

Immortality and Mortality: A Comparative Study of Ageing in Fae and Humans in *A Court of Thorns and Roses*

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Abstract

Ageing is a universal process affecting all living organisms, including humans, animals, and plants. In fantasy literature, immortality frequently shapes character development and narrative arcs. Immortality remains a perfect myth in the real world. Fantasy authors craft immortal characters such as gods, vampires, elves, faeries, and other supernatural beings to make the audience understand the contrast between human mortality and creative invention. This paper examines the divergent timeline of mortals and immortals in Sarah J Maas' *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. By analysing the human and Fae characters, the study investigates the impact on

each group across multiple dimensions. Physical, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions are the different dimensions of ageing.

Keywords: Ageing, Myth, Mortality, Immortality, Humans, Fae

Ageing is a universal biological phenomenon that affects all living beings from the day of birth till death and beyond. The developmental stages of human beings are measured in gestational months initially, and the progression continues throughout the entire lifespan. In Fantasy literature, authors function as the creators of imaginary characters into existence. Writers often create unfulfilled desires of subconscious visions into complex characters. Powerful characters like Tamlin, Ryshand, and Lucien are created by Sarah J Maas from her imagination. Maas herself acknowledged that the genesis of the narrative lay in the dream. Featuring Feyre Archeon and Andras in the woods, from which she slowly developed a fictional universe occupied by both mortal and immortal characters. She constructs the ideas of the Beauty and the Beast and creates two completely distinct worlds. One is the human world where Feyre and her family live, and the other is the immortal world, which has been hidden from the mortals with the help of an invisible wall.

“I have risked much in coming so far into the forest but we’d finished our last loaf of bread yesterday, and the remainder of our dried meat the day before. Still, I would have rather spent another night with a hungry belly than found myself satisfying the appetite of a wolf. Or a faerie.”(Maas 2)

These lines highlight the importance of food and survival for mortal humans and their fear of immortal predators. The faeries in the narrative are immortal human-like creatures who are fundamentally different from humans. Aging does not affect them. They possess innate magical powers and exist beyond the limitations of time and morality. They have a magical effect even on the weather. Maas separates these two worlds with a powerful treaty signed by the ancestors with the faeries and an invisible wall.

In *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, Maas' mortal world is governed by ageing as a linear and inevitable process. Through her characterization, Maas shows how ordinary human beings in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* experience physical growth, emotional development, and a constant awareness of death. Feyre's life in the cottage and her role as a huntress are clear examples of these experiences.

"We'd likely go to whatever rift in the wall he's used to get here, to steal me. And once we went through the invisible wall, once we were in Prythian, there was no way for my family to ever find me. I'd be little more than a lamb in the kingdom of wolves. Wolves—wolf." (Maas 43)

After Andras' death, Feyre was forcefully taken to Prythian by Tamlin. Prythian is the place where these immortal beings live. Feyre was taken hostage by Tamlin to fulfill the terms of the Treaty signed between mortals and the faeries. Tamlin permits Feyre to live the rest of her mortal life within the immortal landscape of Prythian. This makes Feyre the only human living in an immortal world, uniquely conscious of her own ageing and mortality. The Suriel is another immortal creature living in Prythian who has lived for decades and has extensive knowledge of the treaty between the mortals and immortals.

"The next day the blood of the faeries has been cleaned up by the time I ate, washed and dressed. I'd taken my time in the morning, and it was nearly noon as I stood atop the staircase, peering down at the entry hall below. Just to make sure it was gone." (Maas 155)

Although the faeries in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* are immortal beings, they fear death. Ageing does not affect them, but the high Fae does. All faeries of *A Court of Thorns and Roses* are immortal, but they feel pain and fear death because they can be killed by anyone. In the beginning of *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, Feyre killed Andras and proved that even though magic protects a Fae from natural death, they can be taken down by an ash arrow if unnoticed.

Throughout the novel, Maas uses Feyre Archeron's character to further explore the vulnerability of Feyre's kills. Feyre kills the Naga and the blind Worm under the mountain where Amarantha rules.

As a mortal, Feyre has a burning desire in her. She is mentally strong and ready to endure any hardship to keep her family safe and away from the immortals. Human relationships in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* are shaped by sacrifice, love, and care. In contrast, the Fae are immortal beings. Their time is not limited, they fear their enemies, and not age. Characters like Tamlin, Rhysand, and the Suriel are more than a century old. They can be the witnesses of the historic events that occurred in those centuries.

In *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, immortality is not fully a blessing. Immortality comes with a price. Immortality gives eternal life; it also gives emotional weakness and psychological burden. Humans are mortals, and they are forced to move on from any grief, trauma or happiness because they have limited time. Immortality gives a youthful appearance; it also keeps the weight of memories in them.

Immortality not only gives unlimited time, it also gives eternal youthfulness. Unlimited time without youthfulness is used less. Immortality without youthfulness is a curse to mankind. Tithonus, a poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, comes under Greek mythology. In this myth, an immortal goddess falls in love with a mortal man.

“ I ask'd thee, 'Give me immortality.’

Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,

Like wealthy men, who care not how they give.

But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,

And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,

And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd

To dwell in presence of immortal youth,

Immortal age beside immortal youth,

And all I was, in ashes. Can thy love,...”(Tennyson 15-24)

In the poem, Tithonus is granted immortality by the Greek god Zeus. Goddess Aurora loved Tithonus and asked Zeus to grant him immortality. Zeus, to fulfil the wish of the goddesses to bless Tithonus with limitless life, granted immortality to Tithonus. As a result, Tithonus lives forever but continues to age biologically. The blessing of immortality thus becomes a curse. He endures an endless life of physical decay without the relief of death. Tithonus is a proof of the necessity of natural ageing, and death plays a merciful conclusion to mortal life.

Feyre and Tithonus are likely the same; Feyre was the only human living in the immortal world with mortality, human instinct, and ageing; Tithonus was the only human turned into an immortal. Proper ageing as a human and immortality as a blessing turn Tithonus to long for death. Here, immortality is useless without youthfulness. Feyre's transformation from a mortal to an immortal is the core theme of this study. Feyre was once a human with the willpower to survive. She lived with her family. But her faith changed after killing a wolf faerie in the forest. After killing the wolf faerie, the wolf's companion imprisoned her and took her to the cursed immortal land. There she fell in love with a high lord named Tamlin. Feyre freed those lands from the curse, and as a reward, she has been granted immortality and magic from all seven high lords.

By turning into an immortal Feyre's ageing paused, she must practice a lifestyle different from ordinary human beings. As an immortal from the mortal world, Feyre must be ready to accept the loss of her loved ones. Magic made her strong, but the stronger she is, the harder the responsibility she should take.

“Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child;

the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.”(New International version, Isa 65.20)

In the book of Isaiah, chapter sixty-five, verse twenty, a future state of humans is described in which people will live extraordinarily long lives. This verse suggests that a person who died at his hundred will still be considered a youth. This verse provides a commitment to mankind about eternal youthfulness till death. In *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, immortality and youthfulness for a human are essential for survival. In real life, youthfulness can be a key, and immortality can sometimes turn into a curse for mankind. This verse suggests a vision of eternal youthfulness until death. Youthfulness can be a greater blessing, while immortality without youth, as in the case of Tithonus, is a curse in Feyre’s journey.

By comparing humans and Faeries in fantasy with mortality and immortality in ageing, this paper shows the need for death even for an immortal being in his hard times. Death is not a curse for mortals; it is a curse for immortals, especially Feyre, who has been turned from a mortal to an immortal.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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