horrified by her blasé attitude and the destructive power of the weapon terrifies him. Haymes, on the other hand, is flattered by his reaction: “You give me credit for having created something terrible, and I thank you” (F, 89). This is an obvious contradiction to her claims of having nothing to do with the testing and the President sees it for what it is. Being a man of manner, he does not resort to violence no matter how much he might wish to do so: “He wanted to punch her—a desire which shamed him even as the thought of it delighted him. The prospect of running a fist into her smug, pretty face. [...] A lying face (F, 89). Nevertheless, Grant realizes that he is utterly powerless against her scheming, and he turns to Lincoln and his trusted acquaintances for help: “There was nothing else he could say. He could either play along and pretend he was running the show or he could fight and lose” (F, 91).

6.2. Warmongering Businesswoman

Haymes, as an owner and CEO of a weapon building company, represents a more negative side of female empowerment. While Briar, Mercy and Maria have indeed managed to venture into spheres previously denied to women, Haymes went a step further when she took over her father's company and became a businesswoman who manipulates and dominates the world of politics and economy and is able to influence the country's future. In

Fiddlehead, Abraham Lincoln offers a fitting analysis of her character and also of how she managed to become so successful despite her gender:

She is the ‘sons’ in Haymes and Sons. Whether it’s a joke or a matter of practicality in a world of businessmen, I have no idea; but it was her father’s company, and when he passed away, when there were no actual sons to take the reins, she assumed control. Under her command, it’s become a million-dollar weapons factory. (F, 37)

Interestingly, this is the only information the reader has of Haymes’ past as Priest does not focus on how she became a villain in the way she did with the heroines’ journey to self-discovery.

Haymes’ active approach to attain her goals includes not only financing war efforts on both sides of the conflict but taking personal risks in order to influence certain people and events. For example, when Captain Sally attempts to share her knowledge of the Blight disease with the public, Haymes ensures that the Chief of the Robertson Hospital is discredited. One of Lincoln’s loyal men witnesses “Sally Tompkins say her piece, and then [...] get dragged off the congressional floor [...] I’m almost certain that Katharine Haymes was the one who orchestrated it” (F, 38). In fact, he saw the villainess leaving the congressional hall shortly before the event: “This woman took her leave exactly as she’d arrived: in silence and darkness, with a widow’s veil to hide the smile that spread coldly across her face” (F, 8).

The connection between Haymes and Minnericht, the male antagonist of *Boneshaker*, is also noteworthy as they resemble one another in several aspects. Both the villain and the villainess are unscrupulous, power-hungry, monstrous criminals who pose a serious threat to the United States. Whereas Minnericht appears to be satisfied by taking control over Seattle and the surrounding areas, Haymes is portrayed as a much more ambitious person intent on

taking control of the American economy. Moreover, both are directly responsible for the harvesting of the poisonous gas, distillation of the yellow sap and the subsequent distribution of the Blight drug. They also have no qualms about murdering or outright torturing people to ensure their product is effective. For example, in the first stages of processing the Blight, Minnericht used Chinese workers as the test subjects. Similarly, Haymes turned the Andersonville camp into her personal laboratory and many imprisoned soldiers died during the development of her chemical weapons. Similarly to *Boneshaker's* villain, Haymes too fails because she continuously underestimates other women.

6.3. Failed Woman, 'Masculine' Attributes

The villainess, unlike Mercy or Maria, is not harassed for being an unmarried female nor is she judged for not adhering to the virtues of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity”¹⁵⁷ the way a nineteenth-century woman was expected to. Despite not having a family of her own and thus failing to fulfill her primary role as a wife and a mother she is not marked by others as a failed woman. In fact, it is precisely Haymes' lack of maternal duties that enables her to pursue her own interests. In *The Gendered Society*, Kimmel states that “one of the key determinants of women's status has been the division of labor around child care. Women's role in reproduction has historically limited their social and economic participation.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, instead of finding purpose in housewifery, Haymes takes over her father's company, which provides her with financial stability and a unique opportunity for a woman to enforce changes in the patriarchal society. Due to this, she naturally commands respect in others by exercising her socio-economic power over men.

¹⁵⁷ Welter 152

¹⁵⁸ Kimmel 66.

Haymes successfully balances feminine and masculine traits in a way that enables her to use societal expectations to her advantage. In fact, as has been pointed out already, there are many similarities between Maria, the heroine who defeats Haymes, and the villainess herself. Firstly, they are both single women independent on men. Secondly, they both have changed sides in the war but retain most of their Southern beliefs and attitudes towards gender expectations and racism. And thirdly, both are distrusted and seen as traitors by both the South and the North. Haymes especially is hated for the war crimes she committed in Andersonville but once again pays for her freedom:

She's become an unpleasant secret. No one brought any charges against her for the incident with the war prisoners, which was ridiculous, and everyone knows it. It looked like all she got was a slap on the wrist and a scolding, but she was also asked to keep her head down. The CSA wants her money, but they want it quietly. (F, 38)

Unlike Briar or Mercy, Haymes relies only on herself. There are no other women who would offer support and comfort to her, nor men who might provide assistance or serve as a romantic interest. Haymes social contact is limited to her employees and to people whom she either sees as enemies or inferior to her or both. She is completely alone in her quest to control the world. In this respect, she shares many characteristics with Minnericht. Both of them were in a position of power, emotionally detached from other people and interested only in reaching their goals through any means necessary. In contrast, Minnericht's greatest weakness is his ego and a definite lack of intellectual capacity to become an 'evil mastermind', whereas Haymes is much more dangerous because she is capable of multitasking and forming contingency plans for practically any situation. The reason she is defeated is that she too falls prey to gender stereotyping and her own arrogance when she fails to see Maria as a serious threat.

6.4. The Monstrous Female

In *Feminist Fabulation*, Barr states that “feminist fabulators confront the blank pages of female potential, find patriarchal reality too constricting, and create fantastic tales about women’s worlds.”¹⁵⁹ While she intended this as a way of approaching feminist space-oriented fiction, it also applies to steampunk fiction. It is not only the heroine who engages the patriarchal world but her enemy as well. In fact, the female protagonist, and likewise the female antagonist, can “transform their identities, their spaces, and their cultural symbols. They accomplish their objectives after forming new ‘monstrous’ wholes from incongruous parts.”¹⁶⁰ In the case of Katherine Haymes, monstrous is certainly a fitting description that defines both her ‘otherness’ and her ‘evil presence’. Similarly to the brave and heroic women or, as Barr aptly defines them, “the creators of life who do not trouble themselves about the key to the universe,” the villainess too “can build a woman’s world by turning away from man’s world and toward their own embrace with the cosmos.”¹⁶¹ However, instead of presenting a utopian vision of a female world, Priest offers a dystopian one, working with the same principles.

It is in the final pages of *Fiddlehead* that Priest truly becomes a ‘feminist fabulator’ when she not only enables her female characters to create a space where they can be themselves but also gives them the power to destroy the world of men. At the same time, the author abstains from doing exactly that because building a new matriarchal world from the ruins of the old patriarchal one would only defeat the purpose of social change. The process of change towards gender equality that she introduced already in the first installment of *The Clockwork Century* is, after all, key to the women’s journey to self-empowerment. Haymes has a chance to conquer America using tools generally inaccessible to women at the time -

¹⁵⁹ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 29.

¹⁶⁰ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 28.

¹⁶¹ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 26.

money and politics. The reason she fails is not due to her gender but because she does not expect other women to adopt similar tactics and/or exhibit both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ traits. Haymes does not consider Maria and/or other female characters as a threat to her position because she continues to view the world as a gendered space despite Haymes herself being a clear contradiction to the stereotype of the Southern Belle.

Welter wrote that in the nineteenth century “the death of a beautiful woman [...] represented woman as the innocent victim, suffering without sin, too pure and good for this world but too weak and passive to resist its evil forces.”¹⁶² In *The Clockwork Century*, women are many things but certainly not weak and passive. Haymes in particular, is indeed a deceptively beautiful woman, one who represents the ‘evil force’ condemning innocent people to death without any remorse whatsoever. It can be argued that when a woman becomes a monster feared by the most powerful men in the country, it is seen as something unnatural when viewed through gendered lenses of the nineteenth-century America. Despite her gender being traditionally linked to notions of nurture, the villainess lacks empathy and instead seeks to fulfill only her own selfish desires. In the end, Haymes becomes a monster far too powerful and complex for any man to comprehend so that only another female can slay her.

This chapter showed that *The Clockwork Century* is indeed unique in its portrayal of female protagonists and/or antagonists as middle-aged women thriving in a dystopian vision of nineteenth-century America as most of mainstream steampunk operates within the patriarchal context. Thus, instead of a male hero who would triumph in the end, it is the women who are transformed from what Barr refers to as “insignificant helpmates or sex objects”¹⁶³ into central characters. The intersection between heroism and anti-heroism was

¹⁶² Welter 162.

¹⁶³ Marleene S. Barr, ed., *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981) 2.

considered in greater detail. Emphasis was put on the role of the connection between economy and politics and the resulting corruption. The villainess was thus set against the men in terms of skill both in the business arena as well as the political one. The question of morality and what could be termed as necessary evil was also discussed. For that purpose, the characters of Maria Boyd and Katherine Haymes were contrasted with one another in terms of the heroine-villainess opposition. The question of the female potential to become either a heroine or a monster was laid out in the last section.

7. Conclusion

The Clockwork Century is a fictional rewriting of the Civil War in which Cherie Priest explores how women might have had attained gender equality if given the chance. She both subverts and employs gender stereotypes through which she offers an imaginative view of the nineteenth-century American society. At the same time, she experiments with possible ways of women taking control of their own lives and becoming independent of male socio-economic support. In this respect, steampunk functions as a feminist space in which women can become both heroines and villainess regardless of their social standing, family background or particular set of skills. In chapters three, four, five and six, I have proven that *The Clockwork Century* is indeed a feminist steampunk fiction using nineteenth-century lenses to analyze the discriminatory attitudes prevalent during the Civil War era.

In *Feminist Fabulation*, Barr claims that feminist writing in speculative fiction is systematically dismissed as “genre fiction”¹⁶⁴ and consequently deemed irrelevant to the discussion of the connection between feminism and science fiction. She proposes a pro-active approach to the “re-defining of gendered space” through which writers could “reconceive narrative space” in order “to unmask the fictionality of patriarchy.”¹⁶⁵ While Barr relates her ideas to future-oriented science fiction, they can be applied to steampunk fiction as well. In fact, steampunk literature might provide perhaps the most rewarding space for feminist writing as it examines familiar societal issues within an alternative nineteenth-century context revealing a variety of possible outcomes. It is then due to a combination of familiarity and defamiliarization that the readers are able to identify themselves with the characters’ plight and the constant struggle to find their place in a male-dominated world. Cherie Priest contributes

¹⁶⁴ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* xiii.

¹⁶⁵ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 8.

to this effect by employing focalization through which she provides different viewpoints of the same events.

Although the objective of thesis was to discuss the significance of female presence in the selected novels of *The Clockwork Century* series, the argument was limited to emphasizing the female protagonists' ability to become history makers by re-constructing their gender identity and renegotiating their position within the context of patriarchal America. By applying feminist and gender theories, the heroines of *Boneshaker*, *Dreadnought*, *Clementine*, *Ganymede*, and *Fiddlehead* were contrasted with one another and their unique identity traits were examined in terms of the nineteenth-century ideals of the 'Angel of the House' and the archetypal figure of the 'Southern Belle'. Following Barr's assertion that science fiction's potential to become a feminist narrative space ought not to be overlooked, this thesis conveyed some of the principal feminist attitudes towards the notion of gender and self-identification that can be found within Priest's fiction. In addition, since I have analyzed only the works of Cherie Priest, there is undoubtedly a possibility of further research in terms of exploring a wider range of authors and texts which might prove relevant to the ongoing discussion of the representation of women in the genre of steampunk.

In *The Clockwork Century*, Priest criticizes the social construct of gender in the context of the nineteenth-century America. Her heroines actively challenge the prevalent prejudices against women which were rooted in the classification of certain human attributes and behaviors as distinctly 'feminine' or 'masculine'. However, these attributes are not of equal value, which leads to the oppression of all women regardless of class or race. Priest's strategy is thus to deconstruct gender as an inherently unequal social institution which favors hegemonic social structures.¹⁶⁶ By stepping outside the 'feminine' and 'masculine' dimensions, the main female protagonists manage to partially destabilize the system of male

¹⁶⁶ Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 2-6.

dominance. In the last installment of *The Clockwork Century*, it is not the male characters who end the Civil War and divert the pandemic, but heroic women who consciously transcend their gender identities to defend their families and prevent the total destruction of their homeland.

Briar Wilkes, Mercy Lynch, and Maria Boyd defy nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood by following their own visions of what it means to be a woman. To this end, the protagonists adopt both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ attributes to become a whole person. Priest exposes the fluidity and ambiguity of the notion of gender, which is what allows for personal freedom and self-empowerment. Moreover, the author does not ignore the possibility of women becoming powerful and dangerous antagonists as is shown through the character of Katharine Haymes. It is not solely the heroine figure through whom Priest challenges “the constructed nature of patriarchal reality”¹⁶⁷ but also through the villainess who is certainly no “insignificant sex object.”¹⁶⁸

In *The Clockwork Century*, women are not limited by their gender to bear only nurturing and positive attributes but also to become destroyers of worlds if they so desire. In this respect, *The Clockwork Century* chronicles the women’s transformation into heroines, anti-heroines and even villains. The female protagonists’ skills, bravery, intelligence, indomitable spirit and strength of character enable them to put a stop to the ever-present death and destruction that was, ironically enough, supported and purported by a female antagonist.

Perhaps even more importantly, Priest appropriates previously masculine means of communication to spread information about Haymes’ role in releasing and distributing the drug distilled from the Blight along with detailed instruction on how to create the antidote. “The end of the conflict — the reunification of the United States of America. [...] The

¹⁶⁷ Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* xiv.

¹⁶⁸ Barr, *Future Females* 2.

battlefields had fallen silent, the casualties were buried, and everyone lived under the same flag once again” (F, 361-2). Hopefully, this thesis will contribute to the illumination of the female presence in the steampunk genre. After all, in the epilogue of *Fiddlehead*, the women’s triumphant voices carry the message of peace across the country:

In the ensuing weeks, we found others reaching out from across the Mason-Dixon-reaching across a barrier that had once seemed insurmountable.

The diminutive Confederate officer Sally Louisa Tompkins regained her standing and her credibility by force of will, and her voice amplified our message.

Maria Boyd’s voice did likewise, for although she belongs to neither North nor South, she speaks to both with equal authority. (F, 359)

In *The Clockwork Century*, Priest paints a dystopian vision of the Civil War era, one in which strong and independent women can thrive despite the gender-based restriction placed on them. Their survival is thus not a matter of circumstance but a conscious choice to fight for one’s own future. In this sense, steampunk offers an alternative space for gender equality. Priest goes a step further when she shows that women can not only become heroines pushing for progress but also villainesses without conscience. In this respect, Priest’s feminism is not limited to showing women only in a positive light but also as monstrous figures capable of great destruction. This is also why Haymes must be defeated at the end not because she is a woman but because she is a threat to the whole world. It is thus the complexity of gender performance and Western culture’s assumptions about gender roles that form the narrative tension in *The Clockwork Century* novels.

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Appendix A

The Civil War: A Brief History

“When the American patriots first asserted the revolutionary claim of equality in 1776, they did so in a world in which systems of slavery had become deeply entrenched and extraordinarily productive.”¹⁶⁹ In the rural areas of pre-Civil War America, slaves worked on farms, plantations of cotton and tobacco. The Southern agriculture-oriented economy was primarily based on the unpaid labor of enslaved blacks. This translated into white male slaveholders being in a position of power over everyone else in all areas of life across social classes. In comparison, the North was not dependent on slavery to maintain its economic stability as it could turn towards import for materials previously provided by the South. While slaves did indeed labor in manufactures and the construction industry, “the total number of African-Americans living in the North, liberated or enslaved, was only 4% of the total population.”¹⁷⁰ As a result, at the turn of the nineteenth century, slavery was mostly confined to the agrarian Southern states. In other words, “the northern colonies constituted ‘societies with slaves.’ In the South, by contrast, there were only ‘slave societies.’”¹⁷¹

In 1808 the American Congress banned the importation of slaves. Unfortunately, it failed to address the situation of those already living on American soil and the economic, political, cultural and social implications it would have on the Southern states. By the 1820s the abolitionist movement was making great strides towards the public acknowledgment of slavery as a social evil that must be eradicated. The Northerners were stout in their anti-slavery campaigns and the Southerners were similarly set in their pro-slavery ways seeing the North’s actions and beliefs as a direct threat to their way of life.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Lacy K. Ford, ed., *A Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 94.

¹⁷⁰ Ford 95.

¹⁷¹ Ford 95.

¹⁷² White 15.

Moreover, instead of developing its own mills, factories, and manufacturers to harness their natural resources, the South became dependent on the import of goods from Europe, mostly England and France. It was precisely this lack of business foresight that put the Southern states at an economic disadvantage when the industrial North managed to pass legislation that raised taxes on imported products. This legislation then put an even greater strain on North-South relations as a number of the Southern States, South Carolina in particular, disputed the validity of such taxation law claiming that federation legislature cannot be in violation of state laws. By the 1840s, the strain between the South and the North began to negatively affect the economic and political areas and subsequently caused an irreparable social rift.

The 1861 election of the 16th President of the United States proved to be crucial and Abraham Lincoln's victory had a bitter taste to it as South Carolina, followed by six other Southern states, voted to secede from the Union. The Southerners grew wary of the looming threat of a slave rebellion. Although Lincoln was pro-abolition, he also expressly stated that he did not intend to force abolitionist laws upon the South. While the president did not intend to abolish slavery overnight, the continuing denial to allow it to spread would have effectively weakened the slaveholders' hold on their territories. It could be argued that Lincoln's pragmatic approach would have led to a more gradual and less economically damaging way of doing away with slavery. Regardless, the South launched an anti-abolition and anti-Northern campaign. The animosity between the two factions grew exponentially, culminating in the conflict nowadays known as the American Civil War (1861-1865).

On April 15, 1861, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the Southern rebellion, a move that prompted Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina to vote in

favor of secession.¹⁷³ The Lincoln administration was unable to prevent this, which resulted in the Civil War conflict. Neither side of the Mason-Dixon line¹⁷⁴ expected the war to last that long and they were thus woefully unprepared in terms of manpower, weaponry and basic equipment. Having to rely on volunteers eventually proved to be the South's downfall as the North had a larger population and did not have the slaves to keep in line. "About 258,000 Southern men had died and many who survived were maimed for life [...] The largest financial shock to the South was the loss of its slave labor force."¹⁷⁵ In other words, the drawn-out war favored the North. "The South was economically devastated by the Civil War. [...] Its banks had failed, its currency was worthless, the transportation systems were unreliable, and many plantations and farms lay idle."¹⁷⁶ The North may have won the war, but there were no victors as the ideological struggle over the slavery issue continued to burden the country for decades to come.

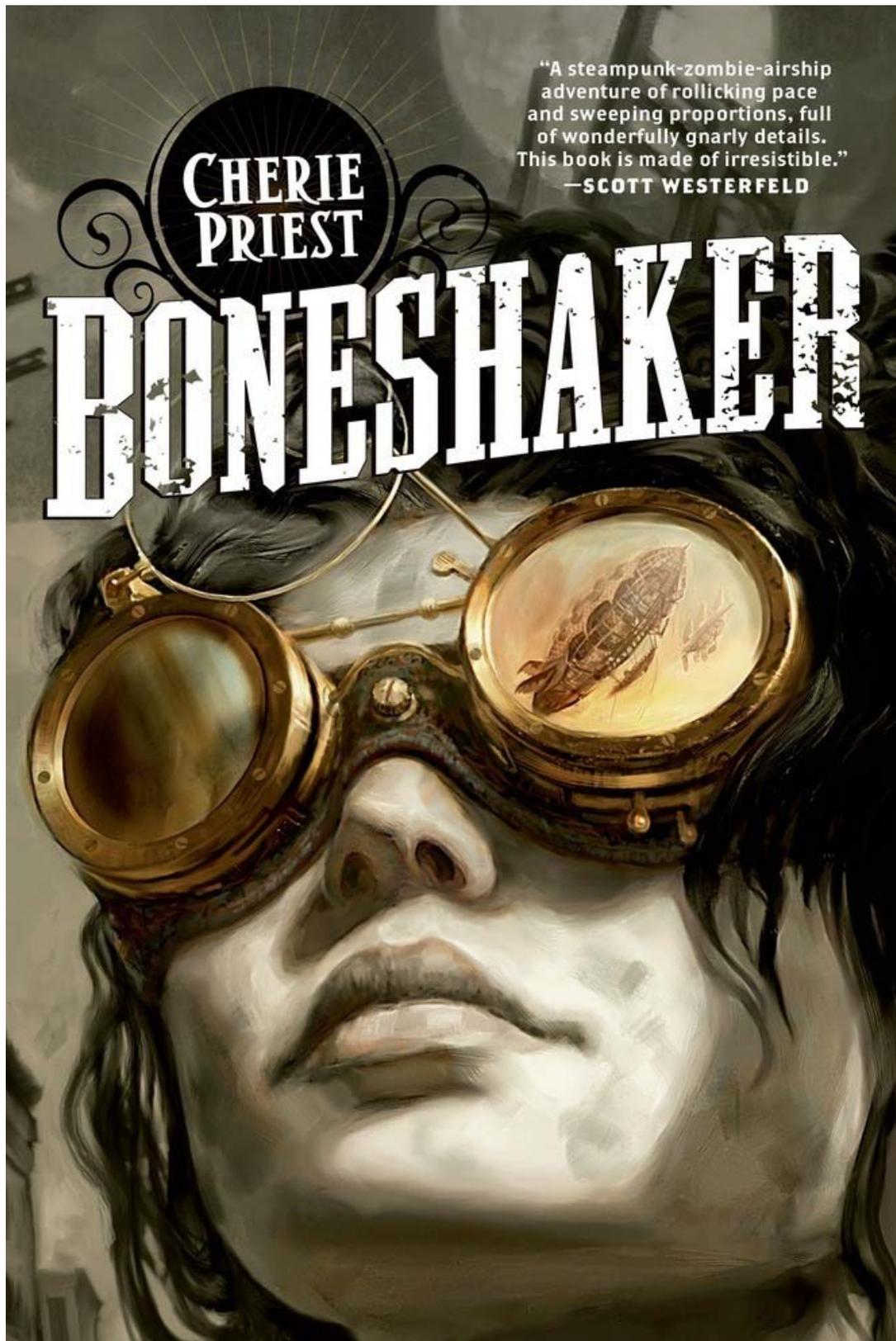
¹⁷³ White 31.

¹⁷⁴ Mason-Dixon line, i.e. the border between the states of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

¹⁷⁵ Benson, and Stock 155.

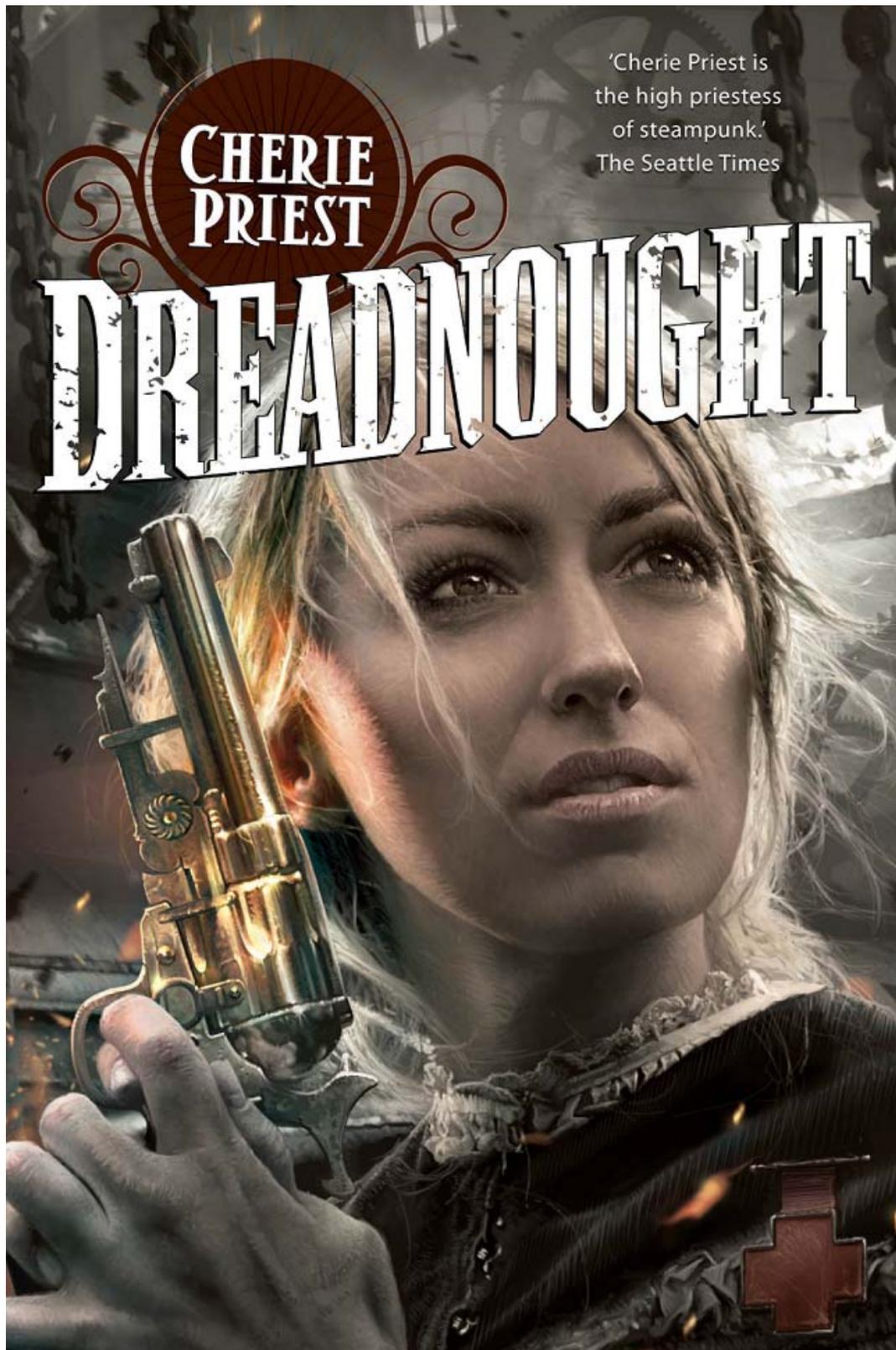
¹⁷⁶ Benson, and Stock 155.

Appendix B



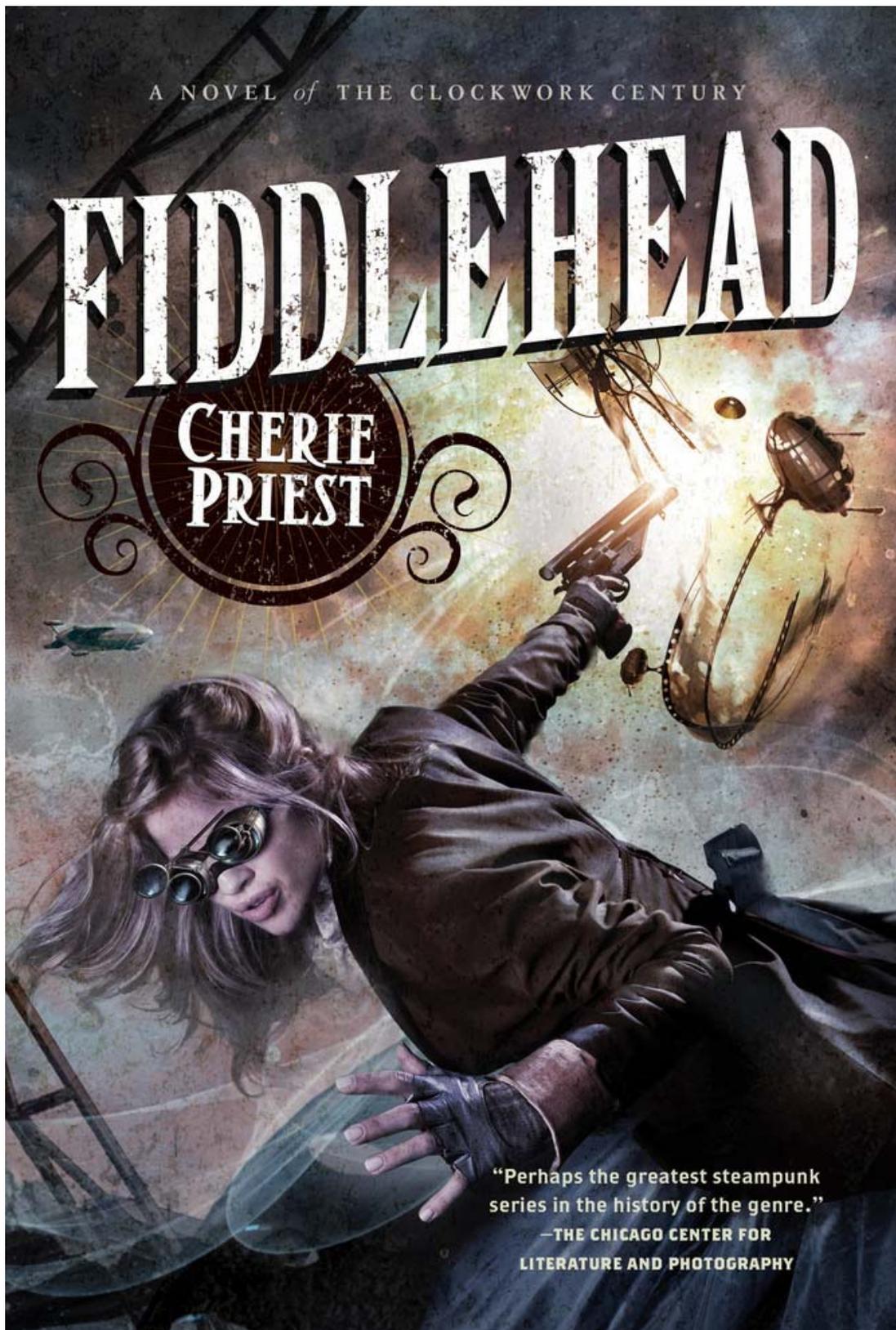
Book cover: *Boneshaker*, Character shown: Briar Wilkes
Photo courtesy of Tor Books (color figure available online at <<http://www.tor.com>>)

Appendix C



Book cover: *Dreadnought*, Character shown: Venita Mercy Lynch
Photo courtesy of Tor Books (color figure available online at <<http://www.tor.com>>)

Appendix D



Book cover: *Fiddlehead*, Character shown: Maria Isabella Boyd
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