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Speaking Through Sacrifice:

Rhetorical and Social Functions of Sacrifice within Long-Form Contemporary Fantasy Literature

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Abstract

Long-form contemporary fantasy narratives present the opportunity for readers to immerse themselves in worlds both different from and resonant with our own. These narratives are fundamentally invested in questions of how societies change and how they persist. Long-form fantasy works to take readers on a journey away from the old world and towards the new. The scope of these narratives is large, both in terms of the length of the written works, and the scale of time passing within the fiction itself. They create meaning by layering imagery and perspective in pursuit of a resonant affect.

This thesis posits that due to fantasy's fundamental investment in change, and because change requires sacrifice, looking to instances of sacrifice within the literature provides useful handholds with which the reader can grasp and manipulate the text. The discussion explores four modes of sacrifice—Martyrdom, Self-Denial, Scapegoating, and Self-Erosion—divided along dual axes of individually chosen/societally mandated sacrifice, and individual act/on-going act sacrifice. Each mode is investigated through a case-study of a single long-form contemporary fantasy text: Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn*; Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*; Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle*; and N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth*.

The case-studies draw on sociological, cultural, theological, and literary theory to understand the social nature of these acts of sacrifice, and this framework is then applied to the acts playing out in the imagined societies. From this combination of theory and textual example, the thesis arrives at a model of the rhetorical function of each of these modes of sacrifice; essentially, how they communicate ideas to the reader, and how they contribute to the texts' overall meaning-making. One of the core ways that fantasy achieves the inter-related ends of critiquing problems and proposing solutions is by speaking through acts of sacrifice.

Contemporary life is a challenging blend of rapid innovation and entrenched ideologies. The influence of societal systems over individuals is complex, and the research that this thesis undertakes dives into defining questions of how marginalised individuals can come to be complicit with oppressive systems, and how individual choice can be coerced and thus undermined. The texts that are emerging from the current socio-political climate seem to be searching for ways to articulate this struggle to both resist and change harmful, dominant systems. This thesis investigates the radical potential of sacrifice as a driver of positive social change.

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Introduction: Fantasy, Sacrifice, and Reading Long-Form Narratives

> Acknowledging the problem is the first step towards fixing it. I look to science fiction and fantasy as the aspirational drive of the zeitgeist. We creators are the engineers of possibility. And as this genre finally, however grudgingly, acknowledges that the dreams of the marginalized matter and that all of us have a future, so will go the world.[1]
>
> – N. K. Jemisin, 2018 Acceptance Speech for the Best Novel Hugo Award

One of the fantasy genre's best aspects is what N. K. Jemisin describes as a shared 'aspirational drive' to 'engineer' and re-build our current world through bizarre, impossible, and inspirational imaginings.[2] Fantasy has been both derided (by critics) and celebrated (by fans) for its escapism. But if we approach that idea critically, the desire to escape must come from a recognition of the problems of reality. We do not just escape *to* we also escape *from*, and both halves of that equation matter. The worlds engineered through fantasy offer the potential to re-perceive and re-engage with the reality from which we have escaped. As we distance ourselves, we are invited to turn back upon ourselves and see differently, be differently. As the genre imagines, 'so will go the world'.[3]

If, as Jemisin attests, the truest work of the genre is to engineer new possibilities that acknowledge the dreams of the marginalised, then it has need of a mechanism that resonates with that goal. Terry Eagleton, whose work plays a key role in the argument of this thesis, describes sacrifice as 'the passage of the lowly, unremarkable thing from weakness to power', and as marking the movement from 'victimhood to full humanity, destitution to riches, the world as we know it to some transfigured to domain'.[4] Acts of sacrifice occur frequently and

[1] N. K. Jemisin, '2018 Hugo Award Acceptance Speech for Best Novel', presented at *Worldcon 76* (San José, California: 19 August 2018) <https://youtu.be/Pt4UI_te7bs?t=8028> [Accessed 27 March 2020].
[2] Jemisin, 'Acceptance Speech'.
[3] Jemisin, 'Acceptance Speech'.
[4] Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 8.

consistently across the genre, both historically and contemporarily. I attest that this is because fantasy seeks new worlds and writes of fundamental change in the status quo, and as sacrifice is a powerful social mechanism for achieving change it recurs within the genre. Structurally speaking, contemporary fantasy begins with Tolkien, and I do not think one could find a better description of *The Lord of the Rings* than the 'passage of the lowly, unremarkable thing'.[5] Sacrifice is embedded within the genre from its roots.

This thesis' focus on the rhetorical and communicative functions of acts of sacrifice within long-form fantasy narratives is fuelled by the 'aspirational drive' that Jemisin so eloquently articulates. I want to aid those 'engineers of possibility'. I can do so in this case by working to unpack ways of reading that help us grasp more firmly what these texts are communicating. The long-form fantasy narratives of Brandon Sanderson, Jim Butcher, Peter V. Brett, and N. K. Jemisin provide a perfect opportunity to focus on four complex case-studies. The worlds constructed by these authors are by design deep and immersive in ways that deny a clear and easy path towards interpretation and analysis. They are often multi-perspectival, with narratives that span years, vast geographies, and pivotal moments of individual and societal change. They communicate and imagine a vast breadth and depth of ideas. My thesis aims to provide one means of grasping and unpacking what these texts are saying to their readers. Taking Jemisin's idea here, if these texts are trying to show a way the world might go, then my thesis is a compass to help follow that road map.

Fantasy Scholarship

In order to best define the fantasy genre within this thesis, it is necessary to understand the history of fantasy scholarship. The academic discussion around fantasy has moved through

[5] Eagleton, p. 8.

three stages of approach. The shifts in trends of discourse through each phase of fantasy scholarship are a journey from the initial grappling with the distinguishing qualities of the fantasy genre, to works that provide tools and lenses through which texts can be approached, to an exploration of texts' relationships with political, cultural, and social issues. Brian Attebery states that 'Tolkien's view was that the myth-making imagination always tends toward truth, rather than lies; that fantastic stories lead toward a genuine understanding of the conditions of existence'.[6] In this most recent phase, the scholarship being pursued now, the texts themselves become understood as tools for approaching reality through an impossible lens. There is of course overlap between these phases of scholarship rather than clear delineations, but the general trends can be recognised. I will first outline the core trend of these phases, before turning in more detail to key scholarship within each. It is important to stress that this "journey" should not be construed as a value statement wherein subsequent scholarship discards what came before, but rather that research questions become more socially embedded and inter-disciplinarily diverse over time only because of the foundational work completed before.

One of the significant facets of fantasy's development through the twentieth century is the way that both fiction and scholarship develop in response to Tolkien. As an influential author and scholar of fantasy, these two arms of Tolkien's work provide bedrocks upon which future authors and future scholars can build.

The first phase of sustained fantasy scholarship seeking core defining traits began around the 1970s through to the late 1980s and emerged in response to the boom in the publication of fantasy texts that themselves worked to recapture, explore, and understand what J. R. R. Tolkien achieved with his genre-founding *The Lord of the Rings*.[7]

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[6] Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 4.

[7] Note that Tolkien's own scholarship on the genre predates this with initial publications in 1939, however what I am addressing here is a wider trend that could be reasonably identified as a "phase" of scholarship.

As the founder of the genre we know today, it is perhaps unsurprising that often Tolkien's writings on the genre remain contemporarily relevant. Though fantasy as a *mode* of writing—that is, stories involving a core impossible element such as fairies, ghosts, or impossible dreamscapes—has been around for the history of shared narratives (let alone the fantasy nature of ancient mythic narratives), it was Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* that established a foundational text for fantasy as a modern genre of writing with core tropes and techniques.

The second phase, with an emphasis on tools, began in the 1990s and extended till more or less the end of the first decade in the new millennium. Here the most widely read and successful texts published within the genre have internalised the lessons of Tolkien and have begun re-appropriating them for their own fictional purposes. With the core of the genre neatly delineated by the scholars of the first phase, it follows that the next step was to begin searching for ways of approaching those core ideas.

The contemporary era picks up from around 2010 and is ongoing. Armed with a strong understanding of the genre, as well as tools for approaching and reading those genre texts, contemporary scholars are thus able to step into the text and from that constructed, distant textual position turn back around to re-examine reality.

To return to the influence of Tolkien as a scholar of fantasy, the foundational text is 'On Fairy Stories' (1947). Here he lays out his conception of the fantasy genre and how it functions. For Tolkien, crafting a fantasy text is an act of 'sub-creation' in which the author brings into being a secondary world—that is, a world distinct and separate from our own.[8] For even though one can read into *The Lord of the Rings* much of Tolkien's experience at war, he was himself insistent that the genre was not simply allegory, going as far as to state: 'I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough

[8] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', in *Tree and Leaf* (Longon: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 9-73.

to detect its presence.'[9] This sentiment is further emphasised by Gary K. Wolfe who draws a distinction between expression and representation 'because many of the finest fantasy writers have correctly rejected the notion that their work is in any sense mere allegory or apologue'.[10]

Tolkien's catch-all term for magic or otherwise impossible elements is "enchantment" which is a thing 'of the elves.' Enchantment is beyond human understanding, both in text and from the perspective of the reader, and as such evokes wonder.[11] This aspect of "enchantment" perfectly describes what is perhaps the defining trait of fantasy texts that distinguish them from others: there are parts of the imagined world that cannot fully be explained and the reader must simply accept their existence.

This acceptance of the impossible would later be described as the reader's act of suspending disbelief. Rather than the mimetic nature of realist texts, or the science fiction approach of logically persuading the reader of the possibility of its worlds, Fantasy's act of acceptance works to create an experience of immersion; as the reader buys into the impossible, they then by design sink more firmly into the imagined world instead of remaining at a sceptical remove. It is via the acceptance of impossible worlds that fantasy works to first distance the reader from reality, but then invite them to see reality back through the lens of the text.

The final aspect that Tolkien insisted upon in fantasy is what he referred to as the "eucatastrophe".[12] In Tolkien's mind, fantasy is fundamentally about good triumphing over evil or, more broadly, positive social change being realised: in Tolkien's more poetic phrasing, 'a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears'.[13] As Rhys Williams argues, the fantasy genre's imagining of alternatives is a fundamentally utopian act. In

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[9] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Foreword to the Second Edition', in *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. xv-xviii (p. xvii).
[10] Gary K. Wolfe, 'The Encounter with Fantasy', in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, by Roger C. Schlobin (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. 1-29 (p. 12).
[11] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 49; p. 13.
[12] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', pp. 62-63.
[13] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', pp. 62-63.

concluding his article, Williams turns to the close of China Miéville's novel *Railsea* as metaphor: the protagonist, 'knowing only what he does not want', builds an impossible ship to travel beyond the boundaries of the horizon.[14] Thus, there is an innate element of utopian energy within the fantasy genre's impossible ships of fantasy texts.

In the 1970s and 1980s, modern fantasy scholars worked to further delineate the defining traits of the genre. The key academic works in this period of scholarship tended to highlight and emphasise a particular facet of the genre as being central, or bring out a core metaphor to explain what the genre was doing. Colin N. Manlove, for instance, drew attention to the genre 'evoking wonder' in response to the impossible elements, while Tzvetan Todorov described fantastic narratives as proceeding 'at a different intensity [...] at [their] maximum'.[15] William R. Irwin noted a 'central arbitrary nonreality' that results in the generation of a 'fantasy illusion' and that 'all elements of the narrative are determined by it.'[16] Each of the scholars mentioned here approach that idea of enchantment in the secondary world and explore the ways that such elements manifest in a text. Irwin, in particular, emphasises that the presence of the impossible element shapes around it the imagined world and even the narrative itself.

A common thread to the arguments of this period was an attempt to defend or justify the value of fantasy as a field worthy of scholarly study. This defensive stance is evident in the title of Ann Swinfen's 1984 *In Defence of Fantasy*. Though later scholarship makes a distinct choice to set aside the need for justification, looking at these past justifications helps to clarify why fantasy scholars are drawn to these narratives. For instance, one key aspect of these justifications was the assertion that there is a fundamental and significant relationship between

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[14] Rhys Williams, 'Recognizing Cognition: On Suvin, Miéville, and the Utopian Impulse in the Contemporary Fantastic', *Science Fiction Studies*, 41.3 (2013), 617-633 (p. 630).

[15] Colin N. Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.1; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 93.

[16] William R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 56.

the imagined world of the text and the real world inhabited by the reader. Swinfen states that the purpose of fantasy is to ‘comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it’.[17] Kathryn Hume describes fantasy as an entire, fundamental mode of writing, equal to and intertwined with mimesis and that in this way ‘Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality’.[18] Rosemary Jackson, perhaps most assertively, emphasises that

> [l]ike any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it.[19]

This foundational work makes possible the contemporary research that uses fantasy worlds to interrogate and unpack contemporary social issues.

To return again to Tolkien’s “enchantment”, the reader’s acceptance of impossible elements makes possible this comparative and interrogative relationship between fantasy and reality. Manlove refers to this enchantment element as ‘a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural’, while Irwin phrases it as a ‘central arbitrary nonreality’.[20] In essence, fantasy is recognised by the presence of impossibilities that ultimately require the willing suspension of disbelief. While some might write off such impossibilities as childish or nonsensical, scholars came to recognise that writing of the impossible afforded the potential to engage slantwise with real topics and concerns of humanity. H. G. Wells once said that all a new perspective requires is to ‘[s]tand aside but a little space from the ordinary line of

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[17] Anne Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 231.
[18] Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 21.
[19] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 3.
[20] Manlove, p. 1; Irwin, p. 56.

observation, and the relative position of all things changes'.[21] Fantasy affords readers a distance from reality that allows them, via a self-reflection effect, to view themselves, their social position, and the state of the world from that new, impossible, non-ordinary line of observation.

Rosemary Jackson's description of fantasy as the literature of subversion that 'disturb[s] "rules" of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of the "real"' is perhaps one of the most useful scholarly contributions from this first phase, in part because this definition can be re-purposed as a tool or perspective with which to approach a text rather than as just a static definition.[22] It allows the reader or critic to ask questions of the text: what is being subverted? How is it being subverted? For what purpose is it being subverted? These questions work to ensure that the analysis and the conversation does not stop at questions of "is it fantasy". Jackson's contribution is even more significant because of her insistence that fantasy "does" something. Her research is built on the notion that the genre subverts expectations and the status quo. This idea taps directly into what would go on to become central to the contemporary approach to the genre: that these texts exist in dialogue with their readers, the genre community, and social existence in general.

The second stage of fantasy scholarship worked to put the genre definition debate to rest. As a result, this stage of scholarship turned instead to exploring potential tools and perspectives that one could put into practice when approaching texts. Instead of asking whether or not a text was fantasy, this stage of fantasy scholarship from the late 1990s to the late 2000s began asking questions such as: "*if* we treat this book as fantasy, then what do we learn?", or "if we focus on this element of fantasy, how does that shape a reading of a text?" There are two key names at the heart of this scholarly shift. First, Brian Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* worked to help the community step away from the definition debate by shifting the parameters of a definition

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[21] Qtd. from David C. Smith, 'A Chat with the Author of *The Time Machine*', *The Wellsian*, 20 (1997), 3-9 (p. 6).

[22] Jackson, p. 14.

to avoid limitations. Attebery instead argued that genre should be understood and approached as a "fuzzy set", 'defined not by boundaries but by a center'.[23] Under this model, texts can be viewed as belonging to that set 'by resemblance to a single core example or group of examples' rather than 'by a clear boundary or any defining characteristic'.[24] This allows a scholar to decide to treat a book as fantasy for the purposes of reading it in that manner. Where limited and divergent definitions place limitations upon research and readings, the fuzzy set approach makes more research and ideas possible.

Farah Mendlesohn's 2008 *Rhetorics of Fantasy* opens with the assertion that '[t]his book is not about defining fantasy'.[25] Instead, Mendlesohn offers a framework in the hopes of making further research possible. Mendlesohn's book presents four rhetorics, structures, or types of fantasy narratives: the portal-quest fantasy where the characters leave the known, enter the unknown, and then return home changed and with a new perspective; the intrusion fantasy where the impossible interrupts and disrupts the known and normal in a potentially dangerous way but ultimately results in re-perception; the immersive fantasy where the reader is placed into a world where the impossible is normal and must fully suspend disbelief in order to experience a fundamental change in this established secondary world; and the liminal fantasy where the lines between the impossible and the real are blurred and always in doubt in a way that prompts active questioning. Mendlesohn undertakes this work, again, not to place limitations, but instead to make questions possible: if we expect one thing of an immersive narrative, but it contains instead an element of a portal-quest narrative, how does that shift what the text is communicating? The final chapter of her book explores the ways that texts can be seen to mix these rhetorics, complicating and blurring the effects and affect generated as a result.

[23] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 12.
[24] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 31.
[25] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. xiii.

This kind of genre-based research, with an emphasis on providing analytical tools, remains prevalent amongst contemporary scholarship such as Stefan Ekman's *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (2013) which takes the fantasy trope of the map and explores ways of reading maps, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating the Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy* (2019) by C. Palmer-Patel, and my own work on the role of magic as a tool of social construction.[26] It is from the tool-providing tradition of Attebery and Mendlesohn that I construct my definition of contemporary fantasy, which defines the genre as one which functions in a mode of hyper-exaggeration. Fantasy does so to amplify and highlight facets of reality in order to create a space for challenging old ideas, and to open up new avenues of social discussion. Through its lens of impossibility, fantasy is a genre which seeks re-perception: re-perception of assumptions, of the self, of society.

The third stage of fantasy scholarship becomes increasingly prevalent post 2010. It places an emphasis on diverse representation and communities, and more actively looks at the way in which texts present, engage with, and critique real and current social issues. The landmark text here is Helen Young's *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature*: *Habits of Whiteness* (2016). Young's work looks back to interrogate the genre's history and "habits" of a dominant white perspective and representation, and then turns to contemporary events amongst the writing and reading community to address the work that is being carried out to combat those habits, as well as the obstacles still to be overcome.[27] Young is careful to note that, increasingly, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the genre and community of fantasy is stereotypically white, middle-class, and male, but that 'it is unarguably true that the loudest voices – authorial

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[26] Matthew J. Elder, *Magic as a Tool of Social Construction: Cultural and Gender Identity in Contemporary Fantasy* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Waikato, 2015); Stefan Ekman, *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013); C. Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating the Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[27] See Chapter Seven in Young's text - 'Breaking Habits and Digital Communication' - for analysis of the events referred to as RaceFail 09.

and audience alike – were those of White men for much of the genre's history' and it is the shaping influence of those loudest voices that Young works to unpack and understand.[28] This aspect of contemporary research works to understand the ways that traditions, habits, and assumed norms have placed limitations upon what the genre can achieve in terms of its reach and its inclusion, with the goal of enabling movement beyond those limitations. Or, as Young's work suggests, perhaps this research can work to dismantle the barriers of those limitations so that the existing diverse works can step onto a larger stage.

Palmer-Patel's *The Shape of Fantasy* investigates narrative structures and patterns in what she terms American Heroic Epic Fantasy and in so doing demonstrates the ways that fantasy 'exhibits a conscious awareness of its own form'.[29] I would suggest that this self-awareness and self-reflexivity within fantasy extends also to the genre's active and dynamic community of writers, readers, and critics. Readers actively communicate with authors through social media or at conventions. For good or for ill, the collective force of the community wields much power to demand representation and even changes. In the twenty-first century, authors no longer have the luxury of writing in ideological bubbles. While this affords the dominant voices a further measure of power, it also creates a space in which historically marginalised voices can be louder than ever and less easily denied or ignored. Helen Young, drawing on the work of Chris Atton on popular music, establishes that she is interested in a different conception of genre as "genre-culture". For Young,

> genre culture in popular fantasy places textual practices within a wider set of social processes that include not only Fantasy conventions, but the behaviours of authors and audiences, the ideological arguments that circulate around the texts, and the meaning and location of fantasy within a political economy.[30]

[28] Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy: Habits of Whiteness* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 6.
[29] Palmer-Patel, p. 2.
[30] Young, p. 5.

Young affirms the relationship between genre and culture by hyphenating "genre-culture" in order to 'draw attention to how firmly texts and "discursive agents" are tied to each other; neither would exist without the other'.[31] It is in this way that contemporary fantasy scholarship, much like the contemporary genre itself, is dynamic.

Significant academic books of the last decade include James Gifford's *A Modernist Fantasy: Modernism, Anarchism, and the Radical Fantastic* (2018), Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games* (2019), and Maria Sachiko Cecire's *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (2019). These, respectively, approach the fantasy genre to explore and discuss radical politics, issues of race representation, and children's relationships with fantasy and the lasting impacts of such texts into adulthood. Thomas' book should be particularly noted for her drive 'toward a fantastic that is restorative, transformative, and emancipatory' and thus 'has the power to remake the world.'[32] The fantasy genre scholarship published in the last decade shows a dominant thematic trend towards works concerning gender, race, sexuality, and environmental issues. This reflects how fantasy enables different thoughts, perspectives, and ideas and how in the face of troubled times, people are reaching through this genre for possible answers.

Long-Form Narrative

One of the formative aspects of this research is the prevalence of what I am terming long-form narrative in fantasy fiction. When I began this thesis, this was only an implicit element of the research. It was not until I presented some of my first chapter at a conference that this

[31] Young, p. 5.
[32] Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), p. 13.

narrowing of focus came about. I had presented upon Sanderson's *Mistborn* series and martyrdom—the subject of my first chapter—and afterwards a colleague asked me: "Do you teach these texts?" To which I replied, "Yes I have, but only one of Sanderson's stand-alone novels." We proceeded to have a discussion concerning the difficulty of finding a place for these large and long novels in the classroom. That question stayed with me, and began to evolve: how do we read such long texts? And how, as scholars, might we engage with them critically and effectively without being reductive? Often literary research focuses on either the macro—a genre, a body of work, a time period—or the focus narrows down into a single text, or poem, or character. But what do we do when the single text is thousands of pages long instead of twelve lines of poetry? For fantasy, which commonly produces long-form, expansive texts, a key question becomes: how do you set about meaningfully untangling and articulating the work of such a text? This thesis aims to offer one tool for undertaking such a task.

Long-form narrative has a number of notable qualities. In *Reading Series Fiction* (2000), Victor Watson notes that reading a series (a long-form narrative) requires a deliberate and sustained choice, wryly asserting that you 'cannot read a series of twelve novels by chance'.[33] Watson goes on to emphasise the elements of commitment in reading a series, and that '[r]eading a series involves a special relationship between reader and writer which the reader has made a conscious decision to sustain'.[34] This sustained choice on the reader's part to continue reading must, at the least, suggest an investment in hearing out the rest of what such a text has to say.

Watson's work focuses on the series in children's literature, emphasising the importance of the passage of time for developing minds, and how familiarity with a series can reinforce a desire to keep reading and grow reading skills. In this sense, some of what Watson is discussing

[33] Victor Watson, *Reading Series Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.
[34] Watson, p. 1.

does not translate to this discussion of fantasy texts for adults, where reading development and skills is less central to textual analysis. However, the engagement with the qualities of a series carries profound implications for the efficacy of the type of texts that this thesis will examine. One moment in Watson's work has stuck firmly in my mind from the first moment I read it. In his introduction, Watson briefly recalls the following perspective offered by a child:

> A Year 6 child once explained to me why he preferred a series to single novels: when you begin a new novel, he explained, it is like going into a room full of strangers, but reading the latest book in a series which you already know *is like going into a room full of friends*.[35]

Watson draws on this to discuss potential apprehensive feelings towards approaching a completely unfamiliar text. However, there are further implications to this statement. It suggests that over the course of engaging with a long-form narrative, as those characters becomes like friends, there is a heightened level of empathy attained. As that connection and openness rises there is then a greater potential for the reception, acceptance, and internalising of the meaning-making as the reader makes themself more willingly vulnerable to the affect of the text.

For the purposes of this thesis, long-form fantasy is defined as any fantasy narrative that is told over multiple volumes, and depicts characters' lives over long periods of time such as multiple years, or even centuries or millennia. It is those qualities of physical and temporal length that I find fascinating and worthy of exploring. The long-form narrative tells of people and worlds that change through their various experiences. It is not one moment but many, and all of them in service of core thematic ideas and acts of social meaning-making. I want to find ways to usefully write about these texts because they are doing something unique to their form. Long-form narrative may not be present only in fantasy, but the combination of the two creates

[35] Watson, p. 6.

powerful social testing grounds and allows these texts to perform as generators of empathy and understanding. It is also true that not all fantasy is long-form narrative. However, in the tradition of Tolkien, the long-form narrative is the genre's most recognisable form: the bread and butter of the genre is, colloquially, the "door-stopper" novel.

The lengthy nature of a long-form narrative also results in long passages of time: time within the narrative of the world that passes; events that occur not just in one day but over a year or more and thus explore characters at different phases of life; and responses to many kinds of events both uplifting and traumatic. There is also the time taken to write, edit, and publish these long narratives. Chapter Two will undertake a case-study of Butcher's *Dresden Files* series which began in 2008 and is still on-going. In fact, after a six-year hiatus, Butcher released both books sixteen and seventeen of the series in 2020. The social context and life experiences of the author have shifted along that extended time frame and so that too must shape the construction and meaning-making of the text. There is also the extended time that the reader spends with the narrative. For a useful quantitative measure of length and time, we may turn to the licensed audiobook versions of some of these novels. Though of course reading aloud will often be slower that direct reading, turning to audiobook length gives us a measurable amount of time that will remain consistent from person to person, and the removal of more unknowable factors allows this to serve demonstrably. Let us look briefly at the four series to be examined as case studies in this thesis.

Sanderson's *Mistborn* series is a trilogy (not counting the sequel trilogy, or the related novel *Mistborn: Secret History*), and each book is between 25 and 29 hours of narration, arriving at a total of 82 hours. If we assume a generous regularity of 2 hours a day, it would take a person 41 days to consume the whole series. Taking that same formula, Butcher's 17 book (so far) *Dresden Files* would take 104 days, Brett's six book and three novella series *The Demon Cycle* 66 days, and Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* 21. All told, around two thirds of

someone's year to engage with just these four prominent works. Of course, reading and listening are not perfectly interchangeable, but given variations in page length of book editions, and potentially drastic variations in individuals' reading speed, the audiobook provides a consistent metric by which I can convey the salient point: engaging with texts this long is an act that is not one Sunday afternoon of reading, but instead represents a sustained commitment to, and an on-going period of time spent with, these characters and in these worlds, being exposed to and experiencing these different perspectives and identities. What these numbers should convey is that we must afford some weight to just the sheer time a reader spends immersed in that space.

This is perhaps especially true when, as Watson notes, there are many readers of long-form narratives who 'insist on reading (and owning) the entire series, and will read – or reread – the sequence only in the correct chronological order'.[36] The readers who continue to choose to commit to a long-form narrative often re-make that commitment again and again, reading and re-reading. Speaking for myself as one of these readers, and looking to the texts that will be focus of the case-studies in this thesis, I have read each of these series at least twice outside of and prior to the research process for this thesis; in particular, I have read Sanderson's *Mistborn* and Butcher's *Dresden Files* at least four to five times, willingly re-immersing myself in those narratives, characters, and worlds only to find the comprehension and impact of the texts re-affirmed and raised with each reading.[37] To return to my maths from earlier, that means for just under a year and a half of my life, for around five percent of my entire life thus far, I have spent a part of my day immersed in this world. The wise child in Year 6 asks an excellent question, why would I not return to the room full of my friends?

[36] Watson, p. 1.

[37] I single out Brandon Sanderson and Jim Butcher here not as a measure of comparative significance to the other two, but simply because their series have been published for longer than the other case studies in this thesis.

I first read Sanderson's *Mistborn* eight years ago in the early stages of my undergraduate study, and have continued to return to it again and again as a fan, and then as a scholar; with my first independent research project, my Honours dissertation, I shifted into an active researcher of fantasy, beginning with the representation of race within *Mistborn.* Even more pertinent for this thesis is Butcher's *Dresden Files* which tell the story of twenty-first century wizard Harry Dresden. Each time I re-read this series, I would find myself more fascinated by one or another of the secondary characters, enamoured of their own journeys and the thematic role they played in the meaning-making of a long-form narrative that is ostensibly just Harry's story. It was in a re-read of this series, after the completion of my Masters, that I found myself fascinated by Harry's half-brother Thomas and Thomas' choices to starve himself rather than give in to his monstrous nature. It was Thomas' journey that spurred my interest in sacrifice, and where the origins of this thesis lie. For texts aiming to get their readers to 'stand aside but a little' and see differently, that time of exposure to difference is powerful and valuable.[38]

Turning to narrative structure, long-form fantasy uses the length of time available to it to build and convey meaning via repetition and variation upon that repetition. In the chapter 'Structuralism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012), Brian Attebery explains how fantasy constructs a vertical complexity. He notes that

> Fantasy is often criticized for being too obvious in its oppositions. Light versus dark, good versus evil: such parings seem glaringly evident, even simple-minded […] But Lévi-Strauss says, not so fast. There are different sorts of complexity. A myth is complex vertically, as it were; it lays out its parings again and again, piling opposition upon opposition. […] one must look for the way [the binaries] are bundled, and for the ways the groupings change throughout the narrative.[39]

[38] H. G. Wells Interview, qtd. from Smith, p. 6.

[39] Brian Attebery, 'Structuralism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 81-90 (p. 86).

Attebery here highlights that meaning in the fantasy genre is often clear, but that clarity is by design: the genre proceeds at "the maximum intensity", as Tzvetan Todorov notes.[40] It is this clarity that allows the reader to grasp and hold the depth of meaning layered in through the acts of varied repetition.

Palmer-Patel engages strongly with this idea and pushes it further to what she refers to as "resonance":

> The repetitions of the Heroic Epic pattern that I have identified all build on iterations, creating a resonance that evokes a memory, emotion, or overtones of a previously held understanding of the form. Rather than being simplified, repetitive, and formulaic, the repetitions within the Heroic Epic pattern create a resonance by building layers of depth and complexity.[41]

Long-form fantasy has more time to build that resonance. Palmer-Patel draws attention to an extreme example of this: a scene in Sanderson's second *Mistborn* series, set three hundred years after the end of the first trilogy, where the characters within the text explicitly refer to the resonance of a "current" moment with a key moment in history that occurred in the first trilogy: 'Here, the antagonists themselves are exploiting the resonance between the first trilogy and the second series, highlight repetitions within these patterns'.[42] The scale of time and length affords more opportunities to create moments of resonance through years of characters' lives, but also through distant stages of fictional history that the reader witnesses and experiences.

While there is a breadth of scholarship on long-form narrative in television serials and the comic book, there is a lack of discussion concerning long-form narrative in the novel.[43]

[40] Todorov, p. 93.
[41] Palmer-Patel, p. 179.
[42] Palmer-Patel, p. 166.
[43] For work on television see Jason Mittel, 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 58 (2006), 29-40 <https://doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0032>, Maria Ionita, 'Long-form Televisual Narrative and Operatic Structure in Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*', *Cineaction*, 94 (204), 22-28,

Frank P. Tomasulo draws an important distinction however that 'not all long-*running* television series are long-*form* narratives' as serials of the soap opera and comic strip often depict linked, but resolved narratives.[44] Here, long-form represents a sustained narrative arc over time, even if it also contains smaller resolved narratives within it.

Despite the lack of dedicated study to the long-form structure in the novel, or even the fantasy novel, there is a general acknowledgment of the prevalence of series writing in fantasy.[45] *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* contains a chapter titled 'Reading the fantasy series' by Kari Maund who carefully notes that series fiction is not unique to fantasy, and goes on to use the understanding of the series form in detective fiction, historical novels, military novels, and children's books to address how such comparative structures might help unpack the series in fantasy. Maund identifies three types of series: the classic series, built around the exploits of a character such as Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian; the scripted series where there is a continuity of characters but the driving force is the plot, such as in Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*; and the thematic series or series of place where the texts are bound together by a common theme or setting. An excellent contemporary example of this would be Becky Chambers' science fiction *Wayfarers* series where each book looks at a different part of the same universe but are all thematically concerned with kindness, empathy, and celebrating the diversity of life.

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and Manuel Garin, 'Infinite Wounds: Redefining Narrative Structure and Serial Dynamics in Television Series', *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, 24 (2017), 27-41; For work on comics see Federico Pagello, 'The "Origin Story" is the Only Story: Seriality and Temporality in Superhero Fiction from Comics to Post-Television', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 34.8 (2017), 725-745 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2017.1347864>, Daniel Steina and Lukas Etter, 'Long-Length Serials in the Golden Age of Comic Strips: Production and Reception', in *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel*, ed. by Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey, and Stephen E. Tabachnick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 39-85, and Jean-Matthiew Méon, 'Sons and Grandsons of Origins: Narrative Memory in Marvel Superhero Comics', in *Comics Memory*, ed. by Maaheen Ahmed and Benoît Crucifix (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 189-209.

[44] Frank P. Tomasulo, 'Old Vino in New Bottles?: *The Sopranos* and Long-Form Narrative', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 35.3 (2018), 209-223 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2017.1386449>, p. 209.

[45] See for instance: C. Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating the Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*; Jamie Williamson, *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy: From Antiquarianism to the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Al Muller and C. W. Sullivan III, 'Young Adult Literature: Science Fiction and Fantasy Series Books', *The English Journal*, 69.7 (1980), 71-74.

While these trends are useful, the brief chapter does not offer the same tool set that, for instance, Mendelsohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* does. The work presented thus far does a good job of presenting first an understanding of what long-form fantasy is (its structures and qualities), as well as its value, but the challenge still remains: how do we read, grapple with, and write about these texts effectively and usefully? This thesis aims to offer one answer: if we look to moments of sacrifice within a long-form fantasy narrative, we will find handles that allow us to grasp and manipulate the meaning-making of that text. My assertion here is twofold and interrelated. First is that understanding a genre, its structures and rhetorics, tropes and techniques, leads to understanding its core concerns. It is from this position that we might begin to identify a theme, idea, symbol, concept, or image that resonates with that core of the genre's intent. Second is that sacrifice is a core resonating idea within fantasy. I choose the word "resonating" here very deliberately. To return to Palmer-Patel's notion of this term, resonance is the result of the varied repetition of the genre's vertical complexity. Resonance feeds communication, it affords power to language, it is fuel for a text's meaning-making. What I am asserting here is that sacrifice resonates with core drives of the fantasy genre and as such aids in the genre's communication with the reader.

Acts of sacrifice and the fantasy genre are both concerned with stasis and change. For fantasy, this is enabled by its dual drives towards subversion, as Jackson articulates, and optimism or utopia, as Tolkien insists. The genre's investment in writing about social stagnation and social change, on both micro and macro levels, is well articulated by Mendlesohn's four rhetorics, or structures of fantasy. Each structure is written, and reads, quite differently but the goal of each always returns to some aspect of re-perception where the encounter with the impossible takes the known and re-shapes it. In each of these structures the "normal" established in the text's opening is subverted: either that normal status quo of the

imagined world changes or the characters realise that their assumptions about that normal were themselves flawed, limited, or false.

With the portal-quest narrative the characters leave the known, experience the unknown, and return so fundamentally changed by that experience that they then understand and perceive differently the place from which they started. It is about discovery of new knowledge; 'portal fantasies lead us gradually to the point where the protagonist knows his or her world enough to *change* it' (my emphasis added).[46] This is the *Narnia* narrative, and it is Frodo who finds himself no longer belonging to The Shire after returning from the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. The goal here is that the reader, going along on this journey, returns out of the narrative also changed by their encounter with the impossible, this rhetoric 'allows and relies upon both protagonist and reader gaining experience'.[47]

Liminal fantasy narratives are sustained by a persistent and unresolved doubt about what is real and what is not. That doubt prompts the reader to ask questions; 'While liminal fantasy casualizes the fantastic within the experience of the protagonist, it estranges the reader.'[48] Even if the questions raised cannot be resolved, the act of asking places them into a position of re-perceiving and potentially even challenging the status quo. It is again subversive, this time by blurring the lines of concrete understanding to destabilise the reader and thus create a space in which new ideas are possible.

An intrusion narrative structure, seen in this thesis in Butcher's *Dresden Files*, depicts an impossible, fantasy element invading the known, normal space. Here the impossible is disruptive, chaotic, and requires redressing. In an intrusion narrative the invasion continues to escalate until either the known world is fundamentally changed in accordance with the goals of the intrusive element, or those in the known world arrest that escalation and return a level

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[46] Mendlesohn, p. xix.
[47] Mendlesohn, p. xix.
[48] Mendlesohn, p. xxiv.

of peace and safety. However, even if the intrusion is halted, the fact of its intrusion means that those who have encountered it, including the reader, are forced to re-perceive their reality. Change has come to the status quo. This is fuelled by the rhetoric's 'drive […] to be investigated and made transparent'.[49]

The other three texts explored in this thesis are immersive narratives. Immersion narratives drop the reader into a fully-formed secondary world, one with its own rules and societies, a world distinctly not our own. It is a deep form of estrangement, and perhaps where fantasy, already a genre that functions 'at its maximum' or in a mode of hyper-exaggeration, is at its most extended point: an immersive world requires that the reader accept something that not only does not, but could not and will not ever exist.[50] Where the other three structures might have anchors in reality—the Pevensies begin in and return to England after all—the immersive is unmoored from familiar touchstones. But it is at that extremely distanced point from reality that the reader is afforded the opportunity to look back upon themself and their world. 'In that one literal untruth', as Attebery states, 'is freedom to tell many symbolic truths'.[51] In an immersive fantasy what is "storyable" is the loss of the world: 'from within the river flows away'.[52] However, as I have articulated before, especially in the contemporary space, often the world that is lost in the immersive fantasy is the old world, the stuck and stagnant world that is plagued by the issues that the narrative's ultimate eucatastrophe seeks to explore a change away from.[53]

In each of these structural manifestations of the genre, the whole of the narrative's design works towards a growth or some kind of challenge to the status quo. Fantasy is invested in

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[49] Mendelsohn, p. xxii.
[50] Todorov, p. 93.
[51] Attebery, *Stories about Stories,* p. 4.
[52] John Clute qtd. from Mendlesohn, p. 61. Note this quote comes from a private email conversation between Mendlesohn and John Clute.
[53] For original discussion of positive loss in immersive fantasy, see Elder, *Magic as a Tool of Social Construction: Cultural and Gender Identity in Contemporary Fantasy*.

change. It is by turning to a resonating element that we might firmly grasp exactly what change a text is invested in, and begin to unpack how that change is being communicated and afforded meaning. This is where I propose turning to sacrifice.

Sacrifice Scholarship

Terry Eagleton, in *Radical Sacrifice* (2018), showcases the complexity (and diversity) of the term sacrifice through an excellent and thorough review of the literature across disciplines. Early in his literature review he notes that David Janzen in *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible* (2004) questions 'the possibility of a general theory of sacrifice' by emphasising the way that the 'meaning of the institution shifts from one cultural context to another'.[54] On the same page Eagleton reinforces this point to suggest that sacrifice is fundamentally a polythetic term by "succinctly" listing the various kinds of activities that sacrifice has been understood as:

> gift, tribute, covenant, prayer, bargain, gratitude, atonement, adoration, cajolement, celebration, restitution, expiation, sanctification, propitiation, communion, fellowship, purification and discharge of debt. It can involve a redemptive death, a purging of evil, a refusal of death, a dialogue with divinity, a restoration of cosmic order or a prudent investment in order to secure a profitable return. There are those who have regarded it as a rite of passage or reinforcement of patriarchal power, whereas others have found in it a source of social cohesion, a liberation of vital energies, a ritual working through of guilt or trauma or a species of mourning. […] The practice has also been seen as an attempt to win the attention of the gods, a

[54] Eagleton, p. 4.

> gesture of obedience to the moral law or social code or a token of one's membership of the nation.[55]

He proceeds from here to unpack psychological understandings of sacrifice, as well as key religious, anthropological, and sociological scholars who have explored the notion of sacrifice. Clearly, a general theory of sacrifice would be unhelpful and reductive. The significance of an act of sacrifice is derived from its specificity within a specific context. It is then striking that scholarly conversations around the institution of sacrifice have remained topically consistent for many years. Addressing this dominant thread provides a useful backdrop for the more sociological and radical approach that informs this thesis.

Though separated by 85 years, David Hick's article 'Sacrifice' (2015) and the chapter 'The Theories of Sacrifice' in R. Money-Kyrle's *The Meaning of Sacrifice* (1930) both address, by and large, the same influential scholars.[56] This long continuity of dominant discourse highlights the overarching paradigm that has shaped (and limited) this scholarship over most of a century: the seemingly inextricable connection between sacrifice and religion.

Both Hicks and Money-Kyrle begin with E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871).[57] Tylor defined sacrifice as a gift made to a deity. The gift then creates an obligation on behalf of the deity to the sacrificer. The sacrifice is performed with specific intention, but overall the definition is limited: Money-Kyrle asks '[h]ow, for instance, can we explain, on Tylor's theory, the motive of the communicant who eats his god?'[58]

Robertson Smith champions this notion of sacrifice as communion in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1894).[59] Smith discusses sacrifice as a feast which was shared by both

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[55] Eagleton, pp. 4-5.

[56] David Hicks, 'Sacrifice', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Ltd, 2015), pp. 860-2; R. Money-Kyrle, *The Meaning of Sacrifice* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930/1965).

[57] E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: Murray, 1871/1915).

[58] Money-Kyrle, p. 167.

[59] Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1894/1927).

humanity and the deity. Where the gift creates obligation, the sacrificial feasting aims for communication. It realises this by means of the sacrificed-being representing both humanity and deity. So, for Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1964), Christ on the Cross is the ultimate example in which the victim, representing both man and God, is sacrificed to bring the two closer together.[60] Hence the Christian re-enactment via communion. This concept of sacrifice is the most widely considered and studied; Valerio Valeri (1985), discusses the idea of mutual indebtedness created via communion, and Émile Durkheim's later work (1995) builds upon the work of Smith, and Hubert and Mauss to explore the relationship between sacrifice and social cohesion via the communion.[61]

In the hugely influential *The Golden Bough* (1890), James Frazer examines many diverse instances and accounts of sacrifices amongst (what he terms) primitive man.[62] Whilst there are nuances, his overall conclusion regarding sacrifice is rooted in his breakdown of magic: the idea that performed actions which imitate nature can affect nature; or, in other words, that there is a symbolic relationship between action and universe that flows both ways (each affects the other) which can be capitalised upon to realise desired results. From this perspective, Frazer understood instances of sacrifice to be an attempt to symbolically slay gods before they decayed in age, and in doing so prevent similar decay in nature (for example, crops) that would otherwise naturally occur due to the intertwined nature of the world and deity.

Whilst these approaches to understanding the role of sacrifice vary, they are all tied deeply to both ritual and religion. David Hicks makes the claim that '[s]o pervasive is [sacrifice] in time and space that a case could be made that sacrificial behaviour is one of the

[60] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. by W.D. Halls (London: Cohen & West, 1964).
[61] Valerio Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii*, trans. by P. Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by Karen E. Fields (Free Press, 1995), Reprint Edition.
[62] James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1922).

natural dispositions common to the species *Homo Sapiens*'.[63] There certainly seems to be an abundance of historical and cultural evidence to support this statement. What this should then suggest is that a broader discussion of sacrifice is required, for if sacrifice is a universal trait of humanity, then by virtue of the fact that not all of humanity has or follows religion, then we must also need definitions of sacrifice that account for the non-religious.

Despite this, the dominant voices seem to argue that sacrifice in the Western canon is rooted solely in religion (and in particular the sacrifice of God and Christ); some scholars even take this further to argue that secular, political, or philosophical approaches to understanding sacrifice fundamentally misunderstand and in fact reduce the meaning of sacrifice. Robert J. Daly presents a perfect example of this in his statement that secular definitions are limited or wrong because secular sacrifice is '*by* somebody, *of* something, and *for* something, but never *to* anybody'.[64] Yet theorists such as René Girard in the late twentieth century took established understandings of religious sacrifice and discussed that model of propitiation in other contexts (for instance Girard is in part interested in the parallels exhibited in contemporary judicial systems).[65] For Daly, the influence of theorists like Girard have brought about '"the end of sacrifice"'.[66] However, in an increasingly complex, global, and secular world, it is precisely these wider understandings and discussions concerning sacrifice that are not only of great value but perhaps vital for large scale problem solving. It is in light of this need for wider understanding, and against the backdrop of scholarly discord, that for this thesis I will draw a clear distinction between "a sacrifice" and "an *act* of sacrifice" or "a sacrificial act".

The existing theory asks "what is sacrifice?". By turning instead to "acts of sacrifice" the questions shift: "what is an *act* of sacrifice?" – what are its key and distinguishing traits? What

[63] Hicks, p. 860.
[64] Robert J Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 2.
[65] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).
[66] Daly, p. 202.

motivates such an act? What does it result in? What constructs it? What, in turn, does it construct? To ask "what is sacrifice" is somehow both too abstract and too specific; abstract in the sense that it fails to account for the significance and relevance of nuance and variations; specific in the way it seems to imply an absolute and assume connotations of ritual, religion, and the sacred. This question of "what is sacrifice" sits firmly in the long shadow of a crucifix. It is a question rooted in a way of thinking that is constructed via historical example and this is logical in its reasoning that follows from evidence and example. However, this question is too limiting when, as fantasy asks, we reach beyond the finite evidence of reality and history to explore the impossible.

Sacrifice is a concept; linguistically speaking it exists only as an agreed upon meaning (hence the logical, historical perspective), an *act* of sacrifice, however, is not a concept; it is discrete, concrete, and constructed and therefore an analysis of its nature—symbolism, intent, consequences—will provide an insightful lens into the context that has constructed and shaped the act (on both macro society and micro individual/character levels).

It is with this in mind that I arrive at my definition of an act of sacrifice for the purposes of this thesis. My goal here is to drill down to the bare, structural components of an act of sacrifice but not to reduce religious sacrifice or privilege secular sacrifice. Instead, I suggest that in order to understand the role that each specific act plays in society, the discussion must first step back and understand exactly what an act of sacrifice is outside of the contexts that construct those individual acts of sacrifice. Acts of sacrifice need to be understood as both acts which are constructed by certain contexts (be they religious or not), but also as acts which once enacted they, like gender, performatively construct the contexts which give the acts meaning. These socially performative acts must then either sustain the status quo or begin a process of change.

My definition of sacrifice is as follows: sacrifice is an act in which something is given up in an attempt to realise something else. To unpack that statement, sacrifice requires a conscious action; sacrifice requires the loss, or removal of something in trade; sacrifice requires a desired end. Or, in another sense, an unconscious act is not an act of sacrifice; an attempt to realise change without giving up in exchange is not an act of sacrifice; an act done for its own sake, without a desired change to achieve, is not an act of sacrifice.[67]

Eagleton's book is a timely one. Published in 2018, as the title suggests it calls for a *radical* sacrifice. I draw heavily on Eagleton's work here because, though the publication of *Radical Sacrifice* came part of the way through the writing of this thesis, the emphasis Eagleton places on the socially positive potential for sacrifice mirrors my own thoughts and findings within the literature. What Eagleton means by radical sacrifice is that the modern, Western world tends to harbour a generally negative or suspicious view of sacrifice and that if we can radically re-frame our understanding of sacrifice it will enable the world to embrace sacrifice as a tool for engendering social change. In fact, in response to the suspicion of sacrifice, Eagleton's book opens in a far more scathing tone concerning the historical perceptions of sacrifice than I have been employing in my Introduction:

> Sacrifice has not proved the most glamorous of notions in the modern age; it smacks of self-abasement and punitive self-denial. It is what long-suffering wives do for their imperious husbands, maid-servants for their pampered mistresses, nurses and steelworkers for the good of the economy and storm troopers for the Fatherland. […] [Sacrifice] begins as an attempt to placate a savage God and culminates in the clarion call of the fascist Fatherland, with its necrophiliac rites and ceremonies of self-oblation.[68]

[67] The chapters will also engage with how witnesses and witnessing are often key factors in the success or failure of an act of sacrifice.

[68] Eagleton, p. 1.

Eagleton's writing here speaks with a firm self-assurance that the enlightened, contemporary scholar reading this passage will identify easily and immediately with the wronged women of history, the oppressed lower classes, and the deep harm of the Nazi regime. While this is the opening section of Chapter One 'Radical Sacrifice', it is not how the whole book opens. In fact, turning to the front material reveals a quote from Mary Douglas' 1966 *Purity and Danger*. Devoid of any contextualisation from Eagleton, this epigraph stands on its own. It reads: 'When someone freely embraces the symbols of death, or death itself…a great release of power for good can be expected to follow.'[69] If an act like this should be expected to result in a "release of power for good", then given this quote's position of primacy, clearly Eagleton does not mean to deride sacrifice as in fact being merely that "unglamorous", controlling, and harmful exercise.

Acts of sacrifice are always, in part, value statements. In an act of sacrifice intended for propitiation, the relationship between the one undertaking the sacrifice and the one receiving the sacrifice emphasises the significance and value of the one receiving the sacrifice. It also creates a narrative in which whatever is being sacrificed (be it object, or person, or time) is of value. Many scholars of sacrifice frame this aspect of affording value as re-making the object as sacred: 'Giving is a form of semiosis, converting a piece of the world into a sign. To offer a gift is to gather a fragment of material reality into the intricate mesh of human meaning, converting matter into a mode of communication.'[70] It is in here that Eagleton finds a 'radical kernel to be extracted from [sacrifice's] mystical shell'.[71] For Eagleton,

> [s]acrifice concerns the passage of the lowly, unremarkable thing from weakness to power. It marks a movement from victimhood to full humanity, destitution to riches, the world as we know it to some transfigured domain.[72]

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[69] Mary Douglas, qtd. in Eagleton, front material.
[70] Eagleton, p. 117.
[71] Eagleton, p. 8.
[72] Eagleton, p. 8.

Note the verbs: passage, movement, transfiguration. These, coupled with the repetition of "from" and "to", all speak to change. Acts of sacrifice are fundamentally concerned with change, and this is why sacrifice resonates so powerfully with and within the narratives of the fantasy genre that is itself so invested in change.

Another layer of resonance can be found in the notion of the extreme and of exaggeration. In his second chapter, Eagleton returns to the Mary Douglas quote from the front material of the book about the "great release of power for good" following the free embrace of the symbols of death. He presents the quote again, but this time responds to Douglas: 'It would be preferable, however, if one were not called upon to make any such grossly inconvenient display of moral courage in the first place. That it should prove necessary is itself a tragic affair, not a heaven-sent opportunity to flex one's moral muscles.'[73] Here Eagleton addresses the fact that sacrifice, especially as it 'embraces death itself', is an undesirable phenomenon.[74] It is powerful, and contains great potential for change, which makes it a valuable social tool. However, it is also by nature 'often violent […] because the depth of the change it promises cannot be a matter of smooth evolution or simple continuity'.[75] The violence of sacrifice represents a rupture with the status quo, and it is in that rupture that change becomes possible. The fact that such drastic, extreme action has been required at times speaks to the extreme issues of the situations and contexts that have given rise to those acts of sacrifice. A radical understanding of sacrifice acknowledges that while it is not desirable, it might unfortunately be necessary and that it can also be good.

Fantasy is a genre that proceeds at its maximum, it speaks in a mode of hyper-exaggeration. Thus, extreme acts of sacrifice intersect with the impossibility of fantasy to further realise the radical potential for speaking to both potential change and the problems such

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[73] Eagleton, p. 39.
[74] Mary Douglas, qtd. in Eagleton, front material.
[75] Eagleton, p. 8.

change may redress. That undesirable quality of sacrifice resonates with the utopian aspect of fantasy fiction. Both sacrifice and utopia work to imagine better worlds that transcend their own existence. For utopia this is best envisioned by what Fatima Viéra refers to as a 'process of transformation' in which 'the thought of a sustainable utopianism' becomes possible.[76] This image of utopia as a gradual, sustainable, and ceaseless process of improvement also looks a lot like the 'cycles of revolution' that Palmer-Patel describes.[77] Here a single utopian imagining is designed not as an end point to be achieved, but as a point of inspiration to be transcended. Sacrifice too, in its tragic nature, works to imagine a world in which, as a result of such an act, such acts will no longer be needed. This will be most specifically addressed in my first chapter.

Sacrifice lies at the heart of fantasy literature: from Sam and Frodo's ascent of Mount Doom in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, through Aslan's martyrdom on the Stone Table in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, to the birth of a religion following Kelsier's public death in Sanderson's *Mistborn.* Yet despite these pivotal narrative moments, the scholarship on such texts reflects a preoccupation with religion and only a tangential relationship with sacrifice through that religious lens. Lewis' work draws heavily and directly on a Christian tradition of sacrifice that is additionally underpinned by the presence of 'legendary creatures of classical Greek mythology' as well as elements of Arthurian romance within his characters.[78] Tolkien's work infuses aspects of the sacrifices of war into a narrative built from a blend of 'ancient Norse, Celtic, Finnish, and German mythologies'.[79] So acknowledgment of the presence of sacrifice can be seen; and beyond these seminal texts, wider representations of sacrificial traditions can be found.

[76] Fatima Viéra, 'The Concept of Utopia', in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3-27 (p. 22).

[77] Palmer-Patel, p. 161.

[78] William Indick, *Ancient Symbology in Fantasy Literature: A Psychological Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012), p. 1.

[79] Julie Pridmore, 'Beyond the Somme: war sacrifice and heroism in the writing of JRR Tolkien', *TricTrac: Journal of World Mythology and Folklore*, 9.1 (2016), 98-113; Indick, p. 1.

Weronica Laskiewicz touches on this in an article on religion in the genre and its relationship with myth.[80] She draws upon a blend of modern and contemporary texts by Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, C. S. Lewis, Guy Gavriel Kay, Celia S. Friedman, Jack Vance, Poul Anderson, Phillip Pullman, Dave Duncan, George R. R. Martin, and Brandon Sanderson; and in the discussion of seven of those authors' work, she explicitly pulls out instances of self-sacrifice that are pivotal to those texts. Yet, despite this underlying presence, her article does not define sacrifice and does not offer an explanation as to its prevalence or the role that it is playing. Instead, for Laskiewicz these sacrifices seem to serve only as religious markers that result from the mythic traditions being built upon.

This primary preoccupation with aspects of religion and question of faith can also be traced forwards into the more contemporary works of fantasy. Laura Feldt, in two 2016 articles, writes on the representation of religion in the *Harry Potter* series and Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.[81] Feldt focuses on the relationship between the representation of magic within the *Harry Potter* series and a religious reaction to the text and that representation. She notes that the series draws a distinction between the magic that is learned, and what she refers to as 'deep magic [that] appears only during special moments' that derives from love and loyalty.[82] In this religious discussion Feldt notes that some of the deepest magic derives from the 'trace of motherly love left on Harry by his mother's sacrificial death'.[83] However, the note of it as sacrificial does not continue through the article. There is an implicit connection between religion, the sacred, and this motherly sacrifice but those implications are not further explored. I mean this not as a critique of Feldt's work, for the goals of her article lie elsewhere. What is

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[80] Weronica Laszkiewicz, 'Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature", *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies*, 01.1 (2013), 24-36.

[81] Laura Feldt, 'Harry Potter and Contemporary Magic: Fantasy Literature, Popular Culture, and the Representation of Religion', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 31.1 (2016), 101-114 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2016.1109877>; Laura Feldt, 'Contemporary fantasy fiction and representations of religion: playing with reality, myth and magic in *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*', *Religion*, 46.4 (2016), 550-574 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2016.1212526>.

[82] Feldt, 'Harry Potter and Contemporary Magic', p. 106.

[83] Feldt, 'Harry Potter and Contemporary Magic', p. 106.

significant is the way that this tangential reference contributes to an overall picture of a genre where the "deepest" meaning is tied to sacrifice.

Despite this tradition of sacrifice that the existing scholarship hints towards, little scholarship has been devoted to tracing sacrifice in contemporary fantasy beyond the solely religious paradigm. While that paradigm is of course relevant, it does highlight the gap in the scholarship for approaching sacrifice from a broader perspective. All of these genre-based discussions of religion contain elements of sacrifice, but this scholarship fails to take up the more broad, and more radical approach to sacrifice that Eagleton and myself advocate. Filling this gap becomes particularly urgent as contemporary fantasy continues to emerge from this more religious tradition to build upon it in some instances, as can be seen with Kelsier's martyrdom, or move beyond it entirely as in cases such as the kinds of socially systemic acts of sacrifice that Jemisin's *Broken Earth* explores.

There are some works of scholarship on specific texts that more directly explore sacrifice in fantasy such as Nikolaus Wandinger's article exploring sacrifice in Harry Potter from a Girardian perspective, as well as a dissertation by Melody Sharon Green investigating sacrificial death as a motif in children's and adolescent fantasy.[84] The specifically Christian tradition of sacrifice is explored in work on C. S. Lewis by Jay Rudd, as well as by Curtis Gruenler.[85] Furthering this presence of sacrifice as a tangential theme in other readings of fantasy, there are also some chapters within larger fantasy research projects that look to the topic of sacrifice.[86]

[84] Nikolaus Wandinger, '"Sacrifice" in the Harry Potter Series from a Girardian Perspective', *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, 17 (2010), 27-51; Melody Sharon Green, *The Sacrifice of Sacrifice: The Motif of Sacrificial Death in the Children's and Adolescent Fantasy* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Illinois State University, 2008).

[85] Jay Rudd, 'Aslan's Sacrifice and the Doctrine of Atonement in "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe"', *Mythlore*, 23.2 (2001), 15-22; Curtis Gruenler, 'C. S. Lewis and René Girard on Desire, Conversion, and Myth', *Christianity in Literature*, 60.2 (2011), 247-265.

[86] Lykke Guanio-Uluru, *Ethics and Form in Fantasy Literature: Tolkien, Rowling and Meyer* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); William Indick, *Ancient Symbology in Fantasy Literature: A Psychological Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012); Hugh H. Davis, 'Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle': Aslan's Sacrifice in Adaptations of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in *Past Watchful Dragons*

The work that reaches most towards a broader approach to sacrifice as well as assessing the rhetorical and social role of sacrifice, albeit with a much narrowed focus, is Jeffrey Williams' article 'Dying to Save: Child Sacrifice in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* Series'. Williams makes a point of 'Defining and Contesting Sacrifice', explaining how *The Hunger Games* looks at sacrifice as a 'tool of political oppression' whereas *Harry Potter* presents 'positive instances of self-giving in the protection of the innocent'.[87] Williams' work from 2018, the same publication year as Eagleton's work, I think reflects an emerging moment in genre scholarship that is beginning to recognise this core component of sacrifice within the literature. While there is not as yet a long-form research project where sacrifice in fantasy is the primary pre-occupation of the work (rather than just being present as a topic), my thesis aims to contribute to the redressing of that gap.

Before progressing to the ways that this thesis will specifically engage with acts of sacrifice and the chapter structure of the argument, I need to affirm a remaining difference between Eagleton's approach and mine. By virtue of Eagleton's approach which looks to unpack the radical potential of the historical understanding of sacrifice, he must engage also with the areas of *ritual* sacrifice where acts of sacrifice play out in a prescribed and repeated way; this is particularly evident in the chapter 'Exchange and Excess' where Eagleton discusses sacrifice as giving. In this thesis I will not be discussing these more ritualised forms of sacrifice and instead place my emphasis on the social act, that is, an unprescribed act embedded in a society. Ritual sacrifice, especially when it involves giving, tends to present a representative offering of valued or symbolic gifts, whereas I want to place emphasis on the human identity

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Fantasy and Faith in the World of C. S. Lewis (Altadena, CA: Mythopoeic Press, 2007), pp. 67-78; Elizabeth Zanichkowsky, 'Paradise Contested: Sexuality and Sacrifice in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, in *Gender(ed) Identities: Critical Rereadings of Gender in Children's and Young Adult Literature* (New York, Routledge, 2017), pp. 183-197.

[87] Jeffrey Williams, 'Dying to Save: Child Sacrifice in the *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* Series', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 30.2 (2018), 75-86 (p. 76).

element at play in other acts of sacrifice. The distinction I am drawing here will be easier to grasp by unpacking the specific modes of sacrifice that this thesis will explore.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is built around four case-study chapters, each of which engages with a specific mode of sacrifice and then looks to one long-form fantasy text to explore the rhetorical role of that mode of sacrifice:

- Chapter One: Martyrdom in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008)
- Chapter Two: Self-Denial in Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files* series (2000-on-going)
- Chapter Three: Scapegoating in Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle* series (2009-2018)
- Chapter Four: Self-Erosion in N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017)

At a macro level these chapters exist within a dual axis rubric of opposing categories that work to categorise these types of sacrifice in terms of their function within society and their presence within the literature. This rubric also allows for a deeper discussion of the intersecting and overlapping natures of these types of sacrifice.

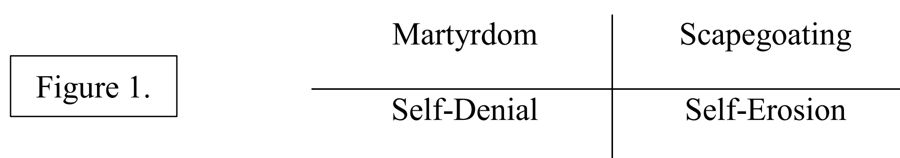

Figure 1 depicts the four types of sacrifice, the four chapters of this thesis. This figure should represent, via the dividing lines, the way each of these types of sacrifice is its own unique act, with a specific social function (in the world), and rhetorical function (in the text).[88]

[88] It should also convey nothing of a hierarchical nature.

Figure 2.

Act Motivation	
Individually Chosen	Societally Enforced
Martyrdom	*Scapegoating*
Self-Denial	*Self-Erosion*

Figure 2 adds to the diagram one of the macro axes that categorise these types of sacrifice: Act Motivation. This category reflects where the sacrifice comes from: an individual's personal choice to undertake an act of sacrifice themself; or the pressure, expectation, insistence, or even literal decision of a society (here understood to mean the majority and or the dominant social group or the group who occupy the position of power) to sacrifice individual(s) for the supposed sake of said society.

Figure 3.

Act Motivation	
Individually Chosen	Societally Enforced
Martyrdom *(Change)*	*Scapegoating* *(Reinforce)*
Self-Denial *(Change)*	*Self-Erosion* *(Reinforce)*

Figure 3 depicts that each of these modes of sacrifice is performed in an attempt to, respectively, change or reinforce the status quo. This is the social axis of the model. Here the instances of sacrifice chosen by the individual are those juxtaposed against the status quo and performed in the attempt to imagine a new world via that act in an attempt to bring about that imagined new world; as opposed to those instances of sacrifice enforced by the society which attempt to further the persistence of the world that both is and has been.

Figure 4.

		Act Motivation	
		Individually Chosen	Societally Enforced
Act Duration	Single-Act	*Martyrdom* (Change)	*Scapegoating* (Reinforce)
	On-Going	*Self-Denial* (Change)	*Self-Erosion* (Reinforce)

The second axis that operates in conjunction with Act Motivation is Act Duration. Figure 4 identifies the delineation between the instances of sacrifice that are single acts (martyrdom and scapegoating) and the types of sacrifice that are on-going in nature (self-denial and self-erosion). The single act types of sacrifice operate more immediately on larger macro levels of the world, society, or community. The on-going types of sacrifice more immediately explore the micro level of the self (hunger as self-denial, as explored in Chapter Two for instance, is about working to deny the monster and become the hero), but do so in a way that reflects back on the wider world, society, or community. They do so either by imagining a new world, society, or community through the example of a new self (to return to the example of self-denial as hunger, the denial of monstrous feeding imagines a world in which the monstrous qualities of a vampire might derive from their actions rather than from an innate and inevitable nature), or by critiquing the existing world, society, or community through the example of a lost self (self-erosion). Where Act Motivation is the social axis, this is the rhetorical one. It describes the presence and prevalence of an act of sacrifice within a literary text which, in turn, shapes the text's meaning-making through that device as well as the reader's relationship with it. In the diagram, the dividing lines represent the mirrored and opposite nature of these types of sacrifice along those two axes.

The single act types are moments within a text. These moments may be ruminated upon, or otherwise later mirrored and reflected, but they occur as single, significant moments around which the narrative can pivot. They represent scenes in which drastic change is made possible (martyrdom) or in which the problems of the persisting society are brought to the forefront of the narrative for critique (scapegoating). They represent a pivot in the narrative that draws clear demarcations of the text's position from that point forwards.

The on-going types of sacrifice exist throughout a text as a constant, or at least, repeated refrain. While there may be moments of single choices that, in looking at a given scene, could be viewed as a single act of sacrifice, exploring the character's journey through the entire narrative reveals that each of these moments exists on a continuum of sacrifices. As the character moves forwards through the time of the long-form narrative they encounter different people, experiences, and contexts and in so doing the social pressures shift in ways that allow for their ongoing acts of sacrifice to shift or add meaning by being differently juxtaposed. Self-denial, as the intersection of individually chosen and on-going sacrifice, represents a series of choices to act, live, and be differently. Acts of self-denial perform repeatedly at the boundaries of the dominant norm in the hopes of realising a shift in that norm and a re-defining of expectations. Self-erosion, at the intersection of societally enforced and on-going, represents the ways that the dominant, expected norm can impose self-reductive "choices" on an individual in ways that serve to perpetuate that dominant status quo. In this way both scapegoating and self-erosion pull the reader into a conversation about highlighting problematic social mechanisms and social narratives that a text seeks to critique, while martyrdom and self-denial place the emphasis on imagining a change away from those problematic elements; in essence, reinforcement and critique vs change and solution.

Each chapter presents a case-study of one of these modes of sacrifice where I look at a single long-form fantasy narrative. I chose the case-study model because no other literary

methodology affords the time and space in which long-form narratives of this nature can be thoroughly unpacked and analysed. It is also useful because my goal is not to set boundaries and limitations, but to provide tools. A case-study model in this context connects back to the fuzzy-set model of genre definition: to come to an understanding via the exploration of core examples rather than by establishing boundaries. In a study of *Modern Dystopian Fiction*, Adam Stock takes a similar approach and notes that '[o]ne advantage of [a fuzzy-set case-study approach] is that analysis is based in the interpretation of existing texts and can therefore adapt to include creative new uses of the genre, rather than attempting to outline effectively deontological categories into which new examples must be made to fit'.[89]

It should be acknowledged that for a genre-based study one might expect a broader survey of primary texts, however in this context a shallow survey of many examples would fail to demonstrate the levels of resonance and the function of these modes of sacrifice within long-form fantasy literature. In order to balance the lack of wider survey, I have tried to find both commonalities and deviations between my chosen case-study texts; commonalities so that the argument is well supported, and deviations so that the diversity might well speak to the reach of the argument.

As stated above, the chapters proceed from martyrdom, to self-denial, to scapegoating, to self-erosion; with the respective case-study texts of Sanderson's *Mistborn*, Butcher's *Dresden Files*, Brett's *Demon Cycle*, and Jemisin's *Broken Earth*. All of these are long-form fantasy narratives, but with interesting variation in their approaches in structure. Sanderson and Jemisin's works are examples of the classic fantasy trilogy with events taking place over multiple years.[90] Brett's *Demon Cycle* consists of five main novels and three interspersed novellas. Butcher's series is currently seventeen novels and is still being written. All of my

[89] Adam Stock, *Modern Dystopian Fiction and Political Thought: Narratives of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 7.

[90] It is worth noting that the *Mistborn* trilogy has a sequel series that takes place three hundred years after the first, and that this will play a role in Chapter One: Martyrdom.

chosen texts are established American authors, Sanderson and Butcher having had texts as number one New York Times bestsellers, and Jemisin's *Broken Earth* making history in multiple ways with its multiple Hugo Best Novel Award wins. The choice of American voices here comes from the desire to test this analysis amongst the currently dominant voices within the genre which remains (for now) decisively American. This choice to focus on four American writers also contextually locates these texts in similar cultural geography. That shared space further allows for juxtaposition, comparison, and contrast between both the texts and the chapters of this thesis.

Sanderson, Butcher, and Brett are all white men, who are at the moment representative of the dominant voices within the genre and readership. Jemisin is a woman of colour and the inclusion of her work is not indicative of a token gesture towards diversity and inclusion but rather as a recognition of the way that writers and readers of colour and non-male genders have always been a part of the genre and how that fact is now finally gaining wider and wider recognition.[91] All of these texts present complex worlds and narratives that offer the opportunity for detailed analysis, with each text asking key questions of assumed social norms and working to provide alternative imaginings of social and individual existence. Considering the wide readership of each of these texts, their social relevance is only deepened.

Another key point of connection between my case-study text is that the chosen works of Jemisin, Sanderson, and Brett are all immersive fantasies. They present fully formed secondary worlds where the reader 'must sit in the heads of the protagonists, accepting what they know as the world, interpreting it through what they notice, and through what they do not'.[92] In order for the immersive narrative to achieve that quality of immersion (and then make use of the

[91] In Chapter Four I will unpack some of Helen Young's work on how entrenched habits of whiteness have obscured the works, roles, presence, and significance of various marginalised communities within the fantasy genre. I would be inclined to suggest that should a PhD thesis of this kind be carried out even only ten years in the future, the list of primary sources designed to be representative of contemporarily dominant voices will be far more diverse.

[92] Mendlesohn, p. 59.

rhetorical effects such an immersion makes possible), Mendlesohn asserts that the reader must entirely suspend their disbelief: the reader must be positioned such that the world is protected from 'any suggestion that it is not real'.[93] Butcher's *Dresden Files* does construct an immersive world in the sense of fully-formed rules of the impossible that shape how that world functions, however it is set in contemporary Chicago. While the world Butcher works to construct is immersive in nature, the actual narrative structure of each novel, and indeed of the series as a whole, fits more closely with an intrusion fantasy where the impossible interrupts the normal and the known to require change and re-perception.

In the *Dresden Files*, all of the magic and its associated intrusions into Chicago are just as intrusive and impossible for the reader as they would be for the innocent and unaware mundane inhabitants of the city that Harry Dresden protects. However, because we are positioned through Harry's perspective, and because he is a wizard, the unknown is known to him. He is immersed in the impossible, and even when something unknown does arrive on the scene it is always possible for Harry to find the information he needs to understand and resolve the intrusion. In this way the narrative blends the modes of the intrusion and the immersive, very deeply intruding into the reader's established perceptions of reality and inviting them to accept (in the mode of the immersive) that it has always already been strange and impossible and that their assumptions of normality are precisely what puts them at risk and in stagnation.

Ultimately the key point of connection is that each of these texts affords the opportunity to explore an act of sacrifice in such a way that models the rhetorical function of that particular mode of sacrifice which in turn works to help unpack what each of these long-form fantasy narratives are working to communicate.

Sanderson's *Mistborn* presents a world of racial oppression, and Chapter One looks to a moment of martyrdom in the first book that juxtaposes the dominant social narrative and

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[93] Mendlesohn, p. 59.

becomes a pivot point for shifting away from the old world and moving forwards into a new one. This text most directly engages with how radical acts of sacrifice contain that 'power for good' and drive towards making social change possible.[94] This chapter looks to how the extreme nature of martyrdom resonates with the hyper-exaggeration of fantasy fiction's vertical complexity to most emphatically communicate the core themes and ideas of the text. While Sanderson is Mormon, it would be reductive to read *The Final Empire* and its martyrdom as simply a Christ allegory, not only due to contemporary fantasy's rejection of direct allegory, but also because Sanderson works hard across his novels to depict a range of perspectives and beliefs such that his work is not a vector for disseminating his own beliefs. Inevitably, certain resonances and vocabularies may well be influenced by Sanderson's own personal theological perspective, but that this does not impact on the social reading of the act of sacrifice as a force of change.

In Chapter Two my focus turns to the on-going individually chosen mode of sacrifice, self-denial and looks closely at a side character in Butcher's *Dresden Files*. Thomas' journey through his relationship with, and denial of, his monstrous, vampiric hunger explores a key theme of defining the self rather than being limited by the world's expectations and assumptions. Where Chapter One examines a single moment as a lynchpin for the text and considers the ramifications that ripple outwards from that moment (both in the world of the text and for the reader), Chapter Two speaks more broadly of how such on-going acts of sacrifice modulate over time in response to individual perception and shifting context, even if the core nature of that sacrifice remains the same.

Chapters Three and Four flip from the individually chosen motivations that bring change, to the acts of sacrifice that are societally enforced. In a mirror to Chapter One, the discussion of Brett's *Demon Cycle* looks primarily at how a single moment of scapegoating can work to

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[94] Mary Douglas, qtd. in Eagleton, front material.

shape a world, a person, and a narrative. It is also more complex in a way than the case-study of martyrdom as where Sanderson's portrayal of martyrdom is one where the act of sacrifice succeeds, Brett instead deliberately prevents the act of scapegoating from fully resolving. In this way the lead up to that moment still, textually, performs the function of an act of scapegoating by raising issues of society for critique, but through the subversion creates a space for the text to speak further and differently on those topics. Brett also works to critique scapegoating, and in order to achieve that fantasy-utopia drive towards the eucatastrophe, resolves his narrative with a hopeful pivot point between old and new worlds via a martyrdom that overcomes a foundational act of scapegoating from the first novel in the series.

Jemisin's text *Broken Earth* is the most complex in terms of both narrative structure and use of prose. It is the final chapter of this thesis because the complexity of it relies on the understandings built through the previous three chapters, and also because it affords the opportunity for further reflection back upon those chapters. The self-erosion in Jemisin's text resonates subtly with acts of self-denial, both so similar but with drastically different outcomes. *Broken Earth* also presents key instances of martyrdom and scapegoating, thus further resonating back with previous chapters and allowing for a strong emphasis on the rhetorical function and usefulness of each of these models in textual analysis of long-form fantasy narratives.

The Fifth Season is explicitly dedicated to *'all those who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question*'.[95] As such, the context of the novel and identity of the author as a woman of colour who in her professional life has encountered direct and public racism and hatred of her identity, are for this chapter extremely relevant. Where a reading of Sanderson's text from a Mormon perspective would reduce the text in an unhelpful manner to that one allegorical reading, in contrast it would be reductive and disingenuous to engage with

[95] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, front material.

Jemisin's text without giving primacy to the context with which she has explicitly framed the text. Jemisin's lived experience directly informs and shapes *The Broken Earth* in a way that makes it a seminal and vital text of the twenty-first century. [96]

Each of these case studies is underpinned by an exploration of the relationship between the macro level of society and the micro level of the individual; as well as by the principle that affirmation of agency brings change while the imposition of conformity sustains the status quo. All of these acts of sacrifice, and all of these texts are, in some way, concerned with stasis and change.

Looking to acts of sacrifice within long-form narrative fantasy is an exercise in looking for handles on these expansive and layered narratives. My proposal is that if one approaches these acts of sacrifice first armed with a social understanding of these acts, and then with a literary lens—with a drive to unpack fictional positioning, relationship of sign and symbol, and of image and metaphor—then one will begin to hear what the text is trying to communicate.

And so, we ask questions: what is being given up? And by whom? And for what purpose? In answering these questions, I can analyse and understand the socially constructed world, as well as the relationship between the micro of the characters and the macro of the status quo and dominant social group. Looking to the instances of sacrifice affords a firm handle by which even long-form narratives can be grasped and manipulated. This is possible because acts of sacrifice "speak"; they are performative in nature and enacting one instantiates an identity and an envisioned, desired world. In this way fantasy texts, so deeply concerned with change and

[96] To point to one prominent and confronting example, during the time of the 2014 Hugo award nominations, N. K. Jemisin was publicly derided by author Theodore Beale as a "half-savage" and as such should not deserve award recognition. As the Hugo nominations are community submitted, this was a direct attempt to further marginalize Jemisin and further entrench Beale's perception of the genre as white and male. Fortunately, Beale was expelled from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Association and Jemisin went on to make history with her consecutive best novel wins, thereby proving that Beale's assumed norm of widespread bigotry was in fact a misperception of the genre community on his part.

stasis, are able to communicate their ideas with the reader. Thus, sacrifice becomes a language of fantasy.

Chapter One: Martyrdom

> "Lord Kelsier fought for us today! He slew an immortal inquisitor!"
>
> The crowd grumbled in assent.
>
> "But then he died!" someone yelled.
>
> Silence.
>
> "And what did we do to help him?" [...] "Many of us were there—thousands of us. Did we help? No! We waited and watched, even as he fought for us. We stood dumbly and let him fall. We watched him die!" [...]
>
> "Will we let him down again?"
>
> "No!" came the reply. [...]
>
> There was a pocket of light in the distance. Like ... torches, lit in the mists. Another one appeared to the east, near a skaa slum. A third appeared. Then a fourth. In a matter of moments, it seemed like the entire city was glowing.[1]
>
> - *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, Brandon Sanderson

> [M]artyrdom is what martyrdom does; a narrative that creates or maintains group identity, by holding up an ideal representative of the community, who chose to or is made to die for its values.[2]
>
> - Paul Middleton

Under the rubric of this thesis, martyrdom is an individually chosen, single act of sacrifice. It occurs in one moment, though it may have on-going effects, and is undertaken willingly and deliberately. Emma Anderson notes that '[v]olition is integral to martyrdom. To be a martyr, an individual must consciously and courageously accept danger and, ultimately, death.'[3] This choice, where an individual gives up their life in an attempt to bring about change in the world, is a powerful value statement. The actor chooses to give up everything they have, and in doing

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[1] Brandon Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, (London: Gollancz, 2009), pp. 581-582.

[2] Paul Middleton, 'What is Martyrdom?', *Mortality*, 19.2 (2014), 117-133 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2014.894013>, p.130.

[3] Emma Anderson, *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 8.

so shows to all who witness that their ideology is of more value than their life. It takes a cause and makes it sacred, significant, and powerful. In Brandon Sanderson's *The Final Empire* the climax of the novel sees Kelsier dying for his oppressed people in a way that challenges the racial hegemony and imagines a new world free of that oppression. His choice to die, his martyrdom and the narrative that spreads from it, begins a process of systemic social change.

Acts of sacrifice are born of a dissatisfaction with the status quo and so are also acts that imagine a better future. They are acts of hope that things will not remain as they are now. Martyrdom, as it requires death, can be critiqued as horrific and tragic. But a radical view of sacrifice, such as proposed by Terry Eagleton, defends such tragic and extreme acts and argues that these should not be condemned but rather recognised for the way that they speak to the tragic and extreme circumstances that might call for an act of martyrdom. Though acts of sacrifice are drastic and undesirable, by imagining a better world they also seek their own end. To continue to sacrifice and act in protest to a problematic status quo is to move forwards in the utopian mode of gradual stages of social betterment. Martyrdom imagines a world in which sacrifice no longer exists. Kelsier's death imagines a world free of slavery and racial hierarchy.

As a mechanism of engaging with the world, sacrifice is one that recognises its own problematic nature, but proceeds under that self-awareness to demand recognition of the problematic nature of the world. As the old world fades away, replaced by a new, better one, so too does sacrifice become a thing of the past, replaced instead by a self-giving not of life, but of love. Eagleton states that '[t]he tragedy of the martyr is not simply that she dies, but that her death should be required in the first place. Martyrdom testifies to the need to change the conditions that make it essential. […] There would be no call for such figures in a just society'.[4] This extreme and tragic act must be understood as the moment "in between" as it first testifies to the problematic conditions of the past, and then also performs an ideology of a possible

[4] Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 92.

future. Through this thesis each case study will explore the two functional axes of an act of sacrifice: its role within society and its role as a rhetorical device within the literature. *The Final Empire* puts into action martyrdom's most powerful social function: providing a shared cultural memory around which a communal identity can be formed. The rhetorical function of this act of sacrifice is as a rupture to stagnant continuity, and as a pivot point: the moment in between worlds.

I am particularly interested in the way that Eagleton describes martyrdom as "testifying" to the need for change.[5] Not only does this refer to the way that martyrdom as an act of sacrifice drives towards change, but its capacity to "testify" hints towards the voice of martyrdom. Martyrdom testifies the truth of the problematic status quo. It very literally and emphatically speaks truth to power. Starting this thesis by looking at martyrdom will establish the foundations of how not only acts of sacrifice speak, but how these fantasy texts use those acts of sacrifice to testify to their own truths, and to speak directly and emphatically to the reader in the language of costs and value statements.

Immersive fantasy texts that use acts of martyrdom achieve a resonance that amplifies their themes and ideas. This occurs due to the structural similarities between the meaning-making of martyrdom as a narrative and the meaning-making of literature as a performative communicator. That structural overlap resonates further still because both fantasy literature and martyrdom can be understood as processes of myth-making. Brian Attebery regards fantasy as a contemporary myth-making activity, describing myth as 'any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorises belief'.[6] Similarly, in her work discussing the repetition of martyrdom as providing foundational narratives for shared identities, Elizabeth Castelli describes such an act as "myth making", stating that '[m]yth is the product of collective

[5] Eagleton, p. 92.

[6] Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Re-Making of Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 2.

imagination, a compelling answer to urgent questions about foundations and identities'.[7] As martyrdom is an act of myth-building, it therefore seeks precisely those 'compelling answers'. Jane Tompkins states that every fantastic text 'is engaged in solving a problem or set of problems specific to the time in which it was written'.[8] Thus, when martyrdom occurs within fantasy literature, it is myth-making within myth-making and those acts resonate with each other for strong and clear performative impact. As a narrative convergence point, martyrdom not only performs the text's ideas most strongly and explicitly for the reader, but also acts as a dense collection of signs and symbols for interpretation and analysis. The moment of an act of martyrdom is the point at which the narrative threads converge from disparate strands into a clear entwined statement.

I am describing martyrdom as a single-act of sacrifice. This is distinguished from the on-going acts of sacrifice that Chapters Two and Four examine. What this means for the case-study of this chapter, is that the analysis will focus in on the moment of that single-act. *Mistborn* is a trilogy, and meets the criteria for long-form fantasy narrative; especially when considering the follow up series set some three hundred years later. While it may seem counter-intuitive to look almost exclusively at one narrative moment in a long-form text, unpacking martyrdom and how it functions will reveal that the moment of Kelsier's sacrifice is a critical pivot point in the narrative from which core thematic elements ripple both backwards and forwards through the text.

Whether or not a text requires martyrdom depends on the scale of social change it seeks to explore; the scale of the issue engaged with; or the scale of power built into the thinning status quo. Not all immersive fantasies will have martyrdom. But those that do, utilise it to emphasise and enforce the scale and importance of the ideas they are attempting to

[7] Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 30.

[8] Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 38.

communicate by testifying to the significant problems of the depicted world that have made martyrdom a necessity. The nature of martyrdom is to come from 'situations of opposition and persecution'.[9] It provides a narrative of rebellion, revolution, change. It is about choice, agency, and identity. As such it appears in texts where precisely these details are the ones at stake.

Defining Martyrdom

The act of giving up one's life is one of the most extreme acts of sacrifice in that it is final, definite, and complete. Historically, definitions of what (or whom) is or is not a martyr have been extremely specific and codified within religious traditions. They tend to revolve around a finite question of "identifying" the martyr. The core definition of martyrdom as 'death for a cause' can be fairly universally agreed upon.[10] But historical definitions also included elements such as refusing to 'act in a way that violated the tenets of their faith';[11] an active and pronounced declaration of faith in the moment of death; as well as notable facets of 'death', 'suffering', 'free choice', 'staging', and 'self-control'.[12] Emma Anderson, in *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs* notes that the Catholic definition of martyrdom relies upon a context where the martyr's killers were motivated by anti-Christian reasons. But this creates a paradigm under which non-Christian martyrdom is impossible.

Whilst these limitations cannot hold under a global and diverse view of the world, the historical emphasis on these specific criteria makes sense. Particularly in the arena of religion, the stakes of martyr status are high because there is a legitimising (and also at times an ostracising) effect to making someone a martyr (and perhaps someone else not a martyr). Such

[9] Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide & Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 75.
[10] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide*, p.1.
[11] Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 50.
[12] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors,* p. 63.

figures, and the role they perform, establish and maintain shared identity and power structures. Acts of martyrdom create martyr narratives around which groups can unify in ways that aid in the persistence of that shared identity.

For an act of martyrdom, lasting martyrdom is not made by just the person or by the act in and of itself. In the end, '[m]artyrs require martyr narratives'.[13] The story that is told and repeated after a martyr's death is what brings change to a society or world. Through juxtaposition, that testifying of truth to power, the narrative of the martyr challenges and potentially displaces the dominant socio-cultural narrative. As Eagleton notes, '[w]hat is revolutionary about the death of Jesus is […] that it lays bare the barbarism of the ruling powers'.[14] Martyr narratives establish collective memories that become foundational narratives for group identities. This is the role an act of martyrdom plays in society. In literature, looking to the deliberately constructed in-between-worlds moment of the act itself affords the opportunity to understand both past and future social narratives in relation to that act of sacrifice.

Martyrdom as an act has clearly delineated components that work towards the overall meaning made by the act: the person who undertakes the act of martyrdom, the act itself, the witnesses to the act, and the reception and re-telling of the narrative of that moment. Especially in literature, each of these components offers an opportunity for symbolic and thematic interpretation in order to build to a layered understanding of the impact and affect of such an act. The remainder of this chapter will look in turn to each of those components of martyrdom, moving between theory and text, in order to examine how the construction of each element within *The Final Empire* works to build the overall resonant meaning of the text.

[13] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide*, p. 18.
[14] Eagleton, p. 26.

The Final Empire—Kelsier, and the martyr narrative of 'The Survivor'

The world of Scadrial (where *Mistborn* is set) is a world oppressed. The Lord Ruler has dictated over this land for one thousand years. His church (The Steel Ministry), with its obligators (bureaucrats) and Steel Inquisitors (feared enforcers with iron spikes for eyes), maintains a status quo in which the nobles (the text uses this term as a racial category) rule over the skaa who work plantations and factories. One key distinction between the nobles and the skaa is that some of the nobles have access to a magic system called Allomancy. Allomancy manifests along genetic lines of inheritance and so if a noble sires a child with a skaa, they are required by the Lord Ruler to terminate the pregnant skaa lest the power be passed on into the skaa population. A key driver of the social critique of this series, especially in the first novel that engages with this long-established status quo, is that there exist some illegal skaa "half-breeds" who wield this inherited Allomancy. This adds layers to the racial othering taking place in the novel by further marginalising their positionality (not just skaa, but illegal half-breed skaa), whilst also providing a key symbol for the flaws in the Lord Ruler's discriminatory regime that suggest it is ultimately unsustainable.

Sanderson's *The Final Empire*, explores a narrative of rebellion against this racial oppression. Protagonist Vin is drawn into a group of skaa thieves led by Kelsier, who together begin a rebellion that ends in the death of the Lord Ruler and steps towards a more open and equal society. The rebellion reaches a tipping point in a climactic scene wherein Kelsier, the face and leader of this rebellion, publicly fights and dies for his cause. His act of sacrifice, and the narrative that spreads amongst the skaa following his death, make him a martyr and drive the rebellion on to success. In that scene of sacrifice the layers of the narrative converge and the text makes its core ideologies most manifest. Eagleton builds on scholarship about how martyrdom speaks, turning an act into narrative meaning:

> Robin Young speaks of martyrs as being like letters meant to be read by the community and the world. To be martyred is to allow one's death to be taken into public ownership, undergoing a form of semiosis in which one's body is converted into a sign. The act of dying becomes an eloquent piece of discourse, as the flesh speaks more persuasively than any voice.[15]

The moment of martyrdom in the text, as the reader witnesses the act of sacrifice, speaks to the reader. They are invited into the community to participate the shared ownership of that moment and by crafting that sense of belonging the text works to align the reader with its ideological perspective.

The story of Kelsier is the story of 'The Survivor'. The Survivor of the Pits of Hathsin, becomes the Survivor whom the immortal Lord Ruler could not kill, who in turn becomes the founding symbol for the Church of the Survivor and eventually the religion of Survivorism. The skaa who witness Kelsier's act of sacrifice, and his apparent resurrection, create, share, and repeat that narrative of survival. For an oppressed people, this act of myth-making is a pivotal moment that creates a shared cultural memory through which the skaa are able to redefine themselves and create a new cultural identity. In the immersive narrative structure Kelsier's act of sacrifice becomes the rhetorical hinge between two worlds. His performance as the Survivor re-frames the limited, marginalised past of the skaa, and creates a platform from which a new world, a free and equal world, can be envisioned for the first time.

Fantasy literature operates in a myth-like structure of 'vertical complexity' where it relies on layers and repetitions of symbols, ideas, and conflicts to approach an idea from as many angles as possible, to make that idea as surface as possible.[16] In much the same way, 'martyrologies are essentially conflict stories operating on many levels'.[17] In his moment of

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[15] Eagleton, p. 91.

[16] Brian Attebery, 'Structuralism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 81-90 (p. 86).

[17] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide*, p. 15.

sacrifice Kelsier is literally a skaa standing up to his oppressors, while his actions represent what the skaa populace at large needs to do; simultaneously, from the perspective of the oppressors, he is a symbol of their transgressions (as a bastard half-breed child) that suggests their rule is fallible. In fantasy, the already symbolically layered fabric of the world and the text becomes even further layered in a moment of martyrdom and it is that resonance that allows this moment to speak so persuasively. The critique of hegemonic racial oppression in *The Final Empire* is brought into sharp focus in this moment of martyrdom.

The scene of Kelsier's sacrifice opens with a group of skaa, including some members of Kelsier's crew (leaders of the rebellion) having been rounded up and paraded through the city in cages on the way to the execution square. It says much about the Lord Ruler's regime that there is a well-established and normal "execution square." Crowds of skaa are required to gather for the execution. The Lord Ruler intends this act of scapegoating to deal a huge blow to the skaa rebellion.[18] Earlier in the novel, at a similar execution, Kelsier made his crew watch and not interfere to reinforce the gravity and importance of their rebellion. This scene resonates back but subverts the earlier one.

Here protagonist Vin cannot stand by and watch, and her influence on Kelsier drives him to act. He intends to rush in, cause chaos by attacking the guards, and create an opening for some of his crew to set the prisoners free. Kelsier plans on being the last to get away. This is a reasonable course of action. As a mistborn (a powerful Allomancer), he is the most capable of fleeing. However, a Steel Inquisitor shows up. In-world history and first-hand experience for the characters of fighting Inquisitors suggest that they are unstoppable. Kelsier however, in this instance prevails and before the crowd of onlooking, oppressed skaa kills the supposedly infallible symbol of the Lord Ruler's power. However, then the functionally immortal, "Sliver

[18] Scapegoating performs a socially preservative function that is opposite to martyrdom and will be addressed in Chapter Three.

of Infinity. […] Piece of God Himself", the Lord Ruler arrives.[19] Kelsier in this moment of apparent hopelessness speaks a line that will become core to the martyr narrative that will follow his death: "I represent that thing you've *never* been able to kill, no matter how hard you try. I am hope."[20]

In response The Lord Ruler 'rip[s] one of the spears from his own body, then slam[s] it down through Kelsier's chest', declaring to his inquisitors and the onlooking skaa '[l]et the executions begin'.[21] As all seems hopeless—the rebellion quashed, people executed—during that night Kelsier appears to skaa throughout the city, apparently resurrected and proving that hope, in fact, cannot be killed. This triggers the rebellion that leads to the overthrowing of the tyrannical regime. As a result of his actions, the revolution begins, Vin is driven to overthrow the Lord Ruler, the road towards a new status quo of equality is begun, and a new religion (Survivorism) is born.

The Components of Martyrdom: The Actor

Of the components of martyrdom, the actor is arguably the least important. Successful martyr narratives persist and the future witnesses who re-tell that narrative will have no direct connection to the actor. The martyr narratives themselves are also subject to potential change through time and translation. These factors make it very difficult (if not impossible) to truly know who the actor was, what they believed in, how they died, and what they died for. Even amongst the gospels there is variation on the account of Jesus Christ, and yet those accounts structure a shared religious identity.

In literature however, where the reader's encounter with the actor is immediate and

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[19] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 82.
[20] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 573.
[21] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 573.

repeatable, spending some time on who that character is, their social positioning, their ideologies, and the symbols and images associated with them is worthwhile. With the vertically complex structure of fantasy texts the symbols of the martyr play a key role in the construction and comprehension of the martyr narrative that is presented for the reader to witness.

To draw briefly towards Kelsier, he was a selfish, egotistical, murderer. And yet it is equally true that his martyrdom inspires a revolution that is the first step towards freedom from a millennium of oppression as well as equality amongst divided peoples; to say nothing of the religion that emerges in response to his death that itself goes on to inspire yet more people to do good for each other and the world at large. The varied inhabitants of the world of *Mistborn*, the oppressed people, Kelsier's friends, his brother, those future inheritors of a new religion, ultimately conclude that Kelsier was a good man. Even as a thief and a murderer, a liar, a bastard, a man who would punch God in the face to get what he wants, at the heart of it all the way that he chose to die did good for the world.

Much of the historical scholarship on martyrdom exhibits, at least implicitly, a focus on criteria for who can and cannot be a martyr. However, this only leads to judgements that tell us very little that is useful about martyrdom (except for perhaps offering us insight into those making the judgements). Lacey Baldwin Smith, in his *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World*, can clearly see the influence and importance of martyr figures in the history of the Western world. However, the way that Smith writes about the martyr figures in his book reveals a strange, judgemental focus on the person who is made a martyr. In the first chapter addressing Socrates, widely regarded as the first martyr figure, Smith describes Socrates as 'disturbingly egotistical', and of martyrs in general that 'we must be dealing with intensely disturbed men and women, devoured by obsessions, seeking beatification, and constructing for themselves a self-defined and self-achieved immortality'.[22]

[22] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors,* p. 36; p. 16.

These judgements seem to me entirely unhelpful. Even if someone like Socrates is egotistical and their act of sacrifice is intended to be self-serving, does that in any way alter the lasting impact it has upon the world and upon those who witness it?

You could of course, as I get the impression Smith may be inclined to do, judge a martyr as lacking, and perhaps as not being deserving of the label as a result. But much as with genres, the question of whether someone, or something, does or does not fit a label is ultimately the least interesting question. The far more nuanced and engaging question lies in what that someone, or something, does, represents, or means. By starting with the statement that Kelsier was a martyr, that allows the discussion to then in turn examine the way his martyr narrative is constructed. Questions can be asked about the ways his life is represented, and by whom and for what purpose it is represented in that way. Instead of the focus on one person, that person becomes a window into a society, a culture, a perspective on the world.

An understanding of Kelsier the person shapes how the reader receives the mythologised figure of "the Survivor". In taking up this role, the symbols of the Survivor (the scarred arms, the resurrection, the man who walks the mists unafraid) are all involved in the reclamation and re-framing of key parts of the established skaa cultural narrative. Much as martyrdom links and moves between an old world and a new one, Kelsier's martyrdom marks a transition between the murderer and the saviour.

In the first two thirds of the novel, Kelsier is largely a self-important man, someone who Vin eventually calls out: "You're no skaa—you're just noblemen without titles".[23] She highlights the hypocrisy in the man who fights for the skaa but has "full meals and nightcaps around the table with [his] friends" every night instead of ever having "knelt, starving, wishing you had the courage to knife the crew member beside you just so you could take his crust of

[23] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 517.

bread".[24] The structure of the novel's perspectives positions the reader to mostly watch Kelsier from the outside rather than being immersed in his world view. Vin is the protagonist, not Kelsier; and so the text aligns the reader with her recognition of the nobles' humanity. For much of the novel Kelsier embodies an opposing viewpoint. He aims to invert the existing power structures and subjugate the nobles under the skaa in an eye for an eye kind of philosophy.

In the scene of martyrdom, as the world and Kelsier shift, Kelsier is persuaded by Vin to save and trust a noble named Elend. Kelsier's yielding to Vin's perspective is the vertical complexity in action; it is the myth being layered into meaning. Kelsier does not just see value in Elend, he also validates Vin's voice. As he gives his life, this man shaped by slavery, fear, and racism chooses to forgive and trust this (actually innocent albeit privileged) representative of his oppressors. This layering means that when Kelsier gives his life he does so not for everything he has fought for through novel. Instead he attempts to use his death to realise Vin's dream. Thus, the direction of the world (and novels) shifts. His act of sacrifice becomes a narrative hinge that pivots the old world of oppression away from that status quo towards a new world of equality instead of falling into an inverted mirror of the world before.

Before a crowd of oppressed people, he simultaneously fights the symbol of his oppression (the inquisitor) and entrusts a noble (who is by all appearances also an oppressor) to help get the skaa to safety. Kelsier's actions reinforce the idea that just as the skaa cannot justifiably be reduced to one thing, neither should the nobles. Between who he fights and who he trusts Kelsier draws a distinction between the monster and the man; suggesting that, much as Kelsier himself can change, so too can the nobles. Where *The Final Empire* (book one) is marked by assassinations in the night, *The Well of Ascension* (book two) contains democratic debate, political discourse and representation, and steps towards equality free of oppression.

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[24] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 517.

The characters in *Mistborn* often have their nature represented in and emphasised by their relationship with the magic of the world. Allomancy functions symbolically in the text both in general as a magic about reaching inside oneself for the strength to change the world, but also specifically in its manifestations. Breeze the Soother can push on people's emotions to dampen them, making him a great manipulator of people. However, those emotions always eventually resurface just as his own hidden altruism drives him from behind his uncaring mask. Those with Allomantic abilities ingest specific metals and "burn" them internally to activate powers.

Kelsier is tied to steel. Burning steel allows one to push metal away from oneself or to push oneself away from metal. Iron is steel's opposite and allows for the pulling on metals in the same way. This is an innate part of who he is and how he interacts with the world, and in his moment of martyrdom these metals take on their most explicitly symbolic role in defining who Kelsier is as a martyr: the manipulator, the man pulling on strings to alter beliefs and perception, the man in control.

> The Inquisitor cursed quietly as it deflected the swarming bits of metal. Kelsier, however, just used the Inquisitor's own Pushes against it, Pulling each item back, whipping them around at the creature. The Inquisitor blasted outward, Pushing against all the items at once, and Kelsier let them go. As soon as the Inquisitor stopped Pushing, however, Kelsier Pulled his weapons back. […] Kelsier lurched back and forth in the air, his feet never touching the ground. Bits of metal buzzed around him, responding to his Pushes and Pulls. He controlled them with such skill, one would have thought they were living things. […] This is his specialty—*Pushing and Pulling with expert control*.[25]

The witnesses see that he is in control, that he has a plan, that he is going to win. The scene in general is charged with this frenetic energy, but here, in particular, Kelsier appears to fly. He

[25] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 568.

does not do so smoothly, but "lurches" up and down. It is irregular, and messy, but he also does not drop to the ground. This is the image he embodies for his rebellion and the path towards a better world.

Sanderson's choice of push and pull as terminology is telling. These are not verbs of inaction or even of natural forces, but rather verbs of effort and choice and direction; and in this moment of awkward but astonishing flight, the pushes and pulls that sustain him are actions denying the inertia of gravity that would keep things grounded and the same. In front of a thousand people whose histories, both generational and personal, are defined by a stagnant social inertia, by being grounded by punishment and failure, Kelsier models again and again a drive to push back up against that force that would keep you down. Through this act, he creates of himself a symbol, and instils this narrative of un-killable hope. His death and resurrection fuel a call to action and demand that people push back and find their own steel within themselves.

Kelsier is a particularly interesting case-study for martyrdom because he clearly understands that what the skaa people need is a unifying narrative. By the fact that he had put in place provisions to convince the skaa he had been resurrected once he died, the reader is shown that dying was always a part of the plan. While Kelsier may not have planned to die on the particular day that he does, it becomes clear that he had always already chosen to die, that he understood that acts of thievery and murder were not going to overthrow a thousand years of entrenched systemic oppression. As this chapter will come to unpack, a new narrative was needed, one that could challenge the supposedly inevitable and permanent power of the "Final Empire".

It is crucial to Kelsier's martyrdom that he is killed and resurrected. Kelsier's defeat of the Inquisitor by its own weapon inspires hope and shows that the status quo is not inviolable. In turn, Kelsier's own death (by the spear used in a skaa rebel's failed attempt at killing the

Lord Ruler) sets a new expectation: a person alone cannot kill the Lord Ruler. It appears to establish that rebellion and dreams of equality are in fact hopeless. But this expectation is only established to afford greater meaning to the subversion of it. Kelsier the Survivor's "not-dying" co-opts the power of the "immortal" Lord Ruler. However, it is also, crucially, thematically different: where the Lord Ruler is immortal and being impaled by the spear does not kill him; Kelsier, dies by that spear but then comes back. He "survives".

When Kelsier is resurrected (or at least appears to be so to the skaa populace) he proves the Lord Ruler's power, much like the Inquisitor's, to be false and fallible. It is this that creates a narrative for the skaa: the future lies in the hands of the people, they cannot be stopped, and they must all push back. In this novel, the presentation of Kelsier as "The Survivor" shapes the reception and repetition of his act of sacrifice. That he is "the one who survives", both in his past, and in the moment of martyrdom, is what allows the suffering of the skaa to be re-written as endurance, strength, and un-killable hope.

The Components of Martyrdom: The Act

The next component of martyrdom, after the person themself, is the act itself: how did they die? One could argue that the details of the act hold no real importance. As with the actor, due to the way that martyrs are made via narrative after their death, the details of the act could be altered, forgotten, or even entirely invented. However, when "invented", the details and particulars of an act of martyrdom become key symbols in the reception and impact of that narrative. Jesus' martyrdom, as a narrative, would shift in meaning without the cross or the crown of thorns for instance. The Pulitzer winning photo depicting the peaceful protest of Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức shows an act of martyrdom marked and emphasised by his

silent immolation, his closed eyes, and unyielding lotus position.[26] As with a literary narrative, the specific details give shape and nuance to the meaning.

In the case of martyrdom Droge and Tabor identify five key facets that "typically" shape an act of sacrifice as an act of martyrdom:

1. [T]hey reflect situations of opposition and persecution.
2. [T]he choice to die, which these individuals make, is viewed by the authors as necessary, noble, and heroic.
3. [T]hese individuals are often eager to die; indeed, in several cases they end up directly *killing themselves*.
4. [T]here is often the idea of vicarious benefit resulting from their suffering and death.
5. [T]he expectation of vindication and reward beyond death, more often than not, is a prime motivation for the choice of death.[27] [numbered list my addition]

This list showcases the nuances of martyrdom. For instance, while martyrdom is a choice to die, it is possible for the cause of death to be the hand of another agent. Droge and Tabor's first point concerning opposition and persecution raises martyrdom's connection to larger scale socio-cultural or ideological clashes, and the second point highlights the way that the witnesses and their narrative shape the act of sacrifice in a positive manner. The mention of it as "heroic" does raise questions about the potentially problematic nature of valorising such extreme acts of sacrifice, however that associated component of "necessary" grounds those questions back into the context of radical sacrifice: unfortunately necessary.

The "eagerness" to die mentioned in point three on the one hand merely means a willingness or an intent to die, but the terminological choice of "eager" draws attention to the

[26] Maclom W. Browne, '1963 Photo Contest, World Press Photo of the Year' <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/ 1963/36275/1/1963-malcolm-w-browne-wy> [Accessed 22 December 2020].

[27] Droge and Tabor, p. 75.

way that some instances of martyrdom have been intentionally undertaken by individuals with a positive view on their imminent and planned demise. For instance, the Japanese kamikaze pilots during World War II, or the Islamic suicide bombers in the twenty-first century are both instances in which, from their perspective and/or their faith, their eagerness to die stems from a belief that their sacrifice will both benefit their people and result in a reward for their actions as is represented by points four and five in Droge and Tabor's breakdown of martyrdom.[28]

The fact that martyrdom 'reflect[s] situations of opposition and persecution' highlights that it is an act of sacrifice with a deep connection to, or at least desire for, change.[29] It is a drastic act that is undertaken from a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo. In affirming a new social, cultural, or religious narrative, the balance of power and recognition in the world shifts as a direct result of that new martyr narrative. Though over time it may solidify a new status quo, and be repeated to sustain that new norm, in its inception martyrdom is an act of change brought about through individual volition. It also made significant via a juxtaposition not only with the status quo, but also with ingrained expectations of individualism. The interplay of juxtaposed narratives, and subverted power structures frames the act of martyrdom.

Martyrdom is particularly relevant and powerful in the Western context due to its juxtaposition against the dominant cultural narrative of individualism. Individualism celebrates individual agency. It places the self on the highest pedestal, and holds choice and freedom as sovereign rights. Martyrdom is an extreme act of individual choice. Yet it is one in which the individual chooses (something that is deeply tied to the ideals of individualism) to place others or an ideal above the self. It is in that subversion of the expected dominant narrative that the shock and awe impact of martyrdom is realised.

At the heart of both the social and rhetorical function of martyrdom is how it 'reflect[s]

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[28] Chapter Three: Scapegoating will address more complex questions of war and coerced choice.
[29] Droge and Tabor, p. 75.

situations of opposition and persecution'.[30] Where '[j]ustice permits restoration' and maintains the status quo (as will be further discussed in the context of René Girard's theory on scapegoating in Chapter Three), 'sacrifice promises transformation'.[31] It performs such a promise due to the way that it comes from a place of conflict and juxtaposition. As Cóilin Owens defines it, 'martyrdom is a radical protest on behalf of transcendent values against social conventions that always threaten those values'.[32] Where those in power seek to retain their power, those marginalised because of that power structure fight back against that threat of erasure, reduction, and control. Martyrdom is a tipping point towards a needed change.

Martyrdom is able to function as a catalyst that inspires action due to its powerful and shocking nature: 'the sight of those who believed enough to die […] was a deeply disturbing performance to a society that was already questioning the values and tenets by which it lived'.[33] Where "sameness" promotes passivity, shocking difference at the very least provokes thought and at the most brings about lasting change. Where performative acts constitute norms, so too do norms change via performative acts that are juxtaposed against those established norms. Middleton notes that, for those in power, '[t]he trouble with martyr narratives is that they turn defeat into victory, and weakness into strength. Furthermore, they encourage repetition'.[34]

The Final Empire sets up two scenes that resonate with each other where the symbols of the second subvert the expectations established by the first. Earlier in the novel, the rebellion army is found, and largely defeated. Following this, the Lord Ruler gathers randomly selected skaa from the city executions where four by four they are beheaded into a fountain that turns red with their blood whilst the majority of the city is required to look on. In this earlier

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[30] Droge and Tabor, p. 75.

[31] Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 26.

[32] Rona M. Fields, Cóilín Owens, Valérie Rosoux, Michael Berenbaum, and Reuven Firestone, 'A Conversation Among the Collaborators', in *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-Sacrifice* (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 149-170 (p. 170).

[33] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, p. 96.

[34] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide,* p. 191.

execution scene 'Kelsier looked like he was forcibly holding himself back—white-knuckled hands gripping the chimney beside him—to keep himself from rushing down to stop the executions'.[35] At this time acting would achieve nothing, if he were to run in then, with eight Inquisitors and the Lord Ruler presiding, he would be killed and it would only add to the hopelessness. The symbols represented by such an action would only reinforce the power of the dominant narrative: The Final Empire is just that, final and forever. Faced with a fountain full of innocent skaa blood, powerless to save themselves, in this scene Kelsier's death would only emphasise the hopelessness of the situation and thus reinforce the Empire's power. Here his death would be in line with the status quo rather than an act of sacrifice juxtaposed against it. Instead of the successful martyrdom, Kelsier would become another nameless skaa in the Lord Ruler's successful act of scapegoating that would sustain the regime perhaps another thousand years.

The scene that culminates in Kelsier's act of sacrifice begins with his leaping into action, and a promise to himself:

> *Too many skaa have died already*, he thought, flaring his metals. *Hundreds. Thousands. Hundreds of thousands. Not today. No more.*[36]

This sentiment stands in stark contrast to the deliberate and necessary inaction of the novel's first scene of mass execution. The return to the execution square sets the expectation for the status quo to re-exhibit its power and perpetuate the skaa oppression. Kelsier recognises that the uprising needed will only come in response to a strong enough symbol, one with enough weight behind its ideology to combat not just 'Luthadel and its Soothing stations that made skaa subservient. [But] *everything*—the obligators, the constant work in field and mill, the mind-set encouraged by a thousand years of oppression' as well as the on-going mass

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[35] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 436.
[36] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 556.

executions of innocents.[37]

To create this symbol there needs to be an event significant enough to overcome everything sustaining the status quo. This is accomplished by subverting the expectations of established social and fictional symbols. When Kelsier charges into the street and takes on the Steel Inquisitor the events of the first scene are inverted. This time rather than the beheading of the skaa four by four, the Inquisitor is beheaded and for the first time proved mortal. Where the literal fountain of skaa blood is clearly depressingly normal for the skaa, the far simpler single stroke death of the Inquisitor is miraculous. This terrifying, monstrous symbol, this walking font of fear, is brought low and killed in the exact same manner as the skaa: by an Inquisitor's axe. In one swing, Kelsier takes the Inquisitor, and the regime they represent, and shows that they are no better than the skaa, no less vulnerable. This single act subverts a thousand years of expectations and so is a symbol with weight behind it; this is a significant, performative act that can accomplish something. It plants a question in the mind of all who witness it: If they can die the same way as us, if they are not different or better or more than us, then what right do they have to oppress us?

The scene is full of these juxtaposed symbolic and thematic layers that contribute to the construction of this moment as the narrative convergence point. It is no coincidence, for instance, that, as Kelsier begins his symbolic fight with the Inquisitor that will lead to his martyrdom, the very first line of the entire novel—'Ash fell from the sky'—re-appears to frame the moment.[38] The act of martyrdom calls into question and challenges the world before. Kelsier's commitment of "*[n]o more*" skaa deaths is framed by the novel's opening line and thus harkens back to the reader's introduction to a choked and suffocated world of oppression. This line activates the reader's memory to make them look backwards at what has come before

[37] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 534.
[38] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 1; p. 561.

and, through that, foreground everything that Kelsier's actions oppose. Where the narrative of his act of sacrifice will contribute to making a new world, the moment of his choice lays a challenge and critique at the past.

In documenting and focusing in on this moment in the narrative, my instinct is to address the moments that would become foundational in the history of Scadrial in a such a way that suggests an inevitability to the actions, as if the socio-political context was ripe for revolution. It is true that the actions and work of Kelsier and his friends lay the groundwork for the uprising that follows Kelsier's death. However, what makes this moment such a compelling case study is the way that, perhaps despite expectations, this moment was unplanned and had such potential to fail (for the cause of the skaa). As Kelsier himself notes,

> [t]hat was what he fought against. Not just the Lord Ruler, not just the nobility. He fought against a thousand years of conditioning, a thousand years of life in a society that would label the deaths of five thousand men as a "great victory." Life was so hopeless for the skaa that they'd been reduced to finding comfort in expected defeats.[39]

The odds of this spur of the moment rescue attempt succeeding lean much more in favour of the regime marked by fountains of innocent blood that they do towards an oppressed individual. The layering of juxtaposed symbols and expectations charge this moment with the potential for change, not just as the rhetorical function of the text but also for the fictional witnesses.

When he fights the Inquisitor in the square the audience is not a crowd of surprised or empowered revolutionaries, but rather the normal, everyday skaa of Luthadel who have witnessed such executions and displays of the Lord Ruler's power many times before. Paul Middleton states that in an instance of martyrdom

[39] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 423.

> [u]sually there is some form of personal confrontation, which may be between a believer and an official. […] The martyr becomes a symbol of a community's desires and hopes, or for that matter, their terrors and fears but in either case, the martyr is representative of a larger struggle. This struggle might be political, spiritual, or often both. Usually some form of final outcome is envisaged and the martyr contributes in some way to that larger end.[40]

In this scene the status quo, embodied by the power of the tyrant first in the form of an Inquisitor (the "official") and then the Lord Ruler himself, is unexpectedly challenged by Kelsier (the "believer"). That power of the status quo both fails and thrives by the end of the sequence. That this scene contains both a victory and a loss tells the reader and the skaa witnesses crucial information: that the Lord Ruler and his inquisitors are fallible, but also that one person is not enough. Kelsier is not a hero to save them, but a martyr to inspire them. This lesson lies at the heart of uprising: we can win, but only together. Kelsier himself is not the "final outcome" but rather his actions and the narrative of his martyrdom is his contribution that sets the world in a path towards the resolution of that "larger struggle". The act of martyrdom is the hinge between worlds, the beginning of change, not the resting point of resolution; just as the moment of martyrdom is at the climax of this novel rather than at its conclusion.

Because everything in this moment is layered for resonance, steel becomes an important symbol not only of the actor but also of the act itself. Following Kelsier's intent of '*[n]o more*',[41] it is steel that fuels his actions towards martyrdom:

> He dropped a coin and jumped, *Pushing* himself through the air in a wide arc. Soldiers looked up, pointing. Kelsier landed directly in their center. There was a quiet moment as the soldiers turned in surprise. Kelsier crouched amid them, bits

[40] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide*, pp. 15-16.
[41] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 556.

> of ash falling from the sky. Then he *Pushed*. He flared steel with a *yell*, standing and *Pushing* outward. The burst of Allomantic power hurled soldiers away by their breastplates, tossing a dozen men into the air, sending them crashing into companions and walls. Men screamed. Kelsier spun, *Pushing* against a group of soldiers and sending himself flying toward a prison cart. He smashed into it, flaring his *steel* and grabbing the metal door with his hands.[42] [my emphasis added]

The Final Empire engages with its ideas through their "vertical complexity". It takes the philosophy of its magic system and mirrors it in the social structure and the characters. Steel is the metal of pushing. It is forceful, aggressive, and often used to kill when an allomancer pushes a coin through another person. Turning then to the Steel Ministry, the combination bureaucracy and religion, the "Steel" here informs the reader of what this organisation stands for: they push, they force, they control.

However, the layers extend deeper than that one interpretive reading. Once the reader arrives at a more nuanced understanding of Allomancy, they learn that Steel pushing works on a Newtonian principle of equal and opposite reactions: if you push on something with less mass than you then it moves away from you, but if you push on something with more mass than you then you move away from it. In essence, you cannot push something larger than you and have it actually move, you cannot impact it. So, on the one hand, yes, the Steel Ministry pushes; there is a tyrannical, oppressive, boot in the face of humanity quality to them. But, what they push on, the skaa populace, is orders of magnitude larger than the ministry. Though they are powerful, the layering of symbols within the text is at once presenting the power of oppression as well as raising the idea that it is flawed and cannot sustain itself. The layering tells us that this is something that should not be both morally, and literally: you cannot Steel push a boulder, you cannot Steel minister to unwilling masses.

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[42] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 556.

As the quote above demonstrates, when Kelsier charges forward with the intent of '*[n]o more*' deaths, he Steel pushes back.[43] He lands "amid them" and pushes them outward, breaking their stable defences, using their apparent strength to push himself towards the prisoners. He fights back with their own symbols of power, their Steel, and in doing so once again brings them down to a matched level. By co-opting what they would claim is their exclusive power, Kelsier reduces the weight they can throw onto the populace and keep them in line.

I have stated that the scene in which the act of sacrifice takes place is where the text manifests its ideas most powerfully and explicitly. One could argue that the meaning lies in the resolution of the conflict, but by that point, I would contest, the ideas are already understood. There is no call to action in "the end". In fact, if anything, "the end" suggests a problem solved. But in the moment of sacrifice the import of the martyr's cause is imprinted upon their witnesses, including the reader. If the fantasy text is truly to provide useful handles on social issues, or at least provide opportunities for re-perception in a way that may be actionable in reality, then it is the call to action that most matters. It is this moment that remains in the mind of the reader, and it is therefore through this moment that the most effective communication can be achieved. The resolution of the conflict plays its part as there is of course value in witnessing that success is possible and that oppression can be overcome. However, this is just one piece of the varied repetitions that layer the text rather than the multi-layered convergence point of the act of sacrifice. In the rhetoric of immersive fantasy, martyrdom (when utilised in a text) is itself a rhetoric; it is a device that performatively communicates a call to action.

When an actor undertakes the act of sacrifice, when they choose to give their life for their cause, either they fail and are forgotten, or they are successful and are made a martyr. The process of "making a martyr" puts emphasis on three key stages of a martyrdom process: the

[43] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 556.

act itself (as I have addressed), but then also the witness, and the reception and retelling of that witnessed narrative. Indeed, as Paul Middleton notes, both the Greek stem word for martyr—"martus"—and the Islamic word "shahid" for '[t]hose who die in Holy War', have the concept of witnessing as their other 'primary meaning'.[44] Martyrdom's socio-cultural change is brought about through the ways that these three elements manifest in a given instance.

The Components of Martyrdom: The Witnessing

The etymology shows that witnessing has always been a core component of martyrdom. The person undergoing an act of martyrdom stands witness to their faith or ideology. The significant historical martyrdoms of the Maccabees, and of Perpetua, originated the requirement that in the moment of the act of sacrifice, one must stand witness their faith by refusing to recant it.[45] Rona M. Fields notes that, for martyrdom it is 'the people, not the leaders, [who] confer the status'.[46] Without witnesses a performance cannot have any impact upon the world. Without witnesses the martyr narrative cannot be spread and the change towards the imagined new world will not come to pass. Though the photo of Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation provides a martyr narrative that affords a legacy and socio-cultural impact to the act, if the photo had never been published and therefore never seen, then such an impact would not exist. For witnessing there is a necessary element of "critical mass". A martyr narrative must be repeated and spread enough times to take hold. An unwitnessed martyrdom dooms the narrative to not reach sufficient mass or resonance as to become socially meaningful.

Critical mass is necessary for martyr narratives to achieve change due to the performative way that social norms and status quos are constructed. All performative change requires

[44] Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide*, pp. 5-6.
[45] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*.
[46] Rona M. Fields, 'The Psychology and Sociology of Martyrdom', in *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-Sacrifice* (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 23-81 (p. 46).

repetition, and all dominant norms are sustained via disjunctive power flows that essentially performatively repeat a particular narrative more powerfully and with wider reach. Herein lies the difficulty for the oppressed to achieve change: their narrative has to overcome the dominant one, but marginalisation means that their voice and their narrative often remains unheard or overlooked amongst the constant support for the status quo. The witness is crucial for realising change. It is the witnesses who create and spread their desired martyr narrative such that it outweighs the normative power of the status quo.

The narrative that follows the act of martyrdom is in dialogue with the existing socio-cultural narratives of the world before. Understanding the socio-cultural narrative of the witnesses emphasises to the reader the extent and import of the possible change that the act of martyrdom represents. I have thus far described the skaa as generally down-trodden, oppressed people lacking in hope (often due to literal magical oppression alongside the rape, slavery, murder, and abuse heaped upon them), and that lack of hope plays a large role in maintaining their current status. As Eric Hoffer states: 'when there is no hope, people either run or allow themselves to be killed'.[47] However, to fully understand them as witnesses and tellers of Kelsier's martyr narrative, we need to understand their history, how they are constructed as a people and a cultural group. Whilst in the novel's present the reader is presented with some identifying features of the skaa, they largely amount to dirty and ragged clothing, ash smudged faces, and a general apathy and fear. These physical and circumstantial descriptions take primacy over any cultural values or histories. What becomes clear is that a key part of the skaa's oppression lies in "slave" being their only sanctioned identity. The novel opens not with action but with a stark picture of slavery: 'Ash fell from the sky' onto skaa working a plantation beneath the gaze of their nobleman.[48] The ash fall smothers, but is a fact of nature weighing

[47] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 74.
[48] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 1.

down the crops just as the nobleman's oversight is a fact of social life: another inevitable smothering.

In the prologue, Kelsier's internal monologue describes how the skaa are afraid to harbour him. They risk the wrath of their nobleman, however they "tolerate" him because he brings stories of elsewhere. 'On the next day, Kelsier's words would be repeated to the several hundred people who lived in other hovels. The skaa might be subservient, but they were incurable gossips.'[49] They have a desperate need for stories because the stories that they tell day-to-day, are limited by their imposed circumstances. Across the generations the skaa have been told, and indeed told each other horror stories of the nightly mists, and the mistwraiths who inhabit them. That going out will turn you mad, will kill you, that mistwraiths will steal your face and return to kill your family. But this is a fabrication of the Lord Ruler and the nobles. It isolates the skaa in their hovels on their plantations. The isolation of the mists creates this image of pockets of light across the continent; pockets of skaa huddled together around a fire each night. Here in the prologue it is Kelsier connecting them, telling them stories, and bringing them "new ideas." Telling them that "new days are coming. Survive a little longer, and you just might see real happenings in the Final Empire".[50] Even on just page twelve of this novel a new narrative is beginning. Kelsier's words are picked carefully. He tells them to "survive", and it is this will help the skaa re-define themselves beyond the story of "slave".

The story of Kelsier is the story of 'The Survivor'. The skaa who witness Kelsier's act of sacrifice, and his apparent resurrection, create, share, and repeat that narrative of survival. For this oppressed people, repeating this narrative is an act of myth-making around which they can re-write their story. Elizabeth Castelli explains that

[49] Sanderson, *The Final Empire,* pp. 7-9.
[50] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 12.

> [m]yth is the product of collective imagination, a compelling answer to urgent questions about foundations and identities. Myth produces a unified account of the past and a unifying account for the present and an imagined future.[51]

When Kelsier subverts the immortality of the Lord Ruler by surviving, he affords an agency to the skaa that they had been denied. Their limited ability to share stories beyond their home plantations means they lack any stories which could solidify into any cultural norms and values beyond what they experience right in front of them. You could describe the historical cultural narrative of the skaa as "just survive", nothing more, nothing less. Kelsier's performance as The Survivor takes that existing narrative and alters it in a way that affords them the agency that has been denied to them by slavery and racial oppression. They are no longer merely "just surviving", instead they have become The Survivors.

As they witness his act of sacrifice in the execution square, the skaa consciously become a majority. While individuals against Kelsier's cause—some few nobles, one Inquisitor (who dies), and the Lord Ruler himself—are present. This is stacked up against Elend Venture,[52] Kelsier's crew members, protagonist Vin, and thousands of skaa. While the named characters provide important perspective to the reader, it is that final group, the thousands of skaa, who matter the most here for it is they who will take up and spread this narrative. It is they who will give it meaning by affording it a critical mass.

In the scene of martyrdom, the convergence of textual ideas is matched by a structural layering and repetition of the key elements that make up a martyr. There is a repetition of juxtaposed views that speaks to the witnesses. Immersed in multiple perspectives, the reader witnesses the martyrdom not only from their own external perspective, but again through the eyes of Vin, and again through the implied eyes of the skaa populace, and again through the

[51] Castelli, p. 30.

[52] The noble Vin loves, who will become Emperor post-revolution, and who will come to view Kelsier as an aspirational figure.

eyes of the rest of the crew, and perhaps most significantly of all, through the eyes of Kelsier, the martyr himself. Even before the story is repeated and spread and takes on the actual trajectory of a martyr narrative, Sanderson's textual construction makes of the reader a repeat witness as if the act is performed again and again. Martyrs within the literature are already partly a narrative. They are already constructed, already repeated, already performed by their nature as fictional. This extra layer of narrative construction and repetition causes the scene to resonate. Kelsier's martyrdom is able to pivot between imagined worlds because of the agency that *The Final Empire* affords to all of these witnesses in defining the act. The martyr narrative comes into existence through the witnesses, which in turn allows the act of sacrifice to become socially meaningful. It is 'the people, not the leaders, [who] confer the status'.[53]

The metaphor of the ash that falls and covers everything, choking the life from the earth and the people who tend it, serves well to explain the numbing and the reduction of the skaa people. Even Kelsier, the martyr and revolutionary whose deceased wife Mare believed in a green world free of ash and even carried with her a drawing of a flower, does not really believe in a world without ash. Not in a distant past, not now, and not even in a possible future:

> He had heard whispers of times when once, long ago, the sun had not been red. Times when the sky hadn't been clogged by smoke and has, when plants hadn't struggled to grow, and when skaa hadn't been slaves. Times before the Lord Ruler. Those days, however, were nearly forgotten. Even the legends were growing vague.[54]

These are the people in the square on the day of Kelsier's act of sacrifice. They are people who have heard the same story their entire lives, but of late they have been told a new one by a man called the Survivor. He tells them to have hope; that they can change their world together; and

[53] Fields, 'The Psychology and Sociology of Martyrdom', p. 46.
[54] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 5.

that the Lord Ruler is not infallible. Then, before their eyes, he does the impossible, and after that survives death itself. His actions take the story he has been telling and makes it real. For the first time in a thousand years there is a narrative that belongs uniquely to the skaa. Where the status quo strives to deny them an identity of their own making, Kelsier's actions create a space in which an identity might be born. To refer again to Fields et al., '[t]here is an aspect of martyrdom as an ascription of heroism that revivifies and revitalizes believers in the cause'.[55] Revivify, revitalise, these are exactly the verbs that wilted plantation crops need but cannot imagine. His martyrdom hinges between the numb, blank, ash-choked world before in which the skaa are weighed down, and the possibility of a freer world where the skaa can stand tall and breathe easily. In constructing Kelsier's martyr narrative, the skaa create a collective memory upon which a shared cultural identity can be built.

The Components of Martyrdom: The Narrative

The act and the witnessing are the first two stages in the process of making a martyr. But it is the third stage of the narrative that is the most complex and the most significant. Narrative makes martyrs, it is where the meaning lies. Lucy Grig, in discussing the martyrs of the fourth and fifth centuries describes that '[t]he martyr had to be 'made'. This 'making' was a matter of representation: of text and image. The story made the martyr'.[56] Similarly, Emma Anderson's work with the North American Martyrs states that '[i]t must be remembered that martyrdom is always an interpretation of a given set of facts, rather being "a fact" in and of itself'.[57] "Representation", "text", "story", and "interpretation" all highlight how martyrdom can be shaped to deliberate social, and textual, purpose.

[55] Fields, 'The Psychology and Sociology of Martyrdom', p. 43.
[56] Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2004), p. 1.
[57] Anderson, p. 8.

The fact of martyrdom's fluid nature should not be surprising; Fields points out that '[t]he meaning of the act to the actor and to the wider audience may be at odds'.[58] The witness has only what they perceive, only what they are given. They may not be privy to the intent or thought processes of the martyr figure themself, or they may themselves only be the recipient of a narrative in a chain of witnesses. Where some witnesses may be as intimately connected to the martyrdom as Jesus' apostles (where even then differences exist amongst the accounts of the Gospels), other witnesses may have only a photograph from which they construct their understanding. This constructed understanding through re-telling is where the meaning is created. The re-telling of a martyr narrative—of who died, what happened, and why—puts the audience back in contact with the performative act of sacrifice. Keith Hopkins states that 'the mere reading of the story by itself constitutes a repeat performance of the miracle which it records'.[59] Hopkins' further notes that whenever a believer believes in the story of a miracle that miracle is '(re)performed. The story is a fundamental part of the belief, and the story performs the miracle'.[60] It is in this overlapping venn diagram of re-telling, narrative, and performance for both martyrdom and fiction that resonance is generated and a text speaks.

Elizabeth Castelli approaches the topic of martyrdom and its role in the construction of collective memories (her interests focussing primarily on Christianity). The core drive of her project explores a space in which

> [h]owever compelling the question "what really happened?" might be in a different context, whether a particular martyr actually died in a particular spot on a particular date matters much less to this study than the work that the memory of that event does at later points. What I argue is that the work of that memory is tied to the broader Christian project of producing a useable story—the project of

[58] Fields, 'The Psychology and Sociology of Martyrdom', p. 32.

[59] Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London: Phoenix, 2009), p. 150.

[60] Hopkins, p. 298.

mythmaking.[61] [My emphasis added]

Sanderson's series bears out this concept. In Kelsier's death he attempts to win the battle through using the mysterious "Eleventh Metal" of Allomancy (the power of which he did not know, but hoped it would help defeat the Lord Ruler) and in his failed attempt he is impaled. His death, his act of sacrifice, was a failure. However, as the rebellion goes on to succeed, this fact does not matter. One could make the argument that this is because he "does not die" in terms of his resurrection; and this is certainly key to the narrative of his death. However, the reader knows that the resurrection was also false: merely a Kandra shapeshifter posing as Kelsier to inspire the skaa populace and present to them that un-killable hope. Thus, the literal fact that Kelsier's resurrection was also false does not matter. What matters is that these events, the way they are perceived, and the way that the narrative spreads, inspires change. The fact of real importance is that the skaa rise up. That they were inspired to do so based on false pretences does not change the end result. What plays out in this text is exactly Castelli's argument: it is not the martyr themself, but rather the narrative forging a collective cultural memory that does the socio-cultural work.

Martyrdom and Memory: Creating Shared Identities through Shared Memories

Middleton, like Castelli, recognises this community-building facet of martyrdom. He ultimately defines martyrdom as 'a narrative that creates or maintains group identity, by holding up an ideal representative of the community, who chooses to or is made to die for its values'.[62] In Christianity the re-telling of Christ's narrative has sustained a spread of faith to remain the most widely practiced religion in the world. Even beyond that, it would not be a

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[61] Castelli, p. 29.

[62] Middleton, 'What is Martyrdom?', p. 130.

stretch to suggest that in all of human history no name or person is more widely recognised or known than Jesus'. In her book *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making,* Castelli attests that 'the memory work done by early Christians on the historical experience of persecution and martyrdom was a form of culture making'.[63] Repeated performative acts form identities and norms. Narratives are performative. Therefore, repeated narratives, such as in preaching, form identities and norms.

The concept of collective memory originates with Maurice Halbwachs where, as Castelli describes it, 'memory is a social construction, the product of the individual's interaction with his or her group—be this family, social class, religious community, or some other collectivity with which the individual is affiliated'.[64] This is due to the way that memories are encoded in language which, due to its constructed nature and web of myriad metaphorical and metonymical connections, both shapes and is shaped by society. Similarly, Valérie Rosoux, in writing about the politics of martyrdom notes that 'the concepts of "Memory" and "identity" are mutually dependent and indissolubly linked: [...] Memory shapes (us) our minds—we are formed through its action—and we in turn influence its content by our representations'.[65]

The constructed nature of memory as it relates to group identities is relevant to this discussion of martyrdom for two reasons. The first is that '[r]emembering martyrs is a shared icon of a common history'.[66] And the second is that, much as Middleton pushes us to do with martyrdom as a concept, Halbwachs was primarily interested in collective memory because of the way that it 'allows one to move past often unresolvable questions of "what really happened" to questions of how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves'.[67] Through this chapter I have touched on some of the ways

[63] Castelli, p. 4.
[64] Castelli, p. 11.
[65] Valérie Rosoux, 'The Politics of Martyrdom', in *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-Sacrifice*, (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 83-116 (p. 85).
[66] Fields, 'The Psychology and Sociology of Martyrdom', p. 70.
[67] Castelli, p. 5.

that Kelsier's martyrdom challenges entrenched narratives and inverts the skaa's own self-expectations. The shared memory of that moment in the execution square creates a new future world not only via literal rebellion but, more significantly, through the way that it offers a sustainable narrative in which the skaa can re-understand what it means to be skaa.

Language is a constructed system by which we make meaning. Martyrdom is a performative narrative in which someone has died for a cause. Group identity is created when, '[t]hrough retelling […] memory accrues meaning through discursive and embodied repetition'.[68] In this way martyrdom is a deliberate, constructed memorialisation upon which peoples are founded and sustained through the re-telling of that narrative over time. It provides to a group that has been outside the dominant narrative and accepted social norm a narrative that has till then been lacking (or at least lacking in recognition). As the narrative is repeated over time it forms a concrete understanding of identity. For instance, 'the story of Christian origins is a narrative of movement from the permeability of memory border to increasing levels of impermeability'.[69] An act is but a moment, and as such is fluid and fleeting. It hovers liminally with the inherent potential to be passed over and forgotten. When such a tremulous thing is brought towards memory, the question becomes will it breach that threshold and last, becoming impermeable, or will it be lost. In repetition one can find solidity and re-assurance.

Halbwachs notes that 'when [memories] cannot be renewed by resuming contact with the realities from which they arose, [they] become impoverished and congealed'.[70] As such, concrete touchstones are necessary for that impermeability to be a lasting identity rather than an "impoverished" or deteriorating concept. This is a role that literature can perform. It is somewhat unique as a performance in that, unlike performative acts of a person, or other art forms such as theatre or live music, literature is static. Though perceptions of language may

[68] Castelli, pp. 11-12.
[69] Castelli, p. 17.
[70] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed., trans., and introduced by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 106.

shift over time, the structure of the narrative remains: Kelsier will always die for his cause in that square; just as he will always say "I am hope". Fields states that '[l]iterature provides a "mass memory," a nearly indestructible and accessible record'.[71] Martyrdom's relationship with literature is fascinating as it layers performative narrative within performative narrative.

In discussing the politics of martyrdom, Valérie Rosoux draws a connection to a lecture given in 1882 by Ernest Renan in which he states that 'the nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion'.[72] For Renan, group identity is formed much as individual identity is: through memory of past experiences. At this point in the history of Scadrial, after a thousand years of oppression, the skaa do not have much of a cultural narrative, certainly not one that drives them towards change. Consider again the reader's first introduction to the skaa as plantation workers: 'The crops hardly seemed worth the effort. Wan, with wilted brown leaves, the plants seemed as depressed as the people who tended them.'[73] The reader is introduced to an existence that is not just hopeless but pointless. They huddle in the dark, afraid of being seen, noticed, or recognised; they are afraid of going outside, and afraid that if one of them disobeys the rest will be punished. Why do they fear these things? Because their shared history, their memories of what it means to be skaa, their past endeavours prove that their fears are well-founded. There is nothing left for them to look back to, no stories to tell. The things they commemorate are that this one pretty girl maybe has not yet been noticed by the noble plantation owner. It is entirely rooted in the here and now.

Sanderson depicts the skaa as a people with no answers to those 'urgent questions about foundations and identities' that Castelli describes.[74] They are lacking a clear and direct heritage of their own through which they can make sense of the world around them. Their cold "facts" of life that the nobles have constructed around them are poor substitute for a myth.

[71] Fields et al, 'A Conversation Among the Collaborators', p. 163.
[72] Ernest Renan, '*Que'est-ce qu'une nation?* [What is a nation?] (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1997), p. 31.
[73] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 5.
[74] Castelli, p. 30.

To borrow from Renan again, '[a] nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices one has made in the past and of those one is prepared to make in the future'.[75] For a cultural group lacking a shared memory of such things, Kelsier provides them a model by which they can re-construct a past feeling of sacrifice and build a future.

In discussing the performativity of gender Judith Butler notes that

> there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself.[76]

Butler articulates here that we do not have the capacity to act outside our construction (or at least that to do so would both have no meaning and would achieve nothing), but that change is still possible by acting differently and at the boundaries of the norm in such a way as to shift that definition of normal. The skaa do not re-define themselves by a narrative of "we were the masters all along", or "we don't need nobles, kill all the nobles", or even "here is our forgotten history lost to time, let us be these people again now". For the skaa, each of these alternative social narratives are too alien to their hemmed in horizons to be sustainable. Instead, the narrative born of Kelsier's martyrdom is that hope cannot be killed. Or, as the skaa witnesses tell it: "we are the survivors".

The new narrative is almost the same as the old, but the perception of it has changed. The way they tell this story has changed. Instead of *just* surviving, the skaa become symbols of strong endurance. Instead of symbolising their limitations, their surviving becomes proof that they cannot be oppressed. No matter how many skaa the Lord Ruler kills, they will survive. By acting differently at the boundaries of their construction, they are able to shift that normative

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[75] Renan, p. 31.

[76] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 148.

core of their established identity. Castelli states that '[s]ocial memory offers one important way for groups to situate themselves temporally and topographically'.[77] For the skaa, this new narrative, this new memory, the myth of Kelsier the Survivor's martyrdom, affords them the opportunity to re-situate themselves in history, in the world, and in society.

The world that grows from Kelsier's act of sacrifice is shaped by a careful process in which limitations are reclaimed and re-defined. As with the shift in the perception of "surviving", so too comes a shift in the perception of the mists. Where the skaa at large have been trained to fear the mists in a way that further oppresses them, Kelsier reclaims the mists in a way that helps the skaa set themselves free:

> "Come," said a skaa man who stood at the front of the group. "Fear not the mist! Didn't the Survivor name himself Lord of the Mists? Did he not say that we have nothing to fear from them? Indeed, they will protect us, give us safety. Give us power, even!"[78]

Memory 'performs a socially conservative function' wherein 'memory (a socially constructed version of the past) operates as an ideological ground for the present […] In this way, collective memory does the work of "tradition," providing the conceptual and cognitive constraints that render past experience meaningful in and for present context'.[79] Where until Kelsier's actions the constructed meaning of the mists was of death, now a new "tradition" has been supplied that abandons fear and embraces empowerment.

The novel's naming of the skaa and the nobles forces the reader to confront the constructed nature of racial oppression. The word "skaa" is specifically a racial group with a distinct history, where (in English) noble is a word that designates class. However, in the time of the Final Empire it is clearly used as a racial signifier. Consider this statement from Brandon

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[77] Castelli, p. 12.
[78] Sanderson, *The Final Empire*, p. 580-581.
[79] Castelli, p. 12.

Sanderson: ‘All of my books are to be read as if there's a phantom translator who took it from the original [in-world] language and translated it into English.’[80] Under this frame, the people in Scadrial are not saying “noble”, they have their own word just as skaa, but the “translator” makes a choice in how the text speaks to the reader. As the reader notices this unexpected use of the fictional construction of “noble” as a racial group and this allows it to emphasise the constructed nature of systemic oppression.

One of the unique opportunities that engaging with *Mistborn* offers is that its follow up series moves forwards around three hundred years (into what is referred to within the reading community as Mistborn Era 2). This then portrays the consequences of these significant socio-cultural actions writ large as they become history. This long-form immersive narrative affords the opportunity to see the martyr’s “world after” come to pass. In Era 2 there is no longer a skaa/noble distinction (whilst other racial categories remain), instead the people who were once skaa or nobles who survive the remaking of the world at the end of the original trilogy become the Originators.[81] This is a potentially problematic line to walk as to suggest that racial differences are purely arbitrary and meaningless is to deny peoples’ lived experiences and identities. However, I think the text walks this line well. If the text explored the distinction between the skaa people and the lothos people (an arbitrary name I have invented here to highlight the point) where lothos were oppressing the skaa, and then in the post-revolution world those two groups merely homogenised it would be deeply problematic. Sanderson’s work does not do this. It makes the “phantom translation” choice to use real world class terminology to describe one of the groups to the reader.

The difference between skaa and noble is circumstance based, and yet the discrimination

[80] Brandon Sanderson, ‘Interview with Brandon Sanderson’, *Goodreads*, 2016 <https://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/1104.Brandon_Sanderson?utm_medium=email&utm_source=ya_newsletter&utm_campaign=2016-02&utm_content=sanderson> [Accessed 13 June 2020].

[81] Brandon Sanderson, *The Alloy of Law* (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 83.

occurs along racial lines. The discrepancy is there to be noticed. The text could be read through a lens of class critique, however looking to the vertical complexity of the text emphasises that the central concern is racial oppression. The layering and varied repetition of images, symbols, ideas, and events shows that in *Mistborn*, it is not just skaa-noble oppression. It is also the oppression and near genocide of the Terris people; the slavery and complete reduction of identity of the Kandra; the making monsters of the Koloss; and the re-forging of people into slaves and tools as Inquisitors. All of these ancillary textual threads are further shades of the discussion of racism and systemic oppression and are not rooted in a class discussion.

Stacked up, these surrounding commentaries deepen the critique present in the constructed skaa-noble divide. They provide the insight needed to take away the most understanding possible. As the series progresses and more of the history of Scadrial is revealed, it becomes clear that when the Lord Ruler rose to power, for a myriad of hate and racism based reasons, he constructed and enforced the divide between skaa and noble. While in this chapter I have focussed my discussion on the skaa, the novel also explores the ways that the nobles are constructed and oppressed by the Lord Ruler's regime in their own way. Just as the existing history of the skaa is lacking in specific memories and cultural touchstones and could be summated as merely "slave"; so too are the nobles lacking in a specific past and identity. They have no way to story themselves other than "privileged".

The skaa/noble distinction is gone by Era 2 not because one group has been reduced into the other, or because one group has been overridden or wiped out. Instead, the foundational cultural myth has changed. The divisive historical narratives of slavery and chosen elite are transcended by a unifying event: Kelsier's martyrdom, and the martyrdoms that follow in his footsteps in later novels. The "Originators" after all, skaa and noble alike, are those who survive the end of the world together. Their shared experience becomes more significant than the enforced binary that has divided them.

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A case study of Kelsier's act of sacrifice is useful for three reasons. The first is that it perfectly maps to the established theory and understanding of not only what martyrdom is and how it functions, but what it accomplishes. As it structurally matches the criteria laid out by the scholarship, it provides a compelling basis for assessing the role it plays within the literature and whether there are any connections or resonances between the two.

The second use is that recognising Kelsier's narrative as a martyr narrative allows for answers to the question: "what role does martyrdom play in fantasy literature?" To which Kelsier's martyrdom suggests this answer: The resonance between the vertical complexity of fantasy and the layered nature of a martyr narrative provides a performatively charged moment in which the ideas and themes of the text converge and make themselves most manifest to the reader.

The third use is that, in building from the first two points, the narrative convergence point of the martyrdom can be mined to understand the core drive of the text. Within the context of *The Final Empire,* Kelsier's martyrdom provides a shared memory that enables a myth-making process to re-shape shared cultural identities. In a world marred by hegemonic racial oppression and societal stagnation through marginalisation, this act of re-definition acts as a narrative hinge that highlights the issues of the world before, and promises a world after in which those issues are addressed. Where an immersive text uses its rhetoric of immersion to communicate a change in a world, the rhetoric of martyrdom can accelerate that shift by performing and embodying the ideology that underpins the desired immersive change.

In closing this chapter I want to highlight Lucy Grig's engagement with the work of Griselda Pollock:

> I take it for granted that, as formulated neatly by feminist art critic Griselda Pollock: 'images and texts are no mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their sources'; to be represented, something has to be 'refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms'. Furthermore, representation is a dialectical, dialogic practice, '"articulating" in a visible or socially palpable form social processes which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation.' Finally, it 'signifies something represented to, addressed to a reader/viewer/consumer.[82]

In this vein of scholarship, Richard Schechner, in his introduction to the posthumously published *The Anthropology of Performance*, uses one short statement to describe the crux of Victor Turner's theorising: 'Performance is a paradigm of process'.[83] It is how we learn, and grow, and imprint our ideologies and identities upon the world. Martyrdom is narrative. Martyrdom is performative, and profoundly so. Martyrdom is perhaps the most extreme and literal act of sacrifice one can undertake given that it involves the giving up of life. It is an act that deeply understands the cost required to realise change. It is an act that has from the very beginning been a part of the Western cultural narrative and its indelible mark is inevitably present within the Western cannon. It is an act that highlights the way that identity is constituted in narrative; which in turn creates huge implications for the role of fictional narratives in the construction of identity.

The idea of systemic change becoming possible through imagining a new world, as well as discussion around both the creation and denial of shared and group identities will remain thematic preoccupations as this thesis moves forwards into the remaining chapters. Martyrdom is an act that has complex ramifications but remains relatively straightforward as an act itself.

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[82] Grig, pp. 5-6.

[83] Richard Schechner, 'Victor Turner's Last Adventure', in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1988), pp. 7-21 (p. 8).

By virtue of its extreme and momentary occurrence it is easy to imagine and comprehend. Martyrdom fits as the first mode of sacrifice in this thesis because that "graspable" property allows it to showcase not just its own rhetorical role but to also lay the foundations for how the remaining chapters of this thesis will proceed and build upon this baseline.

Chapter Two's exploration of self-denial continues a discussion of how choice and agency drive change, but then pulls the discussion in more intimately. Instead of a crowd of thousands witnessing a single act, self-denial is quiet. Looking to on-going sacrifice begins to address how the small-scale of the individual within a large system may have to struggle to survive under that pressure. In *Mistborn* the system works to deny an oppressed group any other chosen identity. It is change on the macro scale that explores how people change each other together. In *The Dresden Files*, the case-study text for Chapter Two, Thomas' self-denial attempts to widen the understanding of the identity he has been given. Analysis of this mode of sacrifice looks at how the example of an individual's personal performance can slowly shift the established norms and expectations of those around them. Most people are not Kelsier, acting at those exaggerated extremes of life, death, and rebellion. Most people are more like Thomas, carrying their parental expectations and just struggling to get through each day. Chapter Two narrows in focus to look at how on-going, individually chosen sacrifice such as self-denial can fuel its own kind of radical change.

Chapter Two: Self-Denial

> I stayed where I was for a moment, trying to ignore my thirst. It was all but impossible to do so. I thought about living with that discomfort and pain hour after hour, day after day, knowing that all I had to do was pick up a vessel filled with what I needed and empty it to make me feel whole. Would I be able to content myself with a quick splash of relief now and then? Would I be able to take enough to keep me alive?
>
> For a time, perhaps. But time itself would make the thirst no easier to bear. Time would inevitably weigh me down. It would become more difficult to concentrate and to sleep, which would in turn undermine my self-control, which would make it more difficult to concentrate and sleep — a vicious cycle. How long would I be able to last?
>
> Thomas had done it for most of a year.
>
> I wasn't sure I would have done as well in his place.[1]
>
> - *Dead Beat*, Jim Butcher

> "It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most who will conquer."[2]
>
> – Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork who died in Brixton Prison after seventy-four days without food.

Thomas Raith is a vampire. That statement likely comes with some immediate assumptions: fangs, bats, cloaks, death, immortality, monster. Thomas's representation within Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* presents an embodied struggle to challenge those assumptions, particularly that final word, monster. Thomas Raith is a vampire (attempting) to deny his hunger.

[1] Jim Butcher, *Dead Beat* (New York: Roc, 2006), pp. 144-145.
[2] David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (London: Grafton, 1987), p. 19.

> "He's a *vampire*, Justine. He's *eating* you. Why should you care if something happens to him?" "He's also a person, Mister Dresden," Justine said. "A person who's never done you any harm. Why shouldn't you care what happens to him?"[3]

These almost duelling questions exist not only in these external expressions, but underpin Thomas' internal struggle: I'm eating people, why should I care about myself? It is in the vampire's nature to be conflicted. Milly Williamson notes that

> [c]ontemporary vampire tales share themes of personalising and individualising moral dilemmas; only now the vampire is both innocent (because it has vampirism unwillingly thrust upon it), simultaneously glamorous and an outside, and a victim of circumstances outside of its control. The vampire can thus be seen to personify dilemmas of the self: how to have meaning in the world which demands it, how to act in circumstances we did not choose, how to be a good human.[4]

Thomas' struggle to avoid, control, or limit his hunger is an on-going act of self-denial. These acts of sacrifice are undertaken in the hopes of denying the monstrous self that was 'unwillingly thrust upon him' to an extent that he can determine 'how to be a good human'.[5]

Dominant norms not only shape lived experience but place limitations upon it. They form a large piece of the victimizing circumstances that Williamson highlights. Where single acts of sacrifice, such as martyrdom and scapegoating, offer some level of declarative statement about those dominant norms, the on-going forms of sacrifice speak instead to that lived experience; to continue with the above quote, they personalise and individualise the moral dilemmas. For both this chapter's exploration of self-denial and Chapter Four's focus on self-erosion, these modes of sacrifice draw the reader into an empathetic space. Then, from that place of caring and witnessing, each mode forces the reader to ask questions of the status

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[3] Jim Butcher, *Grave Peril* (London: Orbit, 2011), p. 253.
[4] Williamson, p. 50.
[5] Williamson, p. 50.

quo. Instead of a single clear statement, self-denial asks implicitly and repeatedly: does the world have to be this way?

If martyrdom is a revolution, self-denial is a persistent resistance. The naming of "self-denial" as a mode of sacrifice here carries dual meanings. This act of sacrifice concerns the giving up of something desired in pursuit of something else. Here sacrifice continues to be a value statement, and this act of sacrifice also performs a denial of a self that those limiting, dominant norms impose and expect. Thus, it is also, in a way, a pivot point; it is just one where its process and resolution are more prolonged. Nonetheless, it represents an attempt to shift away from the shape that the world insists one must inhabit towards a future in which one's self-determination is recognised. The gradual realisation of this self-determination through the sacrificial process of self-denial is a repeated performance at the boundaries of the established social norms in a way that challenges those norms: does the world have to be this way? Do I have to be this way?

In Chapter One I discussed how martyrdom is lent performative impact through the way that the individual's choice to die is juxtaposed against a cultural norm that values the individual and self-interested choices. Volition is a catalysing element that reinforces the value statement of the sacrifice: this is important because I choose it over even my life. Self-denial is a repeated choice. It is an on-going commitment to that value statement. Self-denial involves choosing to sacrifice over and again; and each of those choices matter just as the continuum of those choices as a whole also matters. As Victor Watson points out regarding the 'conscious decision to sustain' reading a series, the commitment suggests an investment.[6] Watson's statement that one 'cannot read a series of twelve novels by chance' is particularly relevant for this chapter's case study of Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*.[7] The series is thus far

[6] Victor Watson, *Reading Series Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.
[7] Watson, p. 1.

an unfinished seventeen novels, with the most recent two both published in 2020. You cannot read this whole series by accident. The same is true of character Thomas Raith's self-denial: he does not accidentally deny his monstrous desires for years of his life.

The combination of long-form narrative and on-going sacrifice allows this sustained commitment to shift over time and to layer in meaning as a character grows and changes. Thomas' sacrifice does not take place in one period of his life, but rather over many years as his social position, self-image, and goals shift and change. As those contexts and choices shift, so too does the reader's understanding of the acts of sacrifice.

Of her own work, Maud Ellman states that the

> [a]im is not to find the cause of self-starvation but to follow the adventures of its metaphors. To intuit what it means for the body to reject itself, the order of life to be overpowered by the dream of disembodiment, the language of imagination has more to offer than the language of statistics.[8]

Though there are potentially many things that could be denied in this mode of sacrifice, the relationship between hunger, language, and imagination that Ellman emphasises is why, for this chapter's case study, I will be looking at Thomas' denial of his hunger. This is a useful model not only because Thomas' relationship with his hunger is exaggerated through the lens of fantasy, but because the way that he denies himself shifts through the narrative. The shifting nature of the self-denial within the narrative means that the acts of sacrifice are able to engage differently with the core themes and motifs. On-going acts of sacrifice are rhetorical tools with multiple modes; they not only speak, but what they say changes.

[8] Maud Ellman, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing & Imprisonment* (London: Virago Press Limited, 1993), p. 15.

The Socio-Cultural Role of the Vampire – Removing the Monster?

The creature referred to as the vampire manifests in literature and culture with a number of common markers including the bite (fanged or otherwise), the consumption of human blood, transforming into or having control over bats, rats, and wolves, and the transformation of humans into vampires willingly and unwillingly. These almost mimetic tropes bring Nina Auerbach to note that, to the reader's detriment, 'vampires are easy to stereotype'.[9] These become symbols that frame common themes within the literature: the combined fear and a lure of the dangerous and powerful outsider, the temptation of the vampire to feed, and the temptation of the human either to be fed upon or transformed. Historically, the 'vampires of the West seek to frighten us into acquiescence, to reassert patriarchy, racial superiority, family values and chaste heterosexuality'.[10]

Like their fellow Gothic monsters, the vampire has stood as representative for all manner of societal fears, warnings, and morality tales – 'a voraciously sexual woman, and a hyper-sexual African, a hypnotic Jewish invader, an effeminate or homosexual man'.[11] With thematic threads of invasion, both of the body and of the nation, the vampire has been used to present a fear of contamination and loss of an established self. Vampires 'inhere in our most intimate relationships; they are also hideous invaders of the normal'.[12] Another view reads the vampire's ceaseless consumption as a metaphor for capitalism's endless wasteful grind, which views humans as only system parts that fuel the larger machine. Paul Kennedy uses the image of the vampire as an 'extortioner' which 'sustains its own existence by preying on the blood of living beings' as an apt analogy for capitalism.[13] These shifting interpretations

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[9] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 1.
[10] Williamson, p. 1.
[11] Williamson, p. 1.
[12] Auerbach, p. 6.
[13] Paul Kennedy, *Vampire Capitalism: Fractured societies and Alternate Futures* (New York: Springer, 2016), p. 29.

stand in support of Auerbach's explanation that that 'since vampires are immortal, they are free to change incessantly', and that as 'they are always changing, their appeal is dramatically generational'.[14]

However, a vampire text's thematic pre-occupation is often doubled, the vampire being a paradoxical figure: the seductive monster. As noted at the start of the chapter, the contemporary vampire, rather than successfully functioning as a warning, 'has more often fascinated us rather than terrified us'.[15] The doubleness of the seductive monster, and the potentially confronting paradox of it, is embodied in Thomas. J. M. Tyree describes contemporary vampiric characters like Thomas as 'a new combination of undead chum and unnaturally attentive lover, a sort of guardian angel with fangs'.[16]

Ildikó Limpár views this emergent figure as the 'domesticated' vampire that occupies 'a space in marketed mainstream literature, and also [makes] their related characters as well as the readers feel safe in their presence'.[17] Butcher's Thomas definitely carries that guardian angel, protector energy but retains an air of danger. The characters around him may love him and rely on his support, they certainly do not always feel safe in his presence. He is not only literally torn between the human and monstrous sides of himself, the struggle is further emphasised by making his beauty monstrous.[18] Instead of the bite and the consumption being read as suggestive of sex and desire, Thomas' burden is to consume through sex. An act of human connection and the literal propagation of life in general becomes instead an egocentric act of destroying the other for the propagation of the self. Thomas Raith is confronted with

[14] Auerbach, p. 5.

[15] Williamson, p. 1.

[16] J.M. Tyree, "Warm-Blooded: True Blood and Let the Right One In", *Film Quarterly,* 63.2 (2009), p.32.

[17] Ildikó Limpár, 'Masculinity, Visibility, and the Vampire Literary Tradition', *Journal of the Fantastic in The Arts*, 29.2 (2018), p. 269.

[18] It is worth noting here, as the cited works of Tyree and Limpár speak to, that Thomas is by no means the first vampire to wrestle with questions of "being good"; other notable examples include Angel and Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Nor do I wish to assert that Butcher's representation of this hero/monster narrative is the paramount example. Thomas' journey provides fertile ground for the discussion of self-denial.

an impossible, paradoxical choice: should I eat?

Discussion of Thomas is complex because his entire journey lies in attempting to deny the monster. He wishes to, despite his biological nature as a vampire, be a good person.[19] But if you remove the monstrous quality from the vampire, does it then de-fang the metaphor? This is a fair concern, and in fact could be especially true for Thomas given the vampiric metaphor of consumption and that his denial is rooted in avoiding his appetite. However, I do not think this is the case for Butcher's work. Partly because plenty of purely monstrous vampires who carry out the more classical rhetorical function remain in the series, but mainly because, over the series, Thomas' dynamic movement towards and away from "being-the-monster" performs a monstrous destabilisation of assumptions regarding heroism, humanity, and monstrosity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states that '[b]ecause of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes'.[20] The monster's presence destabilizes established and assumed binaries, those black and white extremes. For *The Dresden Files* the assumed binary is that of hero and monster.

Thomas is a marginalised Other; both in the minority in the sense of the vastly fewer number of vampires compared to humanity, but more particularly because his vampiric family outcasts him for his desire to care for others and treat humans as more than just food. Thomas often, does not belong anywhere. Williamson explains that '[e]ver ambivalent, the vampire expresses our alienation from our very human-ness and it offers an imaginary transcendence to culturally-imposed limitations on the body and the self. [...] Thus the vampire is no longer

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[19] This is perhaps a discussion brought about in part due to the nature of an immersive world such as this that attempts to function as "real" on as many levels as possible to create that immersive quality. In this sense the textual representation of Thomas and vampires must be understood to be both metaphor and literal fact. Part of the point of *The Dresden Files* is to consider the sociological, and ecological impact of the literal existence of magical creatures in the world.

[20] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25 (p. 6.).

an expression of terror, it is the expression of the outcast'.[21] He is a beautiful, powerful, and privileged marginalised Other, but one nonetheless. As a monster this is perhaps unsurprising. He is feared, and rightly so. He has killed and his biology pushes him to kill again. However, '[t]he monster's destructiveness is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process, rather than in fact (and that "fact" is subject to constant reconstruction and change)'.[22] The long-form nature of Butcher's narrative affords the reader time to witness a process that deconstructs an essentialised relationship between vampire and monster. Through this the reader sees the humanity present within Thomas, and in fact within all monsters. As Bennet and Royle note, the 'monster is excluded, abjected, not because it is entirely other but because it is at least in part *identical* with that by which it is excluded – with, in this case, the human'.[23] This process reveals the way Thomas' nature has been constructed but that agency remains possible.

As a vampire, Thomas is always supernaturally hungry. His sacrifice lies in a daily denial of that appetite; not because of the appetite itself, but because of what his appetite represents and how it affects his identity. His choice to deny his desire, to sacrifice that satiation, defines him as a person rather than a monster. His presence as the "monster" forces both protagonist Harry and the reader to confront the fact that goodness and badness, salvation and harm are not permanent absolutes, but choices along a lived spectrum. In the repetition of those choices an identity can be formed. Here, Thomas' journey defies any kind of hegemonic determinism.

While martyrdom presents a clear and direct challenge to the status quo, Thomas' self-denial engages with a more nuanced understanding of the complex ways that individual

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[21] Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire! Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), p. 183.
[22] Cohen, pp. 14-15.
[23] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory* 4th ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2009) p. 231.

existence is enmeshed within larger contexts. Marx states that '[c]apital is dead labour, which, vampire like, lives only by sucking licking labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks'.[24] In this evocative description there is a clear concern with the way that the capitalist system thrives by reducing humans to, essentially, food. The critique being that if that is endemic to the system, then the system itself must be inherently problematic and harmful. The same is likely true also of vampires. In terms of both the harmful behaviour and its possibly inevitable quality. What is crucial about Thomas is that he does not remove the monster from the vampire, but that he tries to do so. This attempt creates a gap between vampire and monster that calls into question the inevitability or essential nature of consumption. His choice to act differently, to try to not consume, imagines and makes possible a better future. There is also an excellent distinction to be drawn between capitalism as a system constructed by people and the vampire who has agency. Whilst the metaphor of the vampire might offer a means of grasping toxic consumption, the choices to deny such acts reinforce that we—the readers, the actors existing within capitalism—retain the agency to reconstruct our reality and the systems that shape it.

Thomas' representation within the novels revolves around how he is viewed. Specifically, the ways that, as a marginalised Other, those acts of externally applied perception shape his identity in ways beyond his control and in denial of his agency. But that too serves the vampire metaphor and this series' denial of systemic identity limitations. Thomas may be a vampire, but his existence in the world is not his fault. His experience of the world, however, is ours. Vampires 'promise escape from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable'.[25] With Thomas, *The Dresden*

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[24] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 274.

[25] Auerbach, p. 9; Note: When Auerbach refers to our times as being "inescapable" she does not do so to suggest that there is also therefore nothing that can be done, but rather that we must confront the current

Files proposes that if we have made the monster, if we are complicit in the construction and perpetuation of harmful consumption, then we have the responsibility to help. Thomas' self-denial manifests in the form of choosing to hunger; and hunger forces witnesses to confront their complicity.

Thomas and Hunger as Self-Denial

Thomas' relationship with others, both those who fear him and those who love him, is defined by his supernatural hunger. It is his innate hunger to consume the life force of others that pushes him to act as the monster. By denying himself the sating of that hunger, Thomas sacrifices the comfort and literal power that it would provide him and in so doing works towards a change in himself, and through that possibly a change in the world.

Thomas's textual representation engages with the concept of hunger complexly along three distinct axes: the hunger strike (hunger as protest), fasting (hunger as self-improvement), and anorexia nervosa (hunger as disorder). Gene Sharp provides a useful framework that closely aligns with this tripartite delineation. In his 1973 *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, he describes the fast as the base act and defines it as a method of psychological intervention wherein '[a]bstension from certain or all foods may be undertaken for a number of reasons, including health, religion, penance, self-purification, and desire to achieve social and political objectives'.[26] Sharp's work splits the fast out into three types: 'the *fast of moral pressure*, the *hunger strike*, and the *satyagraphic fast*'.[27] The first two match with the axes of hunger that this chapter will address. The satyagraphic fast is a more carefully limited manifestation of hunger strike defined and enacted by Gandhi, that Sharp chooses to unpack. This thesis will

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facts of our lived experience for any kind of change to be possible. Hence her assertion that vampires "matter".

[26] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1972), p. 360.

[27] Sharp, p. 360.

opt instead, driven by its treatment in Butcher's text, to address hunger as disorder wherein Thomas' relationship with consumption is defined by an internalised self-loathing; in essence he starves himself because he hates who he is when he eats. It is important to note that there is a long scholarly history of approaching anorexia as disorder from a purely individual psychological perspective, but that this falsely suggests the fault lies with the individual rather than with the societal context that produces anorexia within individuals. Helen Malson notes that the anorexic body is constituted and regulated in 'various, often conflicting, socio-historically specific ways'.[28] Bryan S. Turner points out specifically that '[a]norexia in part expresses a certain social contradiction between mass consumption and the norm of thinness'.[29] It is necessary to clarify this from the outset as the hunger strike and the fast are more immediately graspable as being enmeshed with social norms, but so too is hunger as disorder and this chapter will engage with it as such.

Though this chapter will stray partially from Sharp's complete outline of the three modes of a fast, his definitions of fasting and hunger strike remain useful. 'Fasts of moral pressure are usually conscious attempts to exert moral influence on others to achieve an objective, though they lack the openly coercive intent of the hunger strike, and the full "conversion" intent of the satyagraphic fast'; while the hunger strike is 'a refusal to eat with the aim of forcing the opponent to grant certain demands but without any serious effort to convert him or to achieve a "change of heart".'[30] The precise extent and shape of these acts of self-denial differ, and Butcher's novels intersect with each of them, transitioning from one to the other at various stages of Thomas' arc through the currently published *Dresden Files* novels. In order to understand Thomas' self-denial, and what it represents in the text, it is

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[28] Helen Malson, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 6.

[29] Bryan S Turner, *Medial Power and Social Knowledge* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995), p. 104.

[30] Sharp, p. 360; p. 363.

important to understand what hunger is and how it can manifest both physically and rhetorically.

At its core hunger is about a lack, and a need to fill that space. It is both the sensation (often painful) of being empty, and the desire to consume. In that sense there is an element of hunger that is inward looking, fundamentally concerned with the state of the self and the body (emptiness), and also an element of hunger that reaches outward, fundamentally concerned with others and things not of the body (desire). It is a communicative act. The self reaches out and consumes something external, re-incorporating that into itself. In this cycle of consumption, change is inherent. At the least because the status quo of the body is changed by consuming a part of the external world.

If sating hunger connects one to the world, then denying hunger creates a distance. New things can come to be in the space created by the self-denial of hunger. In Thomas' case, his vampiric hunger is thematically tied up in his identity. By denying his monstrous hunger, he creates a possible new version of himself that denies the Thomas that the status quo of both humanity and his vampiric family force upon him via their explicitly stated expectations and implicitly imposed perceptual norms.

As well as creating a gap, hunger speaks. From the imperative cry of the hungry infant summoning a ready bottle, to the emaciated corpse of an imprisoned Irish Hunger Striker, in either case hunger loudly proclaims its needs. Even on the literal level of individual survival, hunger is about being dissatisfied with the status quo. From the simple dissatisfaction of a late lunch and a growling stomach, to a profound dissatisfaction that drives political protest. As a metaphor it easily lends itself to the discussion of social ills and stagnation.

Much like martyrdom, hunger presents a kind of call to action when witnessed: '[t]o be hungry is to be uncomfortable, and most of us experience hunger in the same way we

experience pain, as a signal to do something'.[31] People spend their lives redressing their hunger every day. When they witness those who are going without they can be driven to redress that hunger also. And if they cannot, or perhaps more significantly, if those hungering refuse to be sated and choose to continue to sacrifice of themselves, then all the witnesses are left is to ask why, and then to listen. The witnesses are forced to 'recognise that they are implicated in the spectacle that they behold'.[32]

For literal starvation, witnesses are implicated as fellow humans and members of the society that has allowed for such suffering to persist. Hunger strikers use this effect intentionally, drawing a connection between the suffering of starvation and the perpetuation of another social ill in which, the protestor believes, the witnesses are similarly implicated. This works the same way for any form of self-denial. In Thomas' case, where self-denial is about identity, witnessing his chosen suffering forces the witnesses—both reader and character—to recognise that they are imposing their perceptions of a vampire onto Thomas. His self-loathing and his suffering are rooted in that externally imposed assumption of monster, but his self-denial creates a gap between assumption and reality: here is a vampire who saves not consumes. In the gap, new narratives become possible.

***The Dresden Files*: Craving Food, Craving Power**

The *Dresden Files* explores the role of power (defined by the text as choice) as a key determinant of position along an identity spectrum from human to monster. On this spectrum, to be a monster is to use power for one's own gain and wield one's power over others, while to be human is to recognise that having power affords one a responsibility to use that power

[31] Sharman Apt Russel, *Hunger: An Unnatural History* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 26.
[32] Ellman, p. 17.

for others. The hunger of a white court vampire requires one to engage with this question of power: the vampiric abilities afford seductive powers over others in order to feed, and feeding in turn affords literal supernatural power (healing, strength, speed). Thus, the ethical dilemma: can you choose to use the power you have gained through harm to responsibly protect others from harm? And even if you do so, does the good atone for the harm? And what kind of person does that make you?

Thomas' choice to sacrifice of himself in the mode of self-denial reflects his relationship with this spectrum of hero and monster. If monstrousness and humanity are defined not biologically but behaviourally and perceptually, then in choosing to deny his monstrous hunger perhaps he can prove himself human and solve the ethical dilemma that he has inherited.

Hunger, linguistically, is tied to appetite, craving, and desire. When we need fuel we are hungry. Yet when people desire a dream, say the publication of a novel, they often say that they hunger for it. As a White Court vampire the "magic" of Thomas' existence takes this metaphorical and metonymical intertwining of hunger and desire and makes it instead the literal criteria of his existence. As a White Court vampire, Thomas is supernaturally beautiful, and he "feeds" on emotional (typically sexual) energy through physical contact. Of the vampires in Butcher's world, the White Court are often depicted as the most terrifying and dangerous precisely because they appear to be human.

Thomas is torn between two axes: the desire of his Hunger demon, the driving need to consume the life force of others in order to survive; and his desire to "feed" his soul with love and family.[33] The text positions Thomas as a person who needs love to prove that he is not a monster, but for whom love is literal agony. If he touches (let alone feeds upon) a person who

[33] All White Court vampires have what is described as a "Hunger Demon" entwined with their soul. This being pushes them to consume, and is the source of their power. It is a discrete entity, but is used in the novels also as representative of Thomas' most monstrous self. It is the creature he could be if he just gave in to the hunger.

is loved (even someone he himself loves) he will be physically burnt at that point of contact, '[e]ven the trappings of love between two people can be dangerous. [Thomas' sister] Lara's got a scar on the palm of her left hand where she picked up the wrong wedding ring'.[34] For the White Court vampire, love is quite literally anathema to existence. Thomas is trapped. He cannot have the thing he desires (love), and he cannot *allow* himself to have the thing he needs (sustenance) for the required harmful act would only prove that he is undeserving of love in the first place. The fact, in the fantasy world, of his monstrous existence becomes a fulcrum upon which pivots a discussion of power, choice, and what defines a person. As long-form narrative explores not just one story, Thomas' story of hunger and self-denial, of his sacrifice, is not singular either. There is a void inside Thomas that at various times he seeks to either ignore, sate, or negotiate.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two I have chosen texts that are not "about" the type of sacrifice the chapter is addressing, but rather are texts that contain instances, or an instance, of such an act that strikes at the heart of the text's thematic discussion. *Mistborn* is not about martyrdom, it uses a martyrdom to critique racial oppression and tyranny, and explore the role of collective identity building through shared narratives as the counter to such oppression and tyranny. In the same way, *The Dresden Files* is not about hunger. It is about power and choice, temptation and responsibility. Thomas is always tempted by power, always being almost seduced by his demon and always almost failing from his self-doubt. Sating his hunger provides a reservoir of energy that he can draw upon, but the more power he channels the hungrier he becomes. His nature embodies the dangers of wielding power over others. But his choices celebrate those who deny the hunger and choose others over themselves. His successful self-denials, those acts of sacrifice, perform a key message of resilience and self-actualisation in the face of limiting dominant norms and reductive external assumptions.

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[34] Jim Butcher, *Blood Rites* (New York: Roc, 2004), p. 188.

The exaggerated nature of Thomas' hunger, and the fact of his self-denial, presents a scathing indictment of those who abuse their power over others. None of us have to live with a literal, constant, madness-inducing hunger to consume others. In the novel *Dead Beat,* Thomas has been denying his need to feed, rationing himself and trying to reduce the harm of his actions. Thomas has been terse, angry, and Harry does not understand why.

> "You want to know what is' like? Beat me down the beach."
>
> […]
>
> I beat him back to the SUV by maybe four steps, slapped the back of the vehicle with my hand, then leaned against it, panting heavily. My throat felt like it had been baked in a kiln, and as soon as I could manage it I took the keys out of my black nylon sports pouch. There were several keys on the ring, and I fumbled at them one at a time. After the third wrong guess I had a brief sharp urge to break the window and grab the bottle of water I'd left sitting on the driver's sat. I managed to force myself to try the keys methodically until I found the right one.
>
> I opened the door, grabbed the bottle, twisted off the cap, and lifted it to ease the parched discomfort in my throat.
>
> I took my first gulp, and the water felt and tasted like it had come from God's own water cooler. It took the harshest edge off the burning thirst, but I need more to ease the discomfort completely.
>
> Before I could swallow again, Thomas batted the water bottle out of my hand. It arched through the air and landed on the sand, spilling uselessly onto the beach.
>
> I spun on Thomas, staring at him in surprised anger.
>
> He met my gaze with weary grey eyes and said, "It's like that."[35]

[35] Butcher, *Dead Beat,* pp. 144-145.

The simile that Butcher and Thomas present here for the reader and Harry is straightforward in terms of the discomfort of not sating one's needs. Butcher's language choices emphasise the connection between this frustration and the monster, in particular the phrase "spilling uselessly onto the beach". In this simile, the water is a person, and so the parallel drawn is that, from this place of thirst, hunger, the people walking around are uselessly spilling their lives, that whenever Thomas does not feed upon them it is a waste. Thomas does not just deny the hunger, he resists the anger, violence, and predatory urges that the discomfort of his hunger stir in him.

As Thomas walks away, the water bottle spilling uselessly into the sand, Harry reflects on how hard it is to ignore his thirst. He thinks about 'living with that discomfort and pain hour after hour, day after day, knowing that all I had to do was pick up a vessel filled with what I needed and empty it to make me feel whole'.[36] Finally, he asks of himself: 'How long would I be able to last? Thomas had done it for most of a year. I wasn't sure I would have done as well in his place'.[37] Thomas persists, endures, and even triumphs. In the light of that story, his choice to hunger asks the question: for people without literal demons driving their desires, what excuse do they have for using and abusing others? Harry here gives explicit voice as the witness of hunger, as Thomas' acts of sacrifice force him to place himself in that position and consider his own implication in, and relationship with, the monster. This scene forces the reader to confront their expectations of Harry and of Thomas by suggesting that Harry perhaps has more anger in him than Thomas, and that the human hero of this story might more readily give in to an act of monstrous consumption if it would reduce his suffering. The text takes expectations of the monster, subverts them, and then uses that subversion to critique the monster within the human.

[36] Butcher, *Dead Beat*, p. 146.
[37] Butcher, *Dead Beat*, p. 146.

Hunger, Identity, and Self-Perception

Thomas' hunger for life-energy is absorbed through physical touch, intimacy, and, primarily, sex. With Thomas, the metaphorical connection between sexual desire and gastronomic desire is erased, and the two become one. Instead of calories, protein, and fats, a White Court vampire consumes life, identity, and intimacy. The body hungers for what it needs to survive. Thomas' relationship with hunger exists in an interesting thematic space where his body needs intimacy to survive despite how that love is anathema to his existence. He needs to take the intimacy of others but is denied his own experience of loving support. This fact of Thomas' hunger, the equivalency drawn of people as food, is important to hold in mind as it creates the space for compelling questions. For instance, anorexia nervosa (which I will talk about in more detail in the next section) 'can develop whenever a person loses weight, […] fasting […] for beauty or control'.[38] So, as Thomas is not consuming calories, the question becomes: what is Thomas "losing" that triggers a disorder? And over what is he seeking control?

Thomas's first appearance is at a costume party where the theme is to come as something you are not. He attends in opalescent butterfly wings, white leather gloves and loincloth, and is described as 'pale as a statue'.[39] In accordance with the masquerade theme, Thomas must perceive at his core that he is not the beautiful inhuman being and unfeeling "statue". But simultaneously he sees that he cannot fly freely in accordance with his own desires. The wings are just for show. In *Blood Rites* Thomas more fully reaches out to protagonist Harry, requests his help, and ultimately confesses that they are half-brothers.[40] In this novel Harry and Thomas undergo a soulgaze.[41] In the symbolic tableau that Harry

[38] Russel, p. 164.
[39] Butcher, *Grave Peril*, p. 203.
[40] The sixth book of the series, the third Thomas appears in.
[41] An experience that occurs when a wizard locks eyes with someone for the first time that shows each of them the true self of the other person.

witnesses, we see Thomas, the real Thomas, warring with his hunger. Thomas is depicted standing before a large silver mirror, and in the reflection is a demon whose arm extends beyond the surface of the mirror, clutching at Thomas' human arm. His hunger quite literally has its claws in him. However, the rest of Thomas' human body here is unmarked by hunger. In his heart, Thomas is not an inhuman, beautiful statue, but a fairly plain man. In fact, Harry describes him as possibly even a little 'nearsighted'.[42] This, like Thomas' costume, reflects that he is not the monster, but also that he is not free from the monster. What the mirror struggle highlights is that if he were to stop denying the hunger, he would be pulled fully through the mirror glass into the landscape of 'dark, dried blood and sun-bleached bone', the monster would take over, and the costume would cease to be a façade.[43]

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry explains how the mechanisms of torture, and the experience of torture—that is, enforced pain trying to get you to yield, a comparable experience to extreme hunger—reduces the world of the person suffering 'to a single room or set of rooms'.[44] Consider Thomas' interior landscape, the singular room of his hunger, pain, and identity. Not only is the "room" blank and cold, there is also no horizon or limit, '[t]here wasn't a ceiling. There weren't any walls. […] Thunder rumbled somewhere far away'.[45] Thomas' single room, his all-consuming pain, is also endless, boundless. He cannot walk away from it, and with a storm in the distance the threat of it worsening is always imminent. His hunger reduces him to a life lived staring into the mirror at the monster that is a part of his soul.

Sharman Apt Russel succinctly describes the warring motivations that can either motivate or suppress hunger. She states that '[a]ppetite is desire, born of biology, molded by

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[42] Butcher, *Blood Rites*, p. 199.
[43] Butcher, *Blood Rites*, p. 199.
[44] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 40.
[45] Butcher, *Blood Rites*, p. 199.

experience and culture'.[46] Thomas naturally hungers, but his experience and culture (growing up in the Raith family of the White Court) shapes that appetite in a way that requires him to view people as prey and himself as the predator. The social context and dominant norms dictate that appetite is about dominion over another through consumption. Russel continues, '[w]hen appetite and satiety conflict, appetite often wins'.[47] Even when we have eaten enough, we still often desire more. The culturally constructed appetite wins out over just biology. For Thomas, the Hunger in the mirror, representing the desires of the White Court Vampires, is never sated.[48] Thomas can be "full" and have enough energy, but the desire to feed never goes away. You cannot overcome hunger by feeding it. However, '[a]ppetite's alter ego is aversion. When aversion and hunger conflict, aversion often wins'.[49] In the context of human hunger and food, aversion typically refers to things like rotten food turning the stomach which suppresses hunger. For Thomas, his aversion turns inward, he becomes disgusted by his acts of monstrous consumption that feed his appetite but harm others. It is this inwardly directed aversion and self-loathing that gives rise to hunger as a disorder.

Hunger as Disorder

As an individually chosen act, self-denial like martyrdom drives towards change. However, it is possible that this "choice" can be influenced or driven not by the individual but by a social context that shapes that choice. Acts of self-denial work to make a different future possible. But when self-denial takes on an obsessive or fanatical quality it reduces the view of the future to an endless, insurmountable problem of the now; Thomas' life becomes

[46] Russel, p. 24.
[47] Russel, p. 24.
[48] Note, the novels refer to Thomas' Hunger demon as an entity within him. Whenever "Hunger" is capitalised in this chapter, it is referring to that embodiment of Hunger and drawing on the construction of the series.
[49] Russel, p. 24.

reduced to a torturous 'single room' that he cannot see a way out of.[50] When the denial of hunger turns to disorder, that fixation becomes a roadblock in the path towards change. As with other forms of disorders such as addiction, it often says less about the person than it does about the world around them. Nancy Scheper-Hughes states that '[a] hungry body exists as a potent critique of the society in which it exists'.[51] This is precisely because, as Susan Bordo explains, culture is 'not simply contributory but *productive* of eating disorders'.[52] Thomas' journey into hunger and self-denial begins with disorder and so begins not with looking forwards towards change but with critique of the current context. To understand how he might change, we must first understand how he has come to be.

Early in the series Thomas nearly dies and his family bring him his human partner Justine to feed upon. Barely alive, unaware of what is happening Thomas draws deeply from Justine and upon waking believes that he has killed her. This is a catalysing moment in Thomas' relationship with his hunger. He has inflicted deep harm on the person he loves most in the world—thereby proving that he is a monster—and his family brought him to do it. The social context shapes his actions. When Harry questions Thomas about the death of Justine and angrily calls him out, Thomas' typically statuesque physicality shifts: 'He folded his arms over his stomach, as if nauseous'.[53] He has consumed her and he cannot accept it, cannot let it settle. Though he has fed his appetite, the aversion to the harm of this act rises up in conflict with a desire that, given the chance, he would have denied. This is the moment where Thomas' relationship with his hunger shifts from the innate back and forth to disorder.

Thomas's initial portrayal in the series is as the active incubus: a lively party boy with no care for consequences or empathy for others. But as the costume party suggests, this

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[50] Scarry, p. 40.

[51] Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (University of California Press, 1993), p. 174.

[52] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 50.

[53] Butcher, *Blood Rites*, p. 178.

monstrous ego is a facade. Despite his hope that beneath the beautiful exterior there is a good person, killing Justine provides a kind of proof of the monster. The anorexic can become obsessed with their weight and their state of being once they have begun losing weight.[54] The presence of Justine in Thomas' life, the fact that she perceived him to be a good person, made it possible to see himself in that way. She was a different social context to his family. When Thomas loses Justine and her love, he becomes obsessed with his state of being. Thomas in this part of the series begins to deny himself any form of monstrous satiation out of an obsessive need to distance himself from the monster.

Maud Ellman states that '[i]t is true that hunger depends upon its context for meaning, but it is also true that self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself. It de-historicizes, de-socializes, and even de-genders the body'.[55] Thomas experiences this struggle to divorce his body from its social context, and even further to release his identity from its bodily context. In a diagnostic context, one of the primary criteria for anorexia nervosa is an 'intense fear of becoming fat, even though underweight'.[56] This problematic irony is a key part of Thomas' lived experience. To rephrase for his particular context, we could instead say that he exhibits an intense fear of becoming a hideous monster even though he is beautiful. The common thread through all descriptions of Thomas is his exceptional beauty, but as the soulgaze shows, the core of him, the idealised self he would like to be, is far more plain. The beautiful face in the mirror becomes then only a reminder of how stained his soul is. The aversion he feels towards himself motivates his self-denial. As Russel notes, those 'with anorexia nervosa are also paying more attention to their emotional needs (which may have a biological basis) then their body's hunger. Although they may feel hunger acutely, their appetite, their aversion is more

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[54] Russel, p. 164.

[55] Ellman, p. 14.

[56] Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Self-Starvation* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 1.

important'.[57]

Thomas' internalised self-loathing exists in relation to the social expectations of his family, the White Court. Theirs is the context from which Thomas seeks release. For the reader, his obsessive self-denial following Justine's death signals that it is the White Court that is to be critiqued. The ethos of the White Court is power over others through manipulation. Even their coming of age and coming into power, the experience through which they learn they are not human, is a monstrous experience built on lies and manipulation.

As a child in the Raith family, Thomas grows up assuming he is human. In his adolescence, his Hunger awakened alongside his sexual maturity and, in having sex for the first time, his Hunger took over and he consumed his sexual partner, draining then of all life. The first feeding is always lethal. While the series does not depict Thomas' experience of this and instead dramatises it through Thomas' cousin, the explanation is voiced by Thomas. He suggests that the 'panic and trauma must have acted like a catalyst on [the] Hunger'.[58] This experience—one they were denied the agency to choose or avoid—creates an intense internal conflict and forces a choice. On the one hand, they have just murdered someone, probably someone they cared about, but at the same time, as Thomas reports, that fatal feeding feels '[l]ike becoming light […] Like sinking into the warmth of a campfire when you've been shivering for hours. Like a hot steak after a day of swinging in cold water. It transforms you […] Makes you feel […] Whole'.[59] The newly awakened vampire has to confront the horror of what they have done and that it felt so amazing that it fulfilled something they did not even know they were lacking. This impossible confrontation is embodied in the brief pause the text presents between "[m]akes you feel…" and "[w]hole", where '[h]is eyes became haunted, hollow'.[60] A nascent White Court vampire faces an impossible and abusive choice: internalise

[57] Russel, p. 25.
[58] Butcher, *Blood Rites,* p. 186.
[59] Jim Butcher, *Turn Coat* (New York: Roc, 2010), p. 538.
[60] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 523.

the horror of what they have done, or embrace the White Court family that accepts and celebrates the behaviour.

The cultural expectation of the White Court, each of whom has gone through this process and been forced to encounter their own monstrous nature, inflicts this process upon the next generation in some kind of attempt at justification, as if making others commit the same murder as themselves will justify their own experience. There is a pressure of belonging, that you must be a certain way, look a certain way, act a certain way in order to be an acceptable and valued person. Thomas is a White Court vampire, in a sense he *should* be hungry, but he hates himself for being so. For Thomas, this self-hatred drives a need for change. In Chapter Four I will explore how the ongoing nature of self-loathing can lead to an internalised oppression fuelled by acts of self-erosion that inter-generationally support an oppressive status quo. Both Thomas and Essun—the focal character of Chapter Four's case study—represent a struggle with the threat of social determinism. Where self-erosion tragically supports the systems that enforce it, self-denial is an act of resistance that works to not only 'release the body from all contexts', but hopefully to change those contexts by performing at their boundaries, or, to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, by presenting 'a variation on that repetition' of norms.[61]

The textual presence of Thomas' disorder alone is a critique of the White Court culture. But that in itself is not that interesting. The story is not from their perspective, it is not about them. They are literal monsters in this narrative, they are vampires, so of course we are critical, of course the reader is not supposed to be in favour of their perspective. Where they become useful is in what they stand in contrast to. The text has Red Court vampires and Black Court vampires, both of whom are clearly monsters, but neither of them has the Hunger in the

[61] Ellman, p. 14; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 145.

same vein as the White Court. Hunger draws attention to a gap, it tells a story of problems and a need for redressing. It is not just that the White Court uses their hunger to gain power. The series emphasises that their power is distinct from the horror of the Red and Black court vampires who merely kill. The White Court's power is horrifying because it controls people. The White Court vampire removes agency by making a person want to be fed upon. The White Court ethos is power through manipulation and control.

It is in juxtaposition to this that, instead of controlling others, Thomas controls himself. He denies satiation by monstrous feeding. Sacrificing his own well-being to protect others highlights that the true monstrosity of the White Court is not just that they feed and kill, but that they control and reduce. By denying his Hunger, Thomas asserts that the White Court status quo of harmful feeding as essential and inevitable is false. His chosen act of sacrifice creates the possibility of not only a different self, but also of a different White Court. As Jemisin will attest in *The Broken Earth,* '[d]ifferent choices have always been possible'.[62]

Thomas' struggle with the social contexts around him is written on his body. In each novel in which Thomas is present, his first appearance in the narrative is marked by a physical description. The text positions the reader, through protagonist Harry, as always seeing Thomas rather than being him. Ellman notes that 'the verb "to stare" is related to the verb "to starve" which used to mean to freeze or turn to stone. […] staring and starving both have the effect of reifying bodies into spectacles'.[63] For the reader, Thomas' hunger and his body are always the spectacle. From the internal landscape of his true self depicted through the soulgaze of an 'abstract of Mount Olympus after its gods died' where the floor is laid like a chessboard dotted with marble pillars and 'human figures carved in stone', to the descriptions of Thomas as a 'marble-white being' who can stand perfectly still, 'like a statue', whenever

[62] N. K. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* (London: Orbit, 2017), p. 395.
[63] Ellman, p. 102.

the reader perceives Thomas' body they are positioned to experience a cognitive dissonance.[64] He is the beautiful monster, undeniably inhuman and yet desirable and yet fearsome. The hunger written on his body emphasises these contradictions.

Thomas' self-denial exists in this state of hunger as disorder for only one novel following the catalysing event (his apparent murder of Justine). Up until this point the focal points of the reader's stare have been his highly fashionable clothing choices, and his striking physical beauty. In this novel (*Dead Beat*, Dresden Files #7), Thomas is instead described as having 'stark cheekbones' and 'a long face' with eyes 'the color of thunderclouds'.[65] He is gaunt and strained as if something weighs on him. Through the entire novel there is a fatalistic bent to his characterisation; his anger, shame, and self-doubt manifest in avoidance behaviours. The obsession of the disorder denies him the ability to imagine himself differently and so he externalises his fear and self-loathing onto character Waldo Butters.[66]

He warns Harry that Butters 'lets his fear control him', and that '[h]e's either going to get you killed or else freeze at a bad moment and die'.[67] He pushes Harry to leave Butters, that it would be smarter, and safer, and better to cut the liability who will only let him down. Here he is wrestling with his self-perception, but also asking for help. Self-perception is still perception, and so Thomas, having experienced the catalysing moment of his disorder, is also experiencing cognitive dissonance. He loves her, but he hurt her. He is starving, but still hungry. So he pushes his brother to 'cut [Butters] loose'.[68] It is easy to read here Thomas' subtextual question: I might get you killed, are you going to cut me loose? In this novel, Butters comes to act despite his fear, he chooses to help others because even if he were to die,

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[64] Butcher, *Blood Rites*, pp. 198-199; p. 117; Jim Butcher, *Changes* (New York: Roc, 2010), p. 185.

[65] Butcher, *Dead Beat*, p. 4.

[66] In this novel, despite Thomas' fears, Butters saves Harry's life, and in doing so makes the first in a series of choices that leads him down a path to becoming a divinely ordained Knight of the Cross, someone granted power by God to defend the world against those who would seek to take people's choice in their own fates. Yet another piece in the *Dresden Files*' on-going discussion of power, responsibility, humanity, and monstrosity.

[67] Butcher, *Dead Beat*, p. 228.

[68] Butcher, *Dead Beat*, p. 228.

it is the right thing to do and the person he wants to be. The layering of the characters' relationships, Butters choosing against his "nature", Harry standing by his "liability" friend, all support a core message: as context is productive of disorder, so too can it be productive of support and belonging.

The level of Thomas' self-denial here is too much. The disorder harms him and so prevents Thomas from realising the version of himself that he seeks. The obsession narrows his focus so much that he stagnates. The acts of sacrifice involved with self-denial should lead to a new self to supplant the old, denied self. But as Thomas' choice here is in a way coerced, it falls instead into the category of societally enforced sacrifice rather than individually chosen sacrifice and thus brings no change. As the disorder comes in large part from the social context, it trends towards an energy of maintaining the status quo.

The sacrifice plays a thematic role for the reader, but the text suggests that hunger is more complex than this, and that there is more to be said. In the study of hunger and what it says, perhaps the most commonly referenced text is *The Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee. The following quote from this text helps explain why Thomas' time in hunger as disorder has to change in order to achieve change.

> Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding balked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, *the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: the wrong story, always wrong*.[69] [My emphasis added]

This idea of "the wrong story" captures Thomas' acts of self-denial at this time. As he obsessively denies himself, that inward focus takes everything that he might be trying to explain with his self-denial and uselessly pours it into himself. By hating himself, the energy of the act of sacrifice is diverted away from the problematic context that requires the sacrifice

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[69] J. M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 110.

in the first place.

To grapple with hunger is to grapple with its context. Recognising this relationship, Ellman explores the idea that hunger strikers might be driven by a similar compulsion as anorectics, or that perhaps anorectics are undertaking their own kind of hunger strike. The core difference being that 'anorectics rarely explain themselves at all, and the explanations that they offer are designed to disavow their illness rather than to master its destructive logic'.[70] Hunger strikers voice their reasons for protest and demand recognition, while the anorectic hides in shame. They carry the weight of their current inability to redress the gap between how they see themself and the self they would like to see. Malson refers to a 'fading away' of the anorexic, and that it 'may signify a resistance to a number of socially available subject (im)positions. Yet, [...] "fading away" can also be understood as literally and discursively self-annihilating'.[71] While we can read the anorectic struggle as a protest against the context that has birthed it, if the individual merely fades away then the social context will persist. In order to 'make [his] self-starvation readable as protest', Thomas must break his silence.[72] He shifts away from the unvoiced protest of hunger as disorder, towards fasting. This alternate bodily pursuit emphasises the series' core thematic concern of power as responsibility. While the choice to starve himself comes from a place of wanting to deny what the world has demanded of him, hunger as disorder provides critique of the context but it does not change that context. The dissonant gap is not resolved. Thomas is still the beautiful monster, and he is still hungry. Instead he shifts to fasting and attempts to better the self through control and limitation rather than pure ascetic denial.

The textual positioning of Thomas as the object rather than the perceiver also functions as a comparative model for Harry's own journey through the temptations of power and

[70] Ellman, p. 21.
[71] Malson, p. 187.
[72] Ellman, p. 18.

possible fall towards monstrosity. As half-brothers they mirror each other, though they do so asynchronously. Older brother Thomas' monstrous acts prefigure Harry's fall.

In *Dead Beat* where Thomas shifts from disorder to fasting, Harry is beginning his journey into temptation as the shadow of a fallen angel imprints into his mind and offers him power. At this point in the series, the reader has only ever seen Harry be the hero, even pulling Thomas back from feeding on someone. Thomas is the monster, but here he is trying so hard to change that. The mirroring of these two characters affirms the way that desire narrows focus. Just as Thomas' hunger can be all consuming to the point where he can forget the better self he desires to be, Harry's desire to protect the people he loves pushes him to make further and further questionable choices, valuing results over means and giving in to desire and fear. As the "monster" strives to be good, the hero acts more recklessly and violently. Harry takes his 'raw anxiety and rage' and, to make a point to a child in his care, 'gouge[s] a two-foot-deep, coffin length furrow in the concrete of the sidewalk'.[73] In the subsequent scene, Murphy, Harry's friend, calls out this action and frames it with Harry's own teachings about magic, power, and responsibility:

> you knew what kind of damage you could do. But if what you say is true, in the moment you used your magic *you thought that what you were doing was right*. You thought it was okay to destroy something because you were angry. Even though it might hurt someone else who didn't deserve it.[74]

Thomas' acts of self-denial at this stage fail to change himself, Harry, or his White Court family. The level of self-denial is too much. It is absolute and all-encompassing with an obsessive inward focus. The choice to sacrifice should bring change, but this over-correction harms more than it models a possible different future.

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[73] Butcher, *White Night*, p. 295.
[74] Butcher, *White Night*, p. 326.

Fasting

The crucial thematic differences between disorder and fasting are the levels of control, and the levels of connection with social context. In order to not be defined and limited by his monstrous desire, Thomas became fixated on completely denying his appetite. But that fixation in a way gives the desire more control and Thomas finds himself just as limited as before, except he now is alone and hates himself. Fasting represents an attempt to kill the appetite outright, or to transcend it. If he controls his feeding, perhaps he can deny the vampiric harm that steals others' agency. As fasting involves some level of consumption, Thomas enters into a dialogue with the rest of the White Court vampires: is it possible to sustainably feed without harming humans. If the answer is yes, then it reframes their entire existence as a choice rather than in accordance with an essential nature.

Fasting as an act of restricting food intake is all about control of bodily desire for self-betterment. It is an exercise in control that has a long history with the spiritual. Fasting can include both the self-sufficiency, purification of body (and at times of soul), as well as elements of protest. The latter is famously embodied by Gandhi as satyagraphic fast which Sharp notes is intended to convert the witness to the faster's view.[75] As an act of self-denial it occupies a middle ground between hunger as disorder and the fully voiced protest of the hunger strike. Where the disorder fails to achieve change whilst still enmeshed within the context that has produced it, fasting attempts a distancing from that context. It may not achieve in all cases the same explicitly voiced protest as the hunger strike, but it is an active choice to disorder's coerced and constructed nature. It seeks change rather than denial or avoidance. Within a text, fasting emphasises not just a gap between a current and desired self, but a gap between a current and desired world.

[75] Sharp, pp. 367-368.

The act of fasting as purification and self-sufficiency is a refusal of contexts that have been perceived to sully the body and self in the first place. It denies the limitations of a world that would drive is citizens to disorder. Unlike the avoidance of hunger as disorder, the specific choices of a fast (what sustenance, if any, is allowed, intended time period, goals set) take the need of the hunger and shape its voice into clear and specific statements. In Thomas' case, he fasts and so says "I am a vampire but killing is a choice". He says, "though I need to eat to survive, I do not need to glut myself." To return to the vampire as capitalist parasite metaphor, Thomas' family's appetite for hedonism, the way that they eat, says "I am the predator and therefore I must take." Under capitalism, material gain represents value and importance. The language of the system constructs a perception that one way parasitic consumption is in the individual's best interest. However, as the chapter on martyrdom has demonstrated, acts of sacrifice are value statements that can juxtapose and challenge dominant social narratives. By choosing to limit his consumption Thomas models a different metric for measuring success.

His time spent fasting is achieved by taking up a role as a high-end hair stylist. As a stylist Thomas builds people up instead of draining them dry. Another word for one-way emotional relationships is abusive. To take from someone and give nothing in return is abusive. The literal monster of the vampire serves well as a symbolic stand in not just for capitalism but also for the abusive partner, the rapist, and the egomaniac. Thomas' journey towards self-improvement and the denial of the monster has to redress this harmful one-way interpersonal hegemony for the change to ever last or extend beyond himself. By pursuing a career as a stylist, Thomas uses his potentially dangerous incubus-like emotional powers to sustain himself through the little intimacies of washing hair, and in the process not only supernaturally boosts their mood, but physically and visually helps his customers feel good about themselves.

> I watched the woman who'd been under the hair dryer come out, smile at Thomas, and pick up a cup of coffee on the way out. She looked...well, radiant, really. Confident. She looked like she felt sexy and beautiful.[76]

Instead of consuming he creates a mutually beneficial relationship. What is striking about the above quote is not so much the fact that Thomas has contributed to this woman's self-esteem, but that she smiles at him. The happiness is mutual. Here vampire and human are not predator and prey, but partners. In this life choice, Thomas is able to juxtapose everything that his family represents. When White Court vampires feed they become even more supernaturally beautiful and desirable. Thomas' fast inverts that power dynamic by enhancing the beauty of the humans that he supports. He gives back instead of just taking. He heals rather than harms.

When fasting is presented as a pursuit of self-betterment, within fiction this can place a fasting character into a distinct position of "betterness" against which other character and textual elements fail to measure up. As with self-denial in general, it is that contrast that emphasises a gap to be addressed. If Thomas can be better, then do those with selfish desires have to harm others or are they merely choosing to do so because it is easier? Sharman Apt Russel makes reference to a fourth century Greek writer who describes how fasting 'heals disease, dries up the bodily humours, casts out demons, chases away wicked thoughts, makes the mind clearer and the heart pure, sanctifies the body and places the person before the throne of God'.[77] The "casting out of demons" most definitely weighs heavily on Thomas' mind. Much of Thomas' guilt lies not only in the shame at the acts his hunger drives him to, but also in how good it feels to undertake those acts. As well as the fact that he perpetually hungers for more. It is the desire itself that he wishes to kill, or at least control. This is a more intentional and chosen self-denial than the blind avoidance and obsession of the disorder.

[76] Butcher, *White Night*, p. 491.
[77] Russel, p. 44.

Russel also notes that:

> Along with combating sexual desire, fasting also put to the sword to gluttony, which some Christians of that day counted as the first major vice, gluttony leading to lust, and lust to avarice, and down the line to anger, vainglory, and pride. Gluttony was especially stubborn, for the body needs food to eat. Sexual desire was almost as bad since we need sex for procreation. For such physical sins, a physical cure.[78]

Note the intertwined nature of sexual desire and appetitive desire. For Thomas, these are amplified by nature of being one and the same: sexual feeding. Perhaps, if Thomas can "put to the sword" his hunger, then it can prevent him also from falling down that slope into "lust", "avarice", "anger", and, the state that is essentially all of those facets combined, monstrosity.

There is a sense in which hunger is a base drive, an animalistic survival instinct. Choosing to deny the animal affirms human agency as more powerful than the predator. Book eight, *Proven Guilty*, describes Thomas in this animalistic vein, as the 'lean, hungry predator' and as the 'hungry leopard waiting patiently for the next meal to approach'.[79] The lack of choice not only reduces him to the animal, it makes him dangerous. In this novel, where Thomas begins his fast, he is driven by his guilt due to the events of the prior novel. Thomas joined the Wild Hunt of the fae (when the Hunt rides your choices are join or be hunted). In joining, he indulges his animal nature in order to survive. He feeds monstrously and must again confront the fact that it feels good. His guilt haunts him symbolically through the primary events of the novel where invading ghosts grow stronger, *feeding* on the fear of others; this is what Thomas fears he is.

The need for self-betterment is further emphasised by the introduction of character

[78] Russel, p. 45.
[79] Jim Butcher, *Proven Guilty* (New York: Roc, 2007), p. 43; p. 374.

Molly Carpenter. As Harry's new apprentice, Molly represents second chances. She, like Harry, has committed an act of "black magic" for well-intentioned reasons. She first uses her untrained abilities to alter the minds of two of her friends, making them afraid of the heroin they were addicted to. In doing so she breaks one of the world's Laws of Magic which exist to limit instances of wizards wielding their power over others. The prevailing belief is that the use of such Black Magic 'changes you. Stains you'.[80] While this reads like absolutist moralising, it draws on the fact that to alter someone's mind, even to try and help them, is to arrest their agency; she embodies Thomas' core existential question: can a monstrous act do good and thus undo the monster? This novel suggests the answer is "maybe".

The reader is presented with another symbolic tableau via a soulgaze. Instead of Thomas' cold empty landscape focusing on a mirror, Molly's soul is revealed to Harry as a series of church windows each depicting a different image of her. Harry realises he is

> looking at possibilities. […] In all the potential images, she was a person of power—different kinds of power, certainly, but she was strong in all of them. She was going to wind up with power of her own to use or misuse, depending on what choices she made.[81]

Confronted by these possibilities, Harry reflects on how different people in Molly's life might influence her to act in ways that could lead to each image, the 'smiling and laughing, older and comfortably heavier, children surrounding her' Molly or the Molly with eyes 'flat as a reptile's, empty. She wore all black, including a black collar, and her hair had been dyed to match. Though she looked like Molly, like a human being, she was neither. She had become something else entirely, something very, very bad'.[82] Harry's introspection carries shades of the way that he has reflected on his relationship with Thomas, his care to not view him or

[80] Butcher, *Proven Guilty*, p. 40.
[81] Butcher, *Proven Guilty*, pp. 464-465.
[82] Butcher, *Proven Guilty*, p. 464.

treat his brother like a monster in the hopes of supporting Thomas' own journey in self-definition. Harry concludes that 'Molly had not yet indelibly stained herself. Her future had yet to be written'.[83] The scene revolves around the possibility of redemption from bad choices, and a recognition that choices are plural and on-going. One act does not make a monster. All identity construction requires that performative repetition. So, to return to hope, that repetition is required means no one's self is determined. A constructed self can be denied.

In the next novel (*White Night*, book 9) Thomas' on-going relationship with self-denial exists in between two extreme, opposite models. Thomas' cousin Madrigal Raith begins to feed on fear through administered pain and death rather than through sex and so offers an image of an even more self-serving abuse of power. In contrast, *White Night* presents Lash (the shadow of a fallen angel, a literal embodiment of Christian-defined evil). This supposedly irredeemable monster chooses to sacrifice herself for Harry out of love. In a society built on values of individualism, any chosen act of self-sacrifice is likely to cause witnesses to ask why. This effect is amplified in the case of the sustained choices of self-denial and especially hunger. With the sudden and drastic act of martyrdom, a clear narrative immediately forms to fill in the gap of that question. Here the question persists in part because the answer can either be uncertain or shift over time. In the text, the representation of the self-denial is able to pose the question more assertively by positioning the acts of sacrifice in relation to other textual elements. As fasting seeks control—neither full abstinence nor full consumption—these acts can be positioned also in the middle, between an object of critique and a model for further inspiration.

Against Thomas' persistent struggle, the reader is drawn into the dialogue with the monstrous selfishness of Madrigal Raith and his compatriots as their actions are made to stand out as more horrific through the presentation of better alternatives. It emphasises that it is not

[83] Butcher, *Proven Guilty*, p. 465.

who (or what) you are that dictates the actions you choose, but rather it is the actions you choose that dictate who you are. This ideology is then further enforced by an act of martyrdom. Lash is the psychic shadow of the fallen angel Lasciel who exists inside Harry's mind to try and tempt him into fully embracing the power that Lasciel offers. However, instead of fulfilling this role that she was created to do, Lash gives her life to save Harry's. She chooses to undertake an act of sacrifice born of love. This act, the fundamental opposite of what Madrigal Raith portrays in this novel, is possible because, just as he does with his brother, Harry chooses to see a person not a monster. He tells her that '[j]ust because you start out as one thing, it doesn't mean you can't grow into something else'.[84] Lash is empowered to make this choice, and in fact only realises she *can* make this choice, because of the way that Harry treats her as a person with kindness rather than fear or subservience. Their relationship becomes a micro scale social context with its own expectations. This new space allows for a different, non-monstrous choice to be made.

Moving forwards through these three novels in which Thomas fasts, it becomes slowly clear over time that though Thomas is indeed better than he has been, there remain issues that his fast does not address. In *White Night* Thomas is described as always seeming 'self-contained, confident, pleased with himself and unimpressed with the world around him'.[85] With this description alone it would seem that Thomas has successfully denied the hungry, inhuman statue version of himself that humanity insists is inevitable for the vampire. Perhaps there is too much distance though.

> In Justine's arms he looked like a man in mourning. But he bent his whole body to her, holding her with every fibre and sinew, not merely his arm, and every line of his face became softer, somehow, gentler, as though he had been suddenly relieved

[84] Butcher, *White Night*, p. 340.
[85] Butcher, *White Night,* p. 424.

> of an intolerable agony I had never realised he felt—though I noticed that neither he nor Justine touched each other's skin.[86]

While he may have found a way to be 'unimpressed with the world around him', the mourning tied to his love suggests that the self-satisfaction of the previous description is at least partially a performance. Thomas no longer harms those he feeds on, but it is hard to deny the monstrous self when he cannot physically touch the woman he loves. In *Small Favor* (book 10) Thomas' typically designer fashion is altered by the addition of an 'inexpertly crocheted' white yarn scarf that he wears over good clothes and touches only with gloves hands.[87] Made by Justine, the love it represents would burn him. This burden he carries too. The reader is shown that though the fast is improving him as it starves the monster and kills the feeding desire, so too does it starve the human desire within him. As much as Harry can treat Thomas like family, like a human, Thomas is confronted with facts to the contrary every day in his inability to touch or be with the woman that he loves.

Even with the fast, even though he is no longer adding to the harm of the world, the literal monster within him is alive and well, fed, in a sense, by his on-going self-loathing and disappointment.

> "I fasted to reform those who loved me," Gandhi would one day tell his friend Louis Fisher. "You cannot fast against a tyrant."[88]

It is this wisdom of Ghandi that suggests the final reason as to why Thomas' fast is not the end of his on-going sacrifice through self-denial. Thomas has guilt not only for his own monstrous acts, but also that of his Raith family. One of his desires is reform and change, or at very least to be able to lessen their impact on the world. But fasting distances himself from that context. This works as comparative critique for the reader, but it also lessens his ability

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[86] Butcher, *White Night,* p. 424.
[87] Jim Butcher, *Small Favor* (New York: Roc, 2008), p. 63.
[88] Russel, p.81.

to juxtapose his narrative against theirs. Kelsier's co-opting of the nobles' power in *Mistborn* allowed him to bridge the gap between oppressors and oppressed. Thomas might be able to challenge external perception of the vampire through this distance but he cannot fast against their tyranny

Through these three novels there is a glimpse at what Thomas' self-sacrifice might gain, but also a foreshadowing of imminent failure, and that more may yet be required if more change is what is desired. Before Thomas is afforded the chance to choose for himself however, his progress is cast backwards as the series engages with starvation: enforced hunger and the way that it reduces a person and reinforces the power of those inflicting the starvation. The power of the monster is wielded over Thomas in a way that shrinks his world to only that of pain that in turn only allows for existence as the monster.

Starvation and Indulgence – The Loss of Control

As this thesis is exploring, individually chosen sacrifice leads to change, while societally mandated or enforced sacrifice supports the persistence of the status quo: it is the forceful imposition of an ideology by those in power. Thomas's journey of self-improvement through self-sacrifice, and his narrative arc of defining the moral distinction between human and monster is halted. In *Turn Coat* (Book 11), Thomas' agency is denied as he is, through torture, repeatedly starved and then force-fed young women over and over again, driving him insane with both hunger and shame. Maud Ellman states that '[f]orce-feeding […] demolishes the ego'.[89] A monster (referred to as a Naagloshii) kidnaps Thomas in order to have leverage over Harry. However, during that kidnapping he rips strips of flesh from Thomas until he is mad with hunger. The Naagloshii gloats to Harry, "he was hanging meat for me for more than a

[89] Ellman, p. 33.

day, and I left *nothing* behind. You don't have *words* for the things I did to him. […] It is starving. Mad with hunger".[90] It is not so much the starvation itself that is torture, but more the repeated monstrous acts. With self-denial the emphasis is on "self" and identity. Thomas' ego, in this case the non-monstrous self that he has been building via his acts of self-denial, is demolished by being force-fed.

For Thomas and his relationship with beauty, the body, and hunger, this reduction to the inhuman, to just "meat" and "It", is the worst torture possible. Where Harry's perception of Thomas as a person creates a social space in which it is possible to live that identity, the torture of the Naagloshii reinforces the view of vampire as predator. I note Harry's perception of Thomas as a person here because it stands in stark contrast to the Naagloshii's phrasing. In threatening Lara Raith (Thomas' sister and de facto leader of the White Court), the Naagloshii says: "Do you understand me, little phage? You and that rotting bag of flesh you've attached yourself to?"[91] Here the monster talks, not to Lara, but to her Hunger demon. This monster recognises the agency not of the "bag of flesh" (the person), but rather that of the "phage": the feeding parasite inside. In tearing down Thomas through both starvation and force-feeding, the Naagloshii shows Thomas his monstrous self over and again.

In the soulgaze from *Blood Rites*, Thomas stands in front of a mirror, wrestling with a demon on the other side. The reader is shown this from Harry's perspective. The focus is on Thomas' struggle, and on his resilient humanity. But reconsider this tableau from Thomas' perspective. He is looking into a mirror. He sees only a dark reflection of himself. He cannot see the resilient human that the reader witnesses. When all you see is the monster, it is impossible to imagine anything else. To return to Scarry, the torture of Thomas' endless struggle with hunger reduces his life to this one single boundless and inescapable room.[92] For

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[90] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 458.
[91] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 248.
[92] Scarry, p. 40.

a time Harry and Justine, by seeing him differently, enabled Thomas to imagine himself differently; and this was reinforced by his acts of self-denial that widened the gap between possible selves. The Naagloshi brought back the mirror and reduced Thomas' gaze down to that. By cutting off the peripheral social context and any alternative worlds therein, Thomas becomes once more trapped in the dominant norms of his family and the one limited and harmful definition of vampire. Thomas captures the results of the Naagloshi's torture in tragic defeated words: it showed him '"what I really am"'.[93]

Thomas is always defined by his hunger. Until this point in the narrative, he has been attempting to define himself by his denial of that hunger and his attempted control. However, in this place of indulgence and fear that in fact he might just be only the monster, he affirms that '"[t]*hat's* what it taught me, Harry. At the end of the day, I'm just an empty place that needs to be filled"'.[94] Here, Thomas is defined anew by his choice to feed that hunger. This choice links back to the "choice" of disorder. In both cases these choices follow instances of externally inflicted trauma. As the marginalised minority—Thomas being apparently the only vampire in his family who wants to be human—he is under immense pressure to conform or perish. The trauma, and the self-loathing that he internalises as a result, reduce that capacity to see beyond the mirror and so he conforms.

Thomas appears to give up on self-denial at the close of *Turn Coat*. In a fraught scene between brothers Thomas describes himself as '"not wandering around blind anymore. Not trying desperately to be something that I'm not."', and that '"I was an idiot to try and live the way I've been living. […] The boutique. The constant nibbling, never sating myself. The… […] All of it"'.[95] Butcher sets this scene in a zoo, with both characters observing the caged tigers. Harry wonders in trepidation that perhaps he has never really known 'the tigers' seeing

[93] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 537.
[94] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 539.
[95] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 541; p. 537.

only 'the stripes'.[96] While Thomas clearly sees himself as the caged tiger, knowing that he needs a way out but only seeing walls.

Here, just before the series changes in scale, Thomas turns his self-sacrificing gaze outwards: if he cannot "reform" his family by his fast, perhaps there is another way:

> "I'm not some kind of ravaging monster. I'm not some kind of psychotic rampaging around the city devouring virgins […] You know, I really think I might have something to offer the world. I never could have exerted any kind of influence on my kin as a moping exile, trying to be human. […] Maybe this way, I actually can accomplish something. Promote a more responsible standard of relations between humanity and my kind. Who knows?"[97]

Though the title *Turn Coat* refers to the major plot events if the novel, Thomas' choice here layers in further meaning by turning away from his prior path, turning back to his family, and turning the page on his on-going acts of sacrifice through self-denial. Williamson states that '[e]ngaging with the vampire is connected to recognising our pain; a recognition that the promises that our culture holds out to us are both contradictory and impossible to achieve'.[98] Thomas' hope here to try and change his family, to '[p]romote a more responsible standard of relations' reflects this key facet of his journey through self-denial and his struggle against determining social contexts: a growing recognition that the standards of his family, and the standards of humanity, are both impossible to achieve.[99] If he wants change, and if he wants to resolve the 'unspoken pain of not fitting into societal norms and the misery of insignificance', he will need to change those norms.[100]

In this novel, in particular, Thomas' journey highlights that on-going acts of self-

[96] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 543.
[97] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 541.
[98] Williamson, p. 185.
[99] Butcher, *Turn Coat*, p. 541.
[100] Williamson, p. 184.

sacrifice (be it hunger, or some other form of self-denial) are complex. There is an inherent difficulty of sustaining such a sacrifice. And a further difficulty in determining the right level of self-denial to sustain in the first place. Hunger is a useful paradigm around which to base this discussion because of the way that such on-going self-sacrifice carries the weight of bodily harm and potential death: to keep sacrificing without the gap being redressed will bring a person to either their own end or to the failure of their sacrifice. What Thomas demonstrates, with the intertwining and equating of hunger, identity, and ideology, is the idea that on-going self-denial in any form carries a weight of unsustainability. This is what makes it difficult. However, because it also calls for a response from the empathetic witnesses, it can also function powerfully as protest. Most significantly, what all of these facets emphasise is that change is not a binary event. Sacrifice, not even the single act of a martyrdom, does not flip the world from one state to another. Instead, it provides a performative charge to an ideology that pursues change.

Hunger Strike

The next novel *Changes* (book 12) marks a pivot in the series for a number of reasons. The title itself suggests this, and signals this strongly not only by its literal meaning, but by being the only title in the series (thus far) to have a one word title rather than two. In this novel Harry learns he has a daughter. His idea of power bringing responsibility are made personally tangible in the form of parenthood. Yet in this novel he puts all of his friends at risk to save his daughter. In order to do so he sacrifices (in the ancient ritual sacrifice sense) the woman he loves and simultaneously commits genocide on all of the monstrous Red Court vampires. He makes a deal with a monster for the power he needs to accomplish these things. And he dies. Harry makes, essentially, the monstrous choice: he grabs at whatever power he can get

for his own sake regardless of who it may hurt in the process (and in the end it hurts a lot of people). As he tells Murphy, “I *will* make Maggie [his daughter] safe. If the world burns because of that, then so be it. Me and the kid will roast some marshmallows”.[101] From here the personal, and global, stakes of the series are much higher. This novel marks Harry’s fall towards becoming the monster. This fall is thematically and structurally prefigured in following *Turn Coat* and Thomas’ decision to stop denying himself.

During the time of this novel, Thomas is engaged, initially, in his return to the Raith family. He is feeding regularly, indulging. And while he is on board to help Harry and his newfound niece, there is no inclination that Thomas has any intention of changing his behaviour. However, after Harry’s death at the end of *Changes* Thomas shifts from self-indulgence firmly into the protest of a hunger strike.

In *Hunger: An Unnatural History*, Russell notes that

> [h]unger is a form of communication. When we fast for health, we are having a conversation with the body. When we fast as a Jew or Catholic, Moslem or Hindu, we are having a conversation with God. These are private discussions and often silent. Hunger strikes are different.[102]

A hunger strike is voiced, it is vocal. Unlike the implicit protest of disorder against context, or the inwardly directed conversation of a fast, a hunger striker tells the world what they are doing and why. The hunger striker holds the world hostage and confronts them with the question: are you going to let me die, or will you change? In the wake of his brother’s death Thomas’ self-loathing resurfaces. In his period of post-fast indulgence, in a sense he had more power available than ever before, and in his selfishness he “allowed” his brother to die (or so he internalises the blame in any case). While the fast failed to reform his family, being a part

[101] Butcher, *Changes*, p. 75.
[102] Russel, p. 73.

of the Raiths seems to have cost him his human family, and so he strikes. Full self-starvation.

Ellmann, in an analysis of another literary representation of self-starvation says of a character that '[b]y refusing to eat, she is also refusing to be eaten, to sacrifice her body to her family's greed'.[103] The White Court looks to re-convert Thomas, because if he should fully turn his coat that would justify their own monstrous choices. But Thomas denies them this. He withdraws from the court and the family to grieve in protest, he "refuses to be eaten." The choice to self-sacrifice is a choice for self-determination; in this case, as he denies his hunger so too is he able to deny the Court's hunger for him. In consuming food, the person breaks down the whole into parts that they incorporate into themselves. To feed is to assimilate. The social body of the Raith family hungers for Thomas so that the night break him down and assimilate the parts they view as nutritional and supportive of their way and state of being. The social-body/physical-body metaphor is clear and useful; the reader knows that it is not an easy or quick process to improve one's bodily health.

This strike is distinct from Thomas' period of disorder in which he attempts bodily change, as well as from the period of fasting for self-change in which he attempts contextual change. Here the goal is not at all about himself. Thomas starves himself not because he needs to reconcile the gap between his real self and his idealised self, but instead because of the gap where his brother used to be. He makes of himself a spectacle that cries out to the universe for love lost. However, rather than the strike itself, it is the way that the strike is broken that emphasises which form of change the text values. The strike, of course, does not bring Harry back to him, nor does it atone for his inactions. It does, however, bring Justine to a place where she can help. The series conducts its discussion of being human and being a monster through perspective and perception. Butcher's series fixates on how an individual is viewed and by whom. For Thomas, there is always a tension between the expectations of his human

[103] Ellman, p. 80.

family and that of his vampire family. At the heart of that struggle is Justine. As a third party she represents a critique of the binary between human and monster: she loves Thomas, vampire and all.

When a human is truly loved, symbols and sites of their physical intimacy leave a kind of psychic imprint of their love. Because Thomas loves Justine, he cannot touch her without being burned. Their love should affirm his innate humanity and value, but instead it exists in the world as a painful, embodied reminder of the fact that he is not human. Here in his strike, in his protest against his life and his family and his loss, Justine helps him deny this apparent proof of his monstrous nature. A hunger strike asks of the world: are you going to let me die? In *Ghost Story* (Book 13) Thomas gets his answer: the Raiths are content to let him die because he rejects their status quo. Justine, however, will not. She comes to him, with a woman who she intends to sleep with to cover over that psychic imprint of his love so that they can then be together themselves. As Justine says "[r]epeat […] as necessary".[104] This non-monogamous act is an act of love. It is that love, above all else, that offers a kind of proof or re-assurance that Thomas can be human. Or more importantly, as the next section of this chapter will address, that he can be who he is—human, vampire, monster—and still be good and still be deserving of love. His hunger strike calls out for lost familial love and results in the restoration of a different love that he had been mourning.

As Thomas moves towards humanity, away from self-loathing and into mutual, affirming love of who he is as a person, Harry is dead and on a path towards confronting his own inner monster. The series mirrors this thematic desperation through a structural withdrawal. As Thomas recedes from Harry's mind (for now) so too does he recede from the reader's experience. Thomas' narrative in the novel *Changes* closes before Harry's death and he is not mentioned again until page 443 (of 483) of the next novel *Ghost Story* (book 13).

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[104] Jim Butcher, *Ghost Story* (New York: Roc, 2012), p. 563.

His withdrawal from the text matches his withdrawal from the other spheres of his life into a strike against the state of the world, against himself. This textual absence is key in the way that it further engages with the exploration of the human-monster power spectrum. In *Changes* Harry makes a deal for power to save his daughter and begins a potential fall towards becoming the monster. Thomas' absence suggests that such a fall can come from ignoring precisely what his on-going acts of sacrifice have been communicating: that monstrosity is not inevitable, innate, or foregone.

When Harry arranges his own death at the end of *Changes* in the hopes of preventing that fall into monstrosity. He does not tell Thomas of this plan. Thomas's absence from the narrative reflects Harry's guilt at not trusting his brother. But their reunion in *Cold Days* (book 14) emphasises that this suicidal choice is an affront to everything that Thomas represents. In what is one of the most confronting scenes of the entire series, Harry tries to justify his suicidal actions on the grounds that he would have been corrupted by the deal he made for power. Thomas is angry and hurt.

> "You were going to be tempted, eh? Going to have to deal with monstrous urges? Going to have to face the possibility that you might change if you lost focus for minute? Lose control of yourself? Maybe hurt somebody you care about? […] You'd rather be *dead* than be like me".[105]

Harry balks at this accusation, and asks Thomas what difference would it have made to tell him. Here the roles have reversed and it is Thomas who is human, empathetic, and supportive. In response to Harry's question he replies that he would have told him,

> "[t]hat I was your brother, Harry" […] "That I loved you. That I knew a few things about denying the dark parts of your nature. And that we would get through it."

[105] Jim Butcher, *Cold Days* (New York: Roc, 2012), p. 137.

[…] "That we'd figure it out. That you weren't alone".[106]

Thomas' pain at these revelations forces Harry to confront the truth of the situation: 'I had told Thomas, with my actions, that it was better to be dead than a monster—a monster like him'.[107] Despite knowing their entire relationship that to treat Thomas like a monster is to condemn him to be a monster, Harry becomes blinded by his own fear. As the series moves forwards from here, and Harry wrestles with the Winter Mantle (the power, position, and obligation afforded to him by the deal he made to save his daughter), the thematic struggle and the slippery slope to becoming the monster shifts from Thomas to Harry.

While the drives of the Winter Mantle are not the same as Thomas' hunger demon, the language used to represent those "darker urges" returns again and again to the imagery of consumption and power over others. When Harry later draws deeply on this power to win the day, he describes himself as "a little hungry", while later in the scene the antagonist tries to tempt him further asking: "Can you imagine feeling this strong all the time? Can you imagine being so hungry?"[108] The power inside Harry calls him to use it for his own gain, to use it to gain dominion over others. The shift in struggle should perhaps be unsurprising, Butcher's choice in description hints at it just before the brothers' have their "rather be dead" conversation: 'I didn't do a lot of appraising myself in the mirror, typically, but I realised that suddenly that sometime in the past few years, Thomas had stopped looking like my older brother. He looked younger than me.'[109] The mention of the mirror references Thomas' own internal struggle with his demons, and the shift in self-perception through ageing suggests almost a passing of the torch; it is now Harry's struggle to bear. But has he learnt the lessons that Thomas' choice for self-sacrifice and self-denial has presented? As the series shifts towards this phase of Harry's life, and as the stakes continue to rise, the question of how one

[106] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 137.
[107] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 138.
[108] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 474; p. 477.
[109] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 135.

uses power and where the responsibility lies becomes progressively more complex. It is Thomas' sacrifice and his relationship with his hunger, though, that give the reader a language for understanding this investigation of how power and choice shapes identity.

Balance

Thomas' sacrifice begins with disorder. His on-going self-denial draws attention to the gap between who he is, and who he would like to be. It also highlights the deep flaws and issues with the familial context that created that disorder; in this case, thematically the text begins a conversation about the difference between someone with power who uses that for others, and someone with power who uses that over others. In his fasting stage Thomas strives for self-improvement, choosing a course of action designed around control to limit the harm he was inflicting as well as limiting the amount of power he had. This was a sacrifice of reduction that carried an unsustainable weight and failed to address the wider context that necessitated the sacrifice in the first place. There are two quotes I want to look at from *Cold Days* that show the change in Thomas. The first being:

> "I'm a freaking vampire, man. I rip out pieces of people's souls and eat them, and make them happy to have it happen." I didn't say anything. That was what my brother was. He was more than that, too, but it would have been stupid to deny that part of him. "I'm mostly a monster," he said. "And even I know that she deserves to hear you tell her you love her. Even if she never gets anything more than that."[110]

Thomas acknowledges that he is a vampire. He even explicitly uses the term "monster". But something has changed. The self-loathing that came from that identity is gone. The gap

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[110] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 140.

between who he would like to be and who he sees himself as has been redressed. It is in redressing Thomas' hunger strike, through Justine's actions, that the text begins to suggest a "solution" to its thematic questions of how one can retain power without being corrupted by it: love and support. And it does so not in a reductive or clichéd manner, but in a way that flows naturally from the interplay of symbol and theme that Butcher's text has been weaving around Thomas since the very beginning.

The core traits of a White Court vampire are: always hungry, consume through sex, love is anathema. What Thomas' character offers here is the most damning possible critique of the white court ideology of abusive controlling power. He has learned to feed in order to love. He has found a way to be a functional, powerful, white court vampire in every way except he gets to also be human. His existence, achieved along a road of sacrifice, contrasts his family's self-interested monstrous choices. He takes the innate, paradoxical doubleness of the vampire, and pushes that conflict to its extreme: he inverts the established symbols of power. Where love was pain, love becomes power. Elaine Scarry explains how the power and efficacy of torture is elevated by inverting the intended safety of the home. She uses examples from Greece and the Philippines where names for torture rooms are domestic ones "guest rooms" and "safe houses".[111] When Ellman draws the link between this work on the suffering of torture and the suffering of hunger, she notes '[t]orture mimes the comforts of home'.[112] Thomas takes the ability of the controlling status quo to reduce, and reclaims it to build something new.

Acts of sacrifice, especially in the way they performatively conveys their meanings to witnesses, retain power through the juxtaposition and subversion of expectations. In the previous chapter I addressed how martyrdom inverts expectations of individualism by placing

[111] Scarry, p. 40.
[112] Ellman, p. 100.

something else above the self. The same is true of the on-going self-sacrifice that Thomas undertakes. In this manner, hunger and self-denial contain the power to subvert and challenge the status quo. As the torturer gains power over the victim in part by inverting safe spaces and language into dangerous ones, through his self-denial (and the change in himself that he is able to realise) Thomas inverts the language and expectation of what it means to be a white court vampire. Instead of "love is anathema", love becomes affirming, supportive, and mutual. As that supposedly immutable norm shifts, perhaps the vampire is not doomed to be the monster. Or, to turn it to a larger thematic discussion, perhaps the fact that the Raiths are monsters derives very little from their being vampires, and entirely from their choices to abuse and dominate. By inverting what is understood and accepted, change becomes possible.

The second quote from *Cold Days* engages with the idea of balance as a positive change after the period of sacrifice:

> "Justine … has sort of become a dietician."
>
> "Uh, what?"
>
> He shrugged. "You are what you eat, right? Same principle applies to vampires. Justine thinks I'm sad, she brings home someone happy. She thinks I'm too tense, someone laid-back and calm." He pursed his lips. "Really … it's been kind of nice. Balanced, like." His eyes narrowed and flickered through a few paler shades. "And I get to be with *Justine* again. Even if it was hell, that would make it worthwhile."[113]

The shift in language from the desired control of the fast, to now feeling balanced, as well as the description of Justine as a dietician suggests that something about the consumptive relationship has changed. Where Thomas' hunger before (either in denial or in indulgence) has shaped who he is and dictated the choices he must make, now, in the vein of "you are

[113] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 140.

what you eat", Thomas' identity is not defined by his appetite but rather by both his behaviour and his worthwhile relationship with "*Justine*". [114] Note here the italic emphasis that reflects Thomas' focus: in a dialogue moment discussing feeding, his fixation is on his loving partner not the "food" itself. Similarly, the description of "getting to be with Justine" emphasises the togetherness and partnership of their sex rather than being about consumption of any kind.

The power dynamic of their relationship is also crucially inverted. Instead of feeding on her—the human and stereotypically the victim—the "monster" is fed by the human. She retains the control and by yielding that to her, Thomas makes the statement that Justine's care for him is more true than his vampiric "nature" that his family might insist upon. Eagleton notes that '[n]ot all self-giving is of a sacrificial sort. Sacrifices is the kind of self-giving that hurts. The more fulfilling form of it is love, in which the self is enriched by being bestowed, augmented by being yielded up'.[115] Thomas yields himself, in trust, to Justine's care and by this act of self-giving is able to be bestowed with the self that he has sought through denial.

Russell makes a reference to a story about the Buddha in which

> [f]inally the future Buddha abandoned starvation, sat under a tree, achieved Enlightenment, and announced the four noble truths. Life is suffering. The cause of suffering is desire or attachment. Non-attachment is possible. The Middle Way—shunning the extremes of asceticism and indulgence—is the path to non-attachment.[116]

This is where Thomas arrives. Life is suffering. Going through starvation helped the Buddha reach the point of enlightenment. The starvation was not itself the point, but the sacrifice leads to change and self-realisation. The connection of enlightenment and "noble truths" of life with hunger in various forms, and that neither asceticism nor indulgence offer true answers, sheds

[114] Butcher, *Cold Days*, p. 140.
[115] Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 98.
[116] Russel, p. 41.

light on Thomas' journey.

Placing value on balance and "The Middle Way" is not to suggest that "hunger" and "sacrifice" are in fact incorrect and lacking in power for change. This resolution (of sorts) for Thomas has less to do with undermining the efficacy of sacrifice, and more to do with the next layer of meaning making with this particular series' core themes. More to the point, it recognises that the nature of on-going self-sacrifice (especially in the context of long-form narrative) is that the acts of sacrifice themselves will change. One cannot hunger strike for years on end, but that does not mean that the change sought from such a protest or acts of sacrifice has necessarily been redressed. And in the narrative context, in terms of engaging with a long-form discussion of a theme or ideology, the nuance that vertical complexity demands comes about only through such variations over time. This case study demonstrates how self-denial (on-going chosen sacrifice) in a long-form narrative is mutable, varied, and complex in a way that works towards a layered commentary on a theme that is bigger than that provided by any one moment of self-denial along that journey. It recognises that change is gradual and possibly a process that best functions when recognised as never-ending. It matters that Thomas falls back into indulgence through starvation. The fact that he is *made* to sacrifice in a way that hinders and harms him directly contrasts with the chosen sacrifice that changes his life and leads to some measure of self-worth, happiness, and love. This shifting relationship with self-denial showcases the key difference between choice motivating change and inflicted ideologies driving a persistence of a status quo.

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Not all change (and in fact not much change) happens in one moment, one act, as a result of a single choice. Change is not binary. Most change is gradual. This focus on self-denial as a form of sacrifice reveals that change takes commitment, and that while the ethics of a desired change may seem clear in the first instance, as life progresses, the burden becomes

progressively heavier, especially if it feels as though your sacrifice is going unnoticed or not achieving anything. The fact that people have died in the course of hunger strikes shows that change through hunger requires persistence and potentially carries great cost.[117] Much as martyr narratives reach a critical social mass where change becomes possible, so too does the on-going sacrifice of self-denial erode away at the denial of the world. It creates over time its own critical mass. Here the impetus for change is less the explosion of a martyrdom and more the implacable encroaching force of a glacier on the move. In this sense perhaps hunger in the literature, that kind of self-denial, functions like a compass. As concerns are raised in the narrative, acts of self-denial help the reader navigate the thematic discussion: is the current path heading towards disaster or improvement?

Thomas' ability to be saved by love affords Harry the strength to not give in to despair. Thomas' struggle against the monster, the evidence that he is still standing and better than ever, shows Harry that he is not doomed to be the monster, that he can make better choices. At each stage of this long narrative, Thomas's choices, and the themes and symbols etched upon his body, push and pull at the reader. As Ellmann notes, 'the starving body is itself a text, the living dossier of its discontents, the injustices of power are encoded in the savage hieroglyphics of its sufferings'.[118] As Thomas denies particular desires of his own in favour of what he deems, in thought and through act of sacrifice, more important, and as he suffers to do so, the reader becomes witness. As witness they become complicit and as such, as a human not a monster, may indeed come to recognise their responsibility to make choices to use what power is at their disposal for the sake of others. Thomas' self-denial envisions a future in which people recognise and engage with their social responsibility, where they put their power to use for the sake of others.

[117] Beresford, p. 19
[118] Ellman, pp. 16-17.

Chapters One and Two speak to the possibility of change, and to the potentially radical energy contained within acts of sacrifice. They also effectively establish a key distinction between the literary and social manifestations of individual acts of sacrifice and on-going acts of sacrifice. With that foundation laid, the following chapters turn away from acts that seek change by juxtaposing the status quo, and instead look to those acts of sacrifice which perpetuate it. Both scapegoating and self-erosion are enforced by the dominant norms of a given society in ways that help ensure the existing power structures remain. Where the chosen acts of sacrifice ask why the world has been a particular way, and why it is not different, within the literature these enforced acts of sacrifice function not as inspirational guides for the reader, but instead as warnings and social critiques. Thomas' experience with hunger as disorder raised for discussion the notion that an individual's choice could be coerced. This will play a key role in Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle* series—the case study series for Chapter Three—as this thesis turns to discuss scapegoating as the opposite of martyrdom: a single act of sacrifice enforced upon an individual by the dominant society.

Chapter Three: Scapegoating

> *"In the time of Plague, all men must be as one*."
> "Ay, […] by ridding ourselves of the sinners that brought it about."[1]
> - *Barren*, Peter V. Brett

> The process of education away from violent sacrifice is [...] underway, but it is going very slowly.[2]
> - *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre,* René Girard

In an act of scapegoating a victim is singled out to be killed, destroyed, or outcast by the dominant status quo in an attempt to preserve said status quo. Any discussion of scapegoating—its history, its definition, and its social function—necessarily involves one inescapable name: René Girard. Across multiple works (*Violence and the Sacred*, and *The Scapegoat* are of particular relevance here) Girard explores the ideas that desire is mimetic, that this mimetic desire is the root of conflict, and that scapegoating as a form of sacrifice is how human culture and communities are formed and maintained. As Girard describes it, 'society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificeable" victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect'.[3] Scapegoating has a clear structure, intent, and symbolic underpinning that make an understanding of it an effective analytical tool for engaging with literature.

Peter V. Brett's *The Demon Cycle* (the case study for this chapter) makes use of the act of scapegoating in complex ways: writing not just one, but two key scenes of scapegoating that play out differently, as well as engaging in a wider discussion of the ethics, and potential

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[1] Peter V. Brett, *Barren* (London: Harper*Voyager*, 2018), p. 28.
[2] *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, ed. by René Girard and Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), p. xiv.
[3] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 4.

necessity of such acts. It is a series about survival, cost, gender inequalities, and imperially imposed religious hegemony. By paying close attention to these moments of societally enforced acts of sacrifice, the text's concerns and critiques are brought to the surface.

René Girard and the Act of Scapegoating

Girard's argument as an anthropologist is that the scapegoat mechanism is directly responsible for the development of human culture and civilization. He draws on world mythologies and Greek tragedies, in particular, to explore the ways that the human species has evolved and changed despite the threat of internal destruction due to mimetic violence. Girard states that

> [t]he sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its *own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself. The elements of dissention scattered throughout the community are drawn to the person of the sacrificial victim and eliminated, by its sacrifice.[4]

In Girardian terms desire is mimetic. This means that when violence occurs it calls for violent vengeance to redress the wrong done, but this in turn can only call for future retribution for that subsequent act of violence. In order to prevent the community from being destroyed internally by an unending cycle of retributive violence, a scapegoat is selected and in the sacrifice of that victim the violence is given a release valve out of the community.

Richard Kearney, in an article which effectively unpacks and critiques the failings of Girard's totalizing comments towards the fundamentally sacrificial nature of all myth, provides a succinct explanation of Girard's ideas:

> Human societies are founded upon myths of sacrifice. These myths comprise a social imaginary which operates according to a mechanism of scapegoating

[4] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.

> generally concealed from human consciousness. It is this sacrificial mechanism which provides most communities with their sense of collective identity. But the price to be paid is the destruction of an innocent outsider: the immolation of the 'other' on the altar of the 'same.'[5]

This is the model of an act of scapegoating. Some individual (or possibly group of individuals) who represent a competing ideology to the dominant ideology of the status quo, despite perhaps even being a part of that community, are made 'other' and outcast (even killed). They are sacrificed by the dominant ideology in order to strengthen the power position that it holds as well as its perceived significant boundaries of identity. The skaa executed en mass in *The Final Empire*'s execution square, is an act of scapegoating designed to reinforce the existing racial hegemony.

As Girard puts it, 'the purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric'.[6] In this sense there are two modalities to such an act of sacrifice. There is a practical, tangible drive towards community preservation (the restoring of harmony), but a goal of reinforcing the social fabric is not nearly so simply positive. What if the "perceived threat" is merely a different way of being to the current dominant status quo and the "destruction" of the community would merely be a change in the nature of the community? It is on ideological grounds that acts of scapegoating quickly become deeply problematic as they by nature reinforce positions of power, work to reduce already marginalized perspectives, and bring about the stagnation of a society. In this way, they are often acts undertaken by those in power who selfishly fear what they might lose through change and so scapegoat others in an act of self-preservation. In this manner, scapegoating as an act of sacrifice is a perfect opposite

[5] Richard Kearney, 'Myths and Scapegoats: The Case of René Girard', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12.4 (1995), 1-14 (p. 1).

[6] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.

to martyrdom as an act of sacrifice. Where the willing choice of an individual brings change, here the imposed sacrifice of an individual reinforces the way things have been.

Given that Girard attributes the survival of the human species to scapegoating, he clearly views it as a powerful social tool. He also acknowledges its flaws, chiefly that it is both harmful and arbitrary. The goal of such an act of sacrifice is community cohesion, yet unity does not need to come from violence; and for Girard this is proven by Christ on the cross. He argues that a 'scapegoat is effective as long as we believe the victim guilty'; and that sustaining that belief has been made possible in the past by the stories being told from the perspective of the sacrificer.[7] In such cases the story is not of a victim outcast, but of a problem successfully quashed. Girard's view is that it is this 'protective system of scapegoating which the accounts of the Crucifixion end up destroying, by revealing the innocence of Jesus, and, little by little, of all analogous victims'.[8] The arbitrary and problematic nature of an act of scapegoating is revealed by telling the story from the perspective of the innocent victim. In the case of Christ, as the victim does not seek retribution for the violence done to them, that narrative also shows that it is possible to resolve the chain of mimetic violence via non-violent means. As Rowan Williams phrases it, the narrative of the crucifixion 'establishes a form of human solidarity that does not depend on the identification of a scapegoat and the closing of boundaries against the stranger'.[9]

There are two key points from Girard's argument that are crucial for this chapter. Acts of scapegoating work to preserve the dominant status quo, but they are inherently harmful, problematic, and unnecessary acts. Narratives presented from the perspective of the scapegoat reveal the harmful, problematic, and unnecessary nature of the act and the social context that

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[7] René Girard, 'Introduction', in *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, ed. by René Girard and Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), p. xiv

[8] Girard, 'Introduction', in *Battling to the End*, p. xiv.

[9] Rowan Williams, 'Foreword', in *Can We Survive our Origins?: Readings in René Girard's Theory of Violence and the Sacred*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello, Paul Gifford (Michigan State University Press, 2015), pp. xi-xvi (p. xvi).

produced it. These points suggest a frame for the rhetorical function of acts of scapegoating: they confront the reader with the systemic issues of the dominant societal structure that the text seeks to critique. Terry Eagleton notes that

> a key moment in the evolution of sacrifice arrives when the victim themselves becomes conscious of their condition, and in doing so assumes agency of the event. […] Those who are cast out can now be signs of the criminal nature of the status quo.[10]

By positioning the reader alongside the scapegoat, the story is told from the perspective of the victim and through their innocence the text constructs a targeted social critique.

Scapegoats in Peter V Brett's *Demon Cycle*

Peter V. Brett's *The Demon Cycle* series includes two specific instances of scapegoating that are used to emphasise aspects of society for critique. It also engages in more complex ways with the notion of scapegoating itself, most often reflecting upon the problems inherent in such an act. The series unpacks the individually problematic nature of the moments of scapegoating, but also expresses a deeper concern at the idea that there may in fact be times where such a form of sacrifice is necessary. The specific instances of scapegoating come early in the series. Renna is put on trial for her purportedly sinful acts by a group of pious men looking to maintain their positions of patriarchal power. Arlen is betrayed by his friend Jardir who cannot allow someone who does not devoutly follow the Krasian religion to become the prophesied Deliverer. Both of these scenes shine a critical light on a problematic social aspect that the text targets for critique: gender inequality and imposed imperial, religious hegemony, respectively.

[10] Terry Eagleton, *Radical Sacrifice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 51.

Both of these instances of scapegoating also occur to series protagonists. This has an inciting effect within the plot, but also positions them as outsiders, socially and thematically outcast from their initial communities. Brett's series raises the spectre of scapegoating, but takes advantage of the long-form nature of the series to complicate the issue. In the case of Renna, the act of scapegoating is denied at the last minute; it is subverted in a way that further hones the socio-critical edge of the scene. Building further layers, the series brings together these two characters romantically. They choose each other and through that mutual affirmation they re-integrate into the communities from which they were outcast. The othering created by the scapegoating is undone by accepting the victim of that imposed act of sacrifice—in this case, each other.

More than this though, Brett's work takes these two characters on a journey from part of a dominant group, to marginalised other and victim of the dominant group, to returning into the dominant group as a force of juxtaposition and representatives of change. In returning, and by doing so without changing to fit the status quo of those communities that outcast them, Renna and Arlen force those communities to re-define themselves. The scapegoats bring change. The series derives much of its meaning-making via contrast against the backdrop of the ever-present demons. Ultimate evil is starkly undeniable. The coming apocalypse is undeniable. The question that preoccupies (or at least influences) the text's myriad thematic arms is "why do humans continue to do terrible things to each other rather than uniting in harmony against the literal evil?"; or, to phrase it differently, "how can monstrous acts ever be justified, especially when what is monstrous is so inescapably apparent?" Where Butcher's monsters operate in secret in a way that allows the text to unpack their internal conflict, Brett's monsters are a fact of life and so present a conflict, and a mirror, for all of humanity.

The core tool of the fantasy genre is to use an impossible element to shine a light, for the reader, on real world issues. Brett's text takes this tool further. The demons, as the impossible

element, perform this function not only for the reader, but also for the characters within the world of the text. The presence of the demons in Thesa casts a shadow over everyone and everything. The characters are forced to explicitly deal with the fact that even with the constant looming threat of death and monsters, people still choose to abuse one another. In this sense it ruminates on questions not dissimilar from those that Thomas struggles with through his acts of self-denial in Butcher's work.

Critique through Scapegoating

The narrative thread of Renna Bales née Tanner runs through the background of Book Two, *The Desert Spear*. The three protagonists of the first novel (Arlen, Leesha, and Rojer), having come together at the close of that novel, remain united through most of *The Desert Spear*; while Jardir, the other main narrative arc, unites his people and begins marching northwards. Interspersed through these two main threads, the narrative turns to Renna in Tibbet's Brook, her desire to be free of her sexually abusive father, and, eventually, the trial held by the town (while she is in shock) to determine whether or not she should be executed for allegedly killing her father and a boy named Cobie Fisher.[11] The trial of Renna is a proposed act of scapegoating that emphasises the series' critique of gender inequalities. It, along with the betrayal of Arlen by Jardir at the end of *The Painted Man* that will be discussed after this, is one of the two most significant acts of scapegoating in the series, both driving key social critique.

Though Arlen's is chronologically first, I have chosen to begin with and focus primarily upon Renna's as it is the more textually dense of the two, and offers an opportunity for a deeper analysis. In the same manner that Kelsier's martyrdom matches the structure laid out by the

[11] Of the thirty-three chapters in this novel, only nine are devoted to Renna, and even then in one (Town Council) she is silent, and another is from Arlen's perspective as he rescues her and challenges the town.

scholarship, so too does Renna's scapegoating cleanly fit René Girard's model of attempting to ensure community stability via victim ostracision where '[t]he victimization of this scapegoat serves to engender a sense of solidarity in the tribe now reunited in a common act of persecution'.[12]

> "Won't lie to you, Ilain Bales. This is the worst thing ever happened in Tibbet's Brook as far back as I can recall. I've been Speaker on and off for thirty years, and seen a great many folk die before their time, but there ent never been one killed in anger. That kind of thing may happen in the Free Cities, but not here."[13]

The above quote establishes the stakes that the town faces entering into the trial: people have been killed, not by demons, but by people; and not just by people, but by one of their own. The existence of violence within the community of Tibbet's Brook shocks and horrifies the people and as the Fishers call for revenge, it threatens to spread and deepen dividing lines of difference, hatred, and resentment.

Girard's work tells us that

> [v]engeance, then, is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body. There is the risk that the act of vengeance will initiate a chain reaction whose consequences will quickly prove fatal to any society of modest size. The multiplication of reprisals instantaneously puts the very existence of a society in jeopardy, and that is why it is universally proscribed.[14]

If the cycle of mimetic violence is not halted, Tibbet's Brook (or at least, Tibbet's Brook as it has known and defined itself) could cease to be.

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[12] Kearney, p. 1.
[13] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 373.
[14] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 14-15.

The scapegoating of Renna proceeds through two opposed scenes: the trial that takes place in the chapter 'Town Council' in which competing dominant social norms are established (where the reader's positioning throughout contributes its own aspect of social critique), and the disruption or denial of Renna's execution by Arlen's return in the chapter 'Return to Tibbet's Brook' (in which the town's choice to sacrifice others for themselves is critiqued and the dominant norms shift). But in order to effectively unpack the themes and ideas that intersect in these two scenes, the events that precipitate them must first be understood.

As I mentioned above, Renna's father Harl, who had three daughters to raise after his wife passed, "liked to treat his daughters like wives", to use Renna's older sister's phrasing.[15] The Tanner farm is the furthest outside of the Brook, seldom visited by townsfolk, and so Harl's abuse is unknown by the town. Renna dreams of finally, like her two older sisters before her, becoming "promised" (engaged) and then married so that she might be free of her father. But Harl turns away, with threats of violence, any potential suitor; jealously hoarding Renna for himself. A young man named Cobie Fisher starts coming around the farm more, and Renna believes it to be her chance. They make plans to run away and get married in town before Harl realises what has happened. Renna runs to town, but Harl finds her with Cobie and makes good on his promise to remove Cobie's genitals, Cobie bleeds out on the ground, Renna snaps, grabs the knife, and stabs her father repeatedly in the back before running, screaming through town to her sister Ilain's farm.

While the reader witnesses this, and has witnessed the events preceding the deaths, the rest of the town lacks that clear factual understanding. Some saw Renna, drenched in blood, brandishing a knife, screaming through town. Others found the stabbed bodies of Cobie and Harl and are confused at how two people seemingly killed each other. With the truth in doubt, and in part not immediately attainable as Renna falls deep into shock, the town moves to hold

[15] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 381.

a town council before retributive violence tears them apart. Cobie's father, and indeed the rest of the Fishers, call for justice (although really they call for vengeance) with Garric Fisher clearly not interested in due legal process, telling Town Speaker Selia: "The Core with your law […] if it means I can't avenge my son."[16]

Instances of scapegoating within a novel like this serve as indicators of social critique. They are not the climax or conclusion of the narrative, nor are they the desired goal. They are constructed, in a way, as trials to be endured, overcome, or surpassed by the protagonists. If scapegoating is a problematic way of retaining power or preserving the status quo, then scenes of scapegoating will emphasise the social narratives or ideologies at stake. If we are asking questions of what is being critiqued in this scene, or by this scapegoating within the narrative, we need to consider: whose perspective are we in and whose are we not? Whose voice is being heard, and whose is being denied, silenced, spoken over, or ignored?

In this chapter, and especially in this case study, I am using a number of terms in a deeply interconnected manner, and at times even interchangeably. These are terms such as: community, dominant norms, the status quo, positions of power. Obviously, these are not perfectly synonymous terms. However, they share two common traits: they are each a facet that could be preserved by undertaking an act of scapegoating, and they are each a thing with which a person, or persons, might identify as belonging to or consider important. At its core scapegoating is a simple act to grasp, especially in an abstracted judicial context: someone has been murdered, someone seeks revenge, judicial scapegoating externalises the violent impulse, and thus the inciting incident is resolved and the community persists rather than being torn apart by retributive violence. However, as it is a social act that involves and impacts multiple individuals, and potentially even multiple groups of individuals, a specific, concrete instance

[16] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 374

of scapegoating can be much more complex than the structural framework that underpins the concept.

The Social Communities of Tibbet's Brook

The social situation at Renna's Trial is complex.

> There were ten seats on the council. Each [of the seven boroughs] of Tibbet's Brook held a vote each year, electing one of its own to the council, to sit with the Tender and Herb Gatherer. In addition, they cast a vote for the Town Speaker. Selia held the seat most years, and spoke for Town Square when she didn't. The council seats usually went to the oldest and wisest person in each borough and were rare to change from year to year, unless someone died.[17]

Through the representative figures of the council's Speakers it is clear that there are multiple "communities" and "norms" being championed to remain the status quo. Clearly identifiable is the community of Tibbet's Brook itself as a whole, but those communities being represented can also be broken down further into the seven boroughs of the Brook, each with their own elected Speaker. Raddock Lawry as Speaker for Fishing Hole, and borough representative for the family of deceased Cobie Fisher, has an interest distinct from the kind sympathy of Brine Cutter, Speaker for the Cluster by the Woods who 'had spent weeks in a fugue state similar to Renna's' after his wife and children were taken by demons some years ago.[18]

Other than these communities of place within the larger hamlet of the Brook, there are also deeply religious communities, contrasted with those less so. These are most readily apparent in the conservatives of Southwatch whose elected Speaker Jeorje Watch is also their

[17] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 384.
[18] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 384.

Tender.[19] Selia notes that Jeorje Watch is a man who 'never got a single vote [for Town Speaker] outside Southwatch, and he never would, not even from Tender Harral' because he is too strict in his faith for the bulk of the town.[20] It says much about the dominant norms of quotidian versus extreme faith that Tender Harral occupies the Council's voting position as Tender while Jeorje Watch's council seat comes from his position as borough Speaker and not in recognition of his position as Tender of Southwatch.

There are also communities of gender along which the entrenched patriarchal interests stand to retain their power position while the women of Tibbet's Brook are faced with a further reduction in status if this young woman is excised based upon assumed expectations of her gender. The Brook is deeply patriarchal with the majority of the Speakers (seven of ten) being male. Jeorje Watch is described as being displeased to have to recognise Selia Square's title of Town Speaker as she is 'a woman, and an unmarried one at that'.[21] The discussion and debate that takes place within the chapter 'Town Council' is marked by what seems a common understanding that a young girl could easily lead a man to sin, but that a man's honour must stand inviolable unless proof can be produced otherwise. Phrases such as "no man'd do that to another man" showcase the perception that there are unspoken rules of what a man would and would not do that are accepted as essential facts and that to suggest otherwise would be slanderous, while inversely, by virtue of being a young woman, Renna could have easily done anything including murder.[22]

Jeorje Watch instructs the council most explicitly: "let us not forget it was most likely by feminine wile that the men were taken to wrath. The girl's promiscuity led them to this path, and she should be held to account".[23] This echoes the earlier sentiment of Garric Fisher that

[19] A Tender is a priest.
[20] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 385.
[21] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 385.
[22] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 379.
[23] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 388.

"[e]ven if [Renna] didn't hold the knife, she done it […] witchin' my son into sin and shamin' her da!"[24] The expected gender norms of the town are deeply unequal and afford positions of power to the men who, according to this dominant social narrative, would not act out in violence or in any sinful way unless a "witchin" woman first tempted them to stray.

The final community at play within this debate is that of age. The text notes that

> [o]ne did not get to be Selia's age easily in Tibbet's Brook. Life in the Brook was hard; only the sharpest, most cunning and capable folk survived to see full gray, and the rest treated them accordingly.[25]

The gerontocracy at play within the town affords privilege and weight to voices that could sway such a debate, and certainly creates a position for which preserving the status quo is incentivised.

It is important to understand the communities at play in this scene because, as Kathryn McClymond explains, 'sacrifice is often the arena in which certain people distinguish themselves from others, community versus community, social rank versus social rank'.[26] Renna's trial showcases conflicting and combative definitions of the dominant or most significant or worthy community. The debate that ensues is not that of "should Renna Tanner be executed to preserve peace and stability in Tibbet's Brook", but a rather more nuanced debate about the status quo of four "communities", or sets of values, and whether those currently recognised as in power will remain as such.

Yet it is not quite so simple as a hypothetical situation of boroughs debating about boundary rights between clearly demarcated communities. The concerns and factors that clash on the stage of Renna's trial overlap in the sense that one person might belong to the dominant position of some or all of them.

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[24] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 373.
[25] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 371.
[26] Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 3.

Consider the wording of the town's relevant law here:

> *And should the foul deed of murder be committed in the confines of Tibbet's Brook or its purview, you shall erect a stake in Town Square, and shackle those responsible for all to see for a day of repentance, and a night, without ward or succor, that all may witness the Creator's wrath upon those who violate this covenant.*[27]

The law, in theory, is supposed to provide a neutral means of arbitration in a way that excises desires that threaten the cohesion or safety of the community. And by neutral, we can understand this to mean, in its ideal state, not intertwined with a particular community or power over any other. Yet, as Chapter Four will address through a discussion of Critical Race Theory, at times the law is systemically flawed or skewed in ways that unequally privilege, and also prevent change. Here, in the law of Tibbet's Brook, the punishment for murder is not just to be staked out in the night for the demons to kill you, but to be judged by the Creator. There is an implication to this law that the transgression is not just against the "covenant" of the town, but is inherently sinful and therefore this affords more weight to the religious communities of the Brook. The trial begins skewed against Renna, and thus favours those who might gain by scapegoating her.

That Renna's scapegoating within the series takes place as a trial affords for the contemporary reader an extra layer of judgement to those who push for Renna's staking. From outside of the text, particularly for an American audience of this American author, there is an instilled, dominant social narrative of impartial courts and being innocent until proven guilty.[28] It is predominantly in the context of the judicial system that scapegoating remains a social mechanism at play within twenty-first century society. Girard explains that '[v]engeance is a

[27] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 388.
[28] Whether this is true of the American judicial system is a separate question, but these ideals are certainly those constructed by dominant and popular narratives.

vicious circle' but that 'for us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance' by limiting it to a 'single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority'.[29] The theory is that as the community has jointly placed authority in the hands of the judge as a neutral party, said party may allocate punishment in response to an act of violence and, because of the mutual agreement in the judge's sovereign authority, such a punishment does not invite further violence in return. The inherent unfairness of Renna's trial, what should be a neutral sovereign authority but is instead wildly biased, contributes to the way that this act of scapegoating draws the reader towards confronting these systemic inequalities.

Whilst there are ten town council members in total, with each playing a role in the social critique that this trial offers, the scene is structured most explicitly in terms of an opposition between Selia Square and Jeorje Watch as defender of Renna's innocence and right to be heard, and staunch traditionalist respectively. The Fishers call for redress for the death of Cobie Fisher, represented by their Speaker Raddock. However, as the ones with the grievance and the loss, their vote is already decided. They are not looking for community stability, only recompense. The trial is needed to ensure that Renna's violence is excised from the community before their retributive violence escalates the cycle. The question becomes why are groups and people other than the Fishers lobbying for staking Renna? What do they have to gain through this act of sacrifice? The narrative of the scapegoat, much like a martyr narrative, will determine the norms that are supported and reinforced.

Jeorje Watch presents a narrative that seeks to affirm Tibbet's Brook as a town that casts out sin and thereby remains holy; he seeks not only a reinforcement of religious power, but perhaps even a bolstering of his more extreme position through the faith sanctioned execution of a "sinner". In contrast, Selia hopes for empathy and a vote of innocence, but if she cannot

[29] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 15.

secure that then she will fight to ensure the town is confronted with the unsavoury realities of their decision: that they are a town that murders girls unable to speak their own defence, a town that assumes the inviolable innocence of a man and the inevitable seduction by the witching woman. Selia's truth, that a girl's murder is being societally sanctioned, runs counter to the simple "purity" that Jeorje's narrative represents. The significance of narrative over fact is highlighted at the close of the trial as the verdict of guilty is rendered:

> Jeorje thumped his stick. "Selia is correct. Renna Tanner must be staked in Town Square tomorrow at dawn, for all to see and bear witness until the Creator's justice is done."
>
> "You expect people to watch?!" Hog was aghast.
>
> "Folk cant' learn their lessons if they skip school," Jeorje said.
>
> "I'm not going to just stand there and watch the corelings tear someone apart!" Coline shouted. Others, even Coran Marsh, voiced protest as well.
>
> "Oh, yes you are," Selia snapped. She looked around the room, her eyes hard stones. "If we're going to…to *murder* this girl, then we're *all* gonna watch and remember what we did; man, woman, and child," she growled. "Law's the law."[30]

Though Selia has in a sense lost, and Jeorje has won, here we see them agree on what must happen next: the whole town must assemble to witness Renna being sacrificed to the demons. What differs is how they frame the narrative of that event. For Jeorje it is both an affirmation of the righteous nature of this act—what he views as a sacred act of sacrifice justified by means of appealing to the "Creator's justice"—and a "lesson" for the town about where "sinful" behavior will take you. Selia also seeks to make this a lesson of sorts for the town, but one that draws them in close with the real, tangible consequences of the choices they have made. Brett's layout of Selia's dialogue here is perfect, the hesitation in the ellipsis as Selia searches for the

[30] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 391.

appropriate word, the italicization of "*murder*" as she seizes upon the starkest word for the choice they have made. Describing their decision as murder frames the act as both a crime and morally wrong in a way forces the council, and by turns the town of Tibbet's Brook, to look directly at the horror of what they have done. She refuses to let this be a quiet narrative in which the scapegoat is excised and Jeorje's harmful norms are reinforced.

In order to fully understand Renna's role within the text (especially at this moment in the narrative) the reader needs to understand the narratives and communities at play within Tibbet's Brook for, as Laura Barge notes, '[o]nly by understanding the characteristics and status of a given scapegoat can we gain insight into the cultural circumstances that have created such a victim'.[31] By understanding those four communities—the ideological metrics of power to which people of Tibbet's Brook can belong—the reader comes to understand the conflicting norms and social expectations at stake. Of the four communities—place (borough), religion, gender, and age—Renna is in the minority of, or on the outs with, each and every one of them. Living on Harl's farm prior to the deaths, she was already distanced from any community of place, and now with her father's death she in fact seems to belong nowhere. She does not hold any particular faith, and certainly is viewed as a "sinner" both amongst town gossip in general and due to her alleged murders in particular. She is a woman, and a young unmarried one at that, and so does not retain any position of power from the communities of gender and age that are dominated by older married men.

In contrast, Jeorje Watch is at the opposite end of the spectrum, in almost exaggerated positions of power across all four communities. He is Tender and Speaker for Southwatch, which is described as 'practically a town unto itself, with near three hundred inhabitants and their own Herb Gatherer and Holy House'.[32] He not only represents a borough, but one

[31] Laura Barge, 'René Girard's Categories of Scapegoats and Literature of the South', in *Christianity and Literature*, 50.2 (2001), pp. 247-268 (p. 250).
[32] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 385

recognized amongst the Brook as being almost of a size and standing as the entire Brook itself; and where the other boroughs must all gather at Tender Harral's Holy House, the people of Southwatch attend their own. Jeorje Watch's dual positions afford him both elected political power and religious power (which is especially potent in this instance of a crime where the punishment, by law, seems to fall under religious purview). The men of Southwatch, and especially Jeorje, dress simply and uniformly, and do not take spices nor sugar in their meals. When they arrive for the council they are described as coming

> in neat procession, marked by their stark clothing. Watch men were all thickly bearded and wore black pants with black suspenders over a white shift. A heavy black jacket, hat, and boots finished the outfit, even in the harsh heat of summer. The women all wore black dresses reaching from ankle to chin to wrist, as well as white aprons and bonnets, with white gloves and parasol when not working. Their heads were bowed and they all drew wards in the air, over and over, to protect them from sin.[33]

Their borough is entirely devout, completely overlapping these two communities of place and religion. The description here emphasizes their commitment to their faith in a way that exaggerates their (self-perceived) superiority amongst these two communities. Jeorje Watch is not only a religious leader, but a leader of the most strict religious followers: men committed to their simple garb and content to suffer 'the harsh heat of summer' rather than strip down in what might be an unseemly or sinful manner; women who cover themselves 'ankle to chin to wrist' lest they, like Renna allegedly has, tempt men away from their righteous path.[34]

In terms of gender not only is Jeorje Watch a man, but as a married man he garners yet further significance from the religious community. Even that is exaggerated as Jeorje has

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[33] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 385.
[34] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 385.

multiple wives, old and young. I will return to the topic of gender shortly as its inequality is the core topic of social critique that this scapegoating drives.

Jeorje Watch is also the 'oldest man in Tibbet's Brook by two decades. There were children running around in the Brook who hadn't been born when he celebrated his hundredth birthday'.[35] This description of Jeorje comes not long after the chapter's establishment that 'one did not get to be Selia's age easily'.[36] So in this manner, though she has proven her worth by surviving so long, in a way her wielding of gerontocratic power serves to further reinforce that Jeorje has power even over her. This scene's critique of gender inequality is built through the Selia's frustration at Jeorje's exaggerated positions of social power and that he uses them to reduce the power of others.

In terms of Jeorje and his over-one-hundred summers, the reader cannot help but be drawn into comparison with another key secondary character, Bruna the even older Herb Gatherer of the village Cutters' Hollow for whom '[i]t was said she was old when the village elders were young. She had delivered most of them herself. She had outlived her husband, children, and grandchildren, and had no family left in the world'.[37] Contrasting these two characters deepens the implicit critique of Jeorje's position. Bruna has no patience or concern for town politics or the power that the men derive from their social position. She is the woman with the knowledge, they need her, and she refuses to play their games. Where Bruna subverts and denies the status quo, and even comes to wield power over it through her choice to act outside of it, it becomes clear how constructed this norm of inequality really is. Jeorje, on the other hand, works to fuel the established systems and hierarchies that afford him his position and so seeks to cast out any who might threaten that power structure. Both of them move powerfully through their towns, each "thumping their canes" to emphasise the weight behind their voices, but where Bruna is a

[35] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, pp. 385-386.
[36] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 371.
[37] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 92.

healer devoted to saving lives, regardless of who is in need, and caring for the townsfolk whom she views as 'the children', Jeorje advocates for sacrifice.[38]

To understand what is being critiqued in this scene, and by this act of scapegoating, the focalization of the scene must be considered: whose perspective frames the narrative and whose does not? Whose voice is being heard, and whose is being denied, silenced, spoken over, or ignored? Andrew J. McKenna states that '[s]capegoating is the administration of death […] and the victim is witness against it'.[39] Honing in on this notion of the victim as witness, Barge further unpacks the way that the victim is 'the voice of "truth" in any story of a scapegoat' and that therefore 'to read such a story, we must hear this voice […] even if the voice of the victim is silenced within the discourse of the text'.[40]

For the chapter 'Town Council', in which this debate takes place, Renna is in shock, unable to voice her own defence; a position only further emphasised by the fact that those debating her fate at the trial are titled "Speakers". The narrative thus far has placed the reader in Renna's perspective. They witness her terror at Harl confining her in the barely warded outhouse for the night; her grief at Harl's abuse; her loneliness in life on the farm without her sisters; her yearning for any kind of escape. They also witness the "truth" of the events that the trial debates: Renna ran away to marry Cobie, Harl stabbed Cobie in the groin, leaving him to bleed out, Renna snapped and stabbed Harl. The reader is, in fact, the only one other than Renna herself to witness these events. They know Renna's story, the one that she cannot voice, but, existing as readers do outside of the text, neither can they give voice to the truth. In this manner, the reader is in part put into the same position as Renna: helpless at the hands of the council and made outcast. That fact that they know what is "right" in this case places us in opposition to what is "wrong", in terms of both morality and justice.

[38] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 276.
[39] Andrew J. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 140.
[40] Barge, p. 250.

René Girard notes that there are texts in which the scapegoat is not explicitly identified as such and thus, intentionally or otherwise, the text makes of its subject a scapegoat and in doing so can serve to persecute that subject. There are however also, Girard explains, texts in which the scapegoat is explicitly '*in* the text' and due to its acknowledgement of the scapegoat not only avoids persecuting its subject it 'even reveals the truth of the persecution'.[41] Brett's work, by placing the reader in this position, aligned with the silenced voice, creates a space in which the debate between other perspectives powerfully takes centre stage; and it is on that stage that the socio-cultural narratives of Tibbet's Brook are played out, and thus clearly delineated for the reader. The truth of Renna's persecution, how and why, is revealed.

Repetition of Scapegoating to Reflect and Resonate

As a twenty-first century reader (of a twenty-first century text) one is already primed to empathise with Renna as a victim of abuse now left to the whims of an entrenched patriarchy. The reader is likely to already be critical of such an inequality, and as such it could be construed as a simple or obvious commentary. However, it is important to remember that this is one moment amongst the text's myriad discussions of such issues. Even by this point (towards the end of the second of five novels) the reader has been exposed to a number of different cultural gender norms that this troubled world has created. From the respect, power, and position afforded to Mothers in the city of Miln, to the lower caste of most Krasian women, to the political and religious power wielded by the *dama-ting* women of Krasia, the established norms vary across Thesa. What the scene of Renna's trial seeks to establish most powerfully is the way that the silencing of voice and agency resides at the heart of perpetuating such inequality;

[41] René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 119.

and that in a world plagued by problems, marginalisation, and exclusion, acts of sacrifice that place the self over others—unlike acts of martyrdom where the lives of the many are valued over the life of the self—only reduce the capacity to redress those systemic issues.

Though Renna's voice is denied, this chapter is not presented from a neutral, omniscient point of view. The reader is placed into Selia's perspective. By the dominant measures of power, Selia wields less of it than Jeorje. She has positions of power amongst two of the four communities: as an elected Speaker (for all of the Brook not just for a borough), and a person described as 'a Power unto herself', in reference to her age.[42] As an unmarried woman, she remains marginalized by the narratives of gender and religion, but the positioning of the reader in her point of view affords her more narrative weight. The text positions Jeorje's advocacy of scapegoating for the preservation of the status quo as the opposition to the reader's perspective.

Long-form narrative affords the opportunity for, and indeed rewards, return, reflection, and emphasis. In reading this scene for the first time, the factors I have outlined so far, come together to construct the beginning of a social critique. However, this scene echoes through the series as a whole, and, I would argue, is one that continues to preoccupy Brett himself. This is most evident in the final novella *Barren*, written after the five book *Demon Cycle* was completed.[43]

Barren tells the story of Selia Square. Through the main series of *The Demon Cycle*, readers are led to believe that Selia is often referred to derogatorily as Selia Barren due to her lack of children; however *Barren* proves that to be more complicated. The novella jumps between the Summer of 334 AR (roughly concurrent with the events of the first half of the final novel *The Core*) and fifty years earlier in 284 AR when Selia was 19, well before the beginning

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[42] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 371.

[43] Brett wrote four ancillary stories throughout the *Demon Cycle* of which *Barren* is one. These stories have served to further extend aspects of the series that remained untold through the main five novels, and even in one case, *Messenger's Legacy,* introduced a character who would become a significant protagonist in his own right in the final book of the series. In long-form narrative, there is opportunity for narrative to continue even after it has finished, which in turn brings reflection back upon the preceding narrative.

of the main series. It reveals that Selia is gay, and that she is the originator of 'The Square Girl's Club' (the name she and Deardra Fisher gave to their secret relationship; a relationship Selia wanted for life, but Deardra referred to as "fun, but it's just till we find husbands".)[44] From 'The Square Girls' Club' came the town's use of the phrase or idea of being a "square girl" or just "square", a terminological choice that carries a phonic allusion to "queer".

The 334 timeline presents a Tibbet's Brook one year on from the trial of Renna Tanner and engages explicitly with how that has impacted the town; while the 284 timeline eventuates in a situation that places Selia in a mirrored position to Renna: on trial by the town council for her "sinful" ways. While obviously gender and sexual inequality exist as their own concerns, they often intersect, and especially so when the behaviours are lumped together by the oppressors as "sinful", "wrong", or just to be excised. For those like Jeorje Watch, who is present at both trials, and in both instances fights for the staking of the girls, the "sinful" acts represent threats to the survival of their way of life, as if somehow the dominant norm must be the only extant social narrative: not only dominant, but singular.

Jeorje sees the "casting out" of sin and difference as the solution to any potential threat. Tender Stewert, Harral's predecessor, quotes the canon at Jeorje, attempting to foster unity and cohesion: "*In the time of Plague, all men must be as one*."[45] To which Jeorje replies, "Ay, […] by ridding ourselves of the sinners that brought it about".[46] He preaches unity by conformity to an identity norm, and not even by conversion but by community excision. It is a backwards philosophy, and I do not mean that in a retrogressive sense, but backwards in the way that it looks to the past for affirmation that such a philosophy must be good, successful, and right just because of the perception that things have always been a certain way. The key word here being

[44] Peter V. Brett, *Barren* (London: Haper*Voyager*, 2018), p. 23.

[45] In the religion of Thesa, the narrative is that the demons are a plague on humanity as punishment for their sins, and that only once they have fully atoned will the demons go away. A narrative, it is worth noting, that protagonist Arlen fundamentally opposes. He is unwilling to stand for a narrative that suggests people deserve to die because some in the past may have acted "sinfully" according to one set of morals.

[46] Brett, *Barren*, p. 28.

"perception" in that a view of "normal" life from within the dominant norm is often blind to the fact of different perspectives.

In the two final lines of the novella, as Tibbet's Brook burns, and townsfolk lie dead from a huge demon attack, Selia and Jeorje broker a truce, but it is in these two final lines that their philosophies are made most evident:

> Jeorje nodded. "Then let's put things back the way they were.
>
> "No," Selia said. "High time we started making things better."[47]

There is a reasonable element of restoration to what Jeorje is saying; they will need to rebuild the partially destroyed village. But he does not say "let's rebuild" or "let's start fixing things". In the face of loss he seeks to reaffirm his power base: the way things have always been. Where Jeorje seeks to restore the status quo, Selia looks forwards to a brighter future. These lines come immediately in response to Selia telling Jeorje that she does not care about his disapproval of her new relationship with a girl named Lesa and that she does not intend to hide her sexuality any longer.

In *Barren,* the two trial scenes from Selia's past (Renna's and her own) resonate with her present moment, and they weigh heavily upon her. Much of the language in the novella stacks people and events up against each other in ways that draws equivalencies between them. Selia is made to wallow in '[h]er weakest, most helpless moments. The burning of the school. The staking of Renna Tanner. Weeping on the road to Sunny Pasture, covered in blood'.[48] The short listing here places equal weight on all of these events and draws attention to their interconnectivity. Selia's deepest regrets are of her failure to save her childhood love Anjy Watch (Jeorje's granddaughter) from demons on the road to Sunny Pasture, and her failure to prevent the staking of Renna Tanner. In perhaps the most telling line in the story, as Selia rallies

[47] Brett, *Barren*, p. 120.
[48] Brett, *Barren*, p. 65.

and decides to no longer hide who she is, Selia notes that '[s]he'd lived a life to be proud of, no matter what Jeorje Watch or the demon prince might want her to think'.[49] The demon prince, in this novella, invades Selia's mind and forces her to dwell on her most painful memories, to remind her of her failures, and then relishes in her sorrow. The parallel drawn between Jeorje and the demon is particularly revealing of what he has come to represent.

The Trial of Renna Tanner – A Scene of Scapegoating

In the trial itself, what the chapter names the Town Council, the ideologies, perspectives, and goals of Selia Square and Jeorje Watch are juxtaposed against each other for debate by the Speakers. The voting part of the trial occupies a mere two pages as each Speaker provides a justification and their vote. The typography of these pages offers yet another layer to the text's critique. Where those who vote innocent (Selia Square, Tender Harral, Brine Cutter, and Meada Boggin) provide thoughtful reasoning to their votes in a manner that suggests they take seriously this responsibility to the town, the law, and to Renna; those who vote guilty offer not reasoning but unbending judgement. From the deeply biased "We all know she's guilty" of Raddock Lawry, to Coline Trigg's wild speculation of what she thinks might have happened, the guilty votes come quickly. For those voting guilty, the reader is shown their short, almost snap decision making. On the page the innocent votes follow careful justifications across multiple lines and sentences, while the guilty votes all come in quick succession, with Raddock Lawry's decision taking up barely a single line across the page. It seems as if their vote was pre-determined and that anything raised in the process of presenting evidence for discussion would not have swayed them. Such short decisions are made not by law (as Mack Pasture's

[49] Brett, *Barren*, p. 117.

final vote of "responsible" represents), but are driven by the positions of power and social narratives that the Speakers seek to maintain.

Selia votes innocent until proven guilty, adamant that without Renna's voice at this trial she should not be condemned; Harral votes for "young love"; Brine votes through empathy; and Meada votes as a woman understanding how a young woman might have to defend herself. In contrast, Coran Marsh votes guilty due to Renna being a "sinner" who behaves "like a coreling"; Jeorje Watch sides with Renna's father, arguing that as a man his wishes should have been respected; Raddock states that her guilt is "known", is fact; Hog votes to protect the interests of his store; and Coline votes that, even as a victim, Renna's actions were wrong (essentially Coline votes in ignorance of the world constructed by the other guilty votes: that had Renna come to ask for help, many men would have just hauled her back to "mind her da").[50] In some ways Coline's vote is the most troubling in terms of what it reveals about the world in that she is able to acknowledge that Renna may be a victim but does not then also bring a compassion or empathy that might engender a vote of innocence. Coline's vote shows that, in this world, being a victim is not enough to make you deserving of support. Finally, while Mack Pasture's vote of "responsible" may not contain the same moral judgement as the "guilty" votes of the others, it is still a deeply patriarchal vote, returning again to the note that the "girl didn't mind her da".[51] The Trial shows Renna's fate decided, the town set on casting out the sinner to preserve its status quo. With the harmful and marginalising ideologies laid bare for the reader, the novel then pivots perspective to drive the social critique further, not just to confront the systemic social issues as the scapegoating has done, but to pursue change by speaking truth to power.

[50] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 391.
[51] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 391.

Subverting an Act of Scapegoating

Following the guilty verdict at the close of the chapter, the next time the reader sees Renna is through the eyes of protagonist Arlen, in the chapter 'Return to Tibbet's Brook' (five chapters after Renna's trial). He is returning to his childhood home to arm them with the weapons he has rediscovered. Arlen's journey through this novel is that of addressing, as he refers to them, the wounds of his past that he had left to 'fester, and it was time they were bled'.[52] This description brings to mind connotations of rot and contamination, and is an allusion rich line that the reader can trace back to the initial wounds that haunt him, his first failure: his mother's wounds from a demon which when failed to be treated oozed a 'sickly brown pus [and] the air filled with a rotten stench'.[53] Continuing with the connection, young Arlen runs away from home, fundamentally altering his life's course after his mother dies, a decision that is cemented when he learns that 'his mother could have been cured by a weed he regularly pulled from [his father's] field'.[54] These resonating images frame for the reader that Arlen's return is an exercise in cleansing; but specifically one that can easily be accomplished by widening the isolated perspective of the Brook. Coline Trigg, the Brook's Herb Gatherer should have known such a fundamental and simple cure, but she did not, and so Arlen's mother (and presumably countless others) died. In this way the Brook can be seen also as festering, stagnant in their views and ideologies, with that rot coming to the forefront in staking Renna Tanner. As Arlen commits himself to "bleeding" clean his festering wounds, that commitment flows through to his actions in, partially, healing the town, or, at least, giving the town the opportunity and ability to choose to heal itself.

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[52] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 503.
[53] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 54.
[54] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 171.

As this chapter opens, and Arlen approaches the Brook, he muses on his past here, how growing and experiencing the wider world has led him to the realisation that he 'knew he had judged his people harshly when he left home' and that though they did not literally fight the demons, they 'resisted in their own way, coming together time and again to reaffirm their bonds to one another'.[55] Specifically, he notes that '[w]hen they bickered, it was over petty things' and that '[n]o one in the Brook would allow a neighbor to go hungry or be left without succor, as happened so often in the cities'.[56] What Arlen witnesses upon riding into town, dusk imminent on the horizon, is the town in the process of casting Renna out, banding together to kill her by means of a scapegoating process that renders her no longer their "neighbor", no longer someone to whom they have a responsibility to succor. In this moment, the town divided by violence is 'reunited in a common act of persecution' as 'the victimization of this scapegoat serves to engender a sense of solidarity'.[57]

This chapter revolves around two scenes: Arlen's arrival and rescue of Renna, where he cuts her free and flees to the safety of his father's farm; and Arlen's challenge to the Speakers of the Brook the following night. Both scenes take place in the liminal moment of dusk, clearly a transitionary period in which change is possible, but for the world of *The Demon Cycle*, it is also the time at which the demons begin to rise. Dusk is when people are confronted with literal monsters and evil which serve as a backdrop for their actions. These particular scenes at dusk pose a question to the folk of Tibbet's Brook: will you be those who feed a girl to the demons, or those who take up arms to defend against demons.

While Jeorje and his supporters might seek to champion a narrative of excising sin, Arlen's interruption and scathing judgements as the demons rise around them, forces them to confront the truth underneath the narrative: that they are not only murdering this person, as

[55] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 494.
[56] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 494.
[57] Kearney, p. 1.

Selia would put it, but they are feeding her to monsters, and thus fuelling and supporting evil. As Arlen declares:

> "I came from the Free Cities to teach the good people of Tibbet's Brook to kill demons! […] But so far, I've seen no 'good people.' Good people do not feed helpless girls to the corelings! Good people do not stand by while someone is cored!"[58]

In the second scene, after rescuing Renna, Arlen returns to the town square to offer a chance at redemption for the town, an opportunity for them to regain the qualities he remembered in them. He offers them a choice: "Any man, woman, or child who would rather kill corelings than feed them their neighbor, meet me here at dusk tomorrow."[59] The return of "neighbor" reframes Renna's status to the town. Much as Selia insists upon the use of the term "murder" to define what the council is doing to Renna, Arlen's description of her as a "neighbor" brings her back from her external position as scapegoat and instead reminds the people of the Brook that she belongs to their communities.

Most of Arlen's interactions in these scenes reframe prior events and language, drawing the reader into dialogue with them, challenging them, making those themes resonate. When Selia tries to defend herself against the blame he levels at the Speakers she states that "[n]ot all of us voted her out" and that "[e]nt no one above the law […] When the council voted we had to put the town first, no matter how we felt".[60] But Arlen forces them to confront their culpability. In a direct inversion of Raddock's vengeful statement earlier in the novel— "The Core with your law […] if it means I can't avenge my son"—Arlen spits at Selia's feet, "The Core with your law, if it says to throw your neighbor to the night!"[61] In response to this challenge, Selia, Harral, and Brine immediately step forwards to take up a spear, with Meada

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[58] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 506.
[59] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 497.
[60] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 506.
[61] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 374; pp. 506-507.

Boggin following shortly after. Those who voted for innocence take up the chance to make things right. In the conversation that this series is having around heroism and fighting back, this is a direct emphasis upon whose perspective the text wishes to support. It is in fact the guilty votes who take convincing to step out, a direct opposite to the quick, assured manner in which they voted Renna guilty. Raddock Lawry the man for whom Renna's guilt was "known", whose confident justification to condemn a person contributed barely a single line in the trial, does not step forward to claim a spear at all. When aged Coran Marsh (a guilty voter) seems willing to let his younger son fight in his place, Arlen denies him—"Spear's as good a cane as any for a man thinks he can sit in council and play Creator"—directly challenging the instilled gerontocracy of the town.[62]

The chapter 'Town Council' and its attempted scapegoating brings to the surface of the narrative the social narratives that the text seeks to critique. Arlen's denial of the scapegoating in the chapter 'Return to Tibbet's Brook' not only challenges those problematic inequalities, but also proffers some of the socially positive ideas that the text wishes to champion as potential vectors for change. Through challenging the primacy of law, and entrenched mechanisms of power like age, Arlen demands that the people benefiting from positions of power should also take on board the responsibility towards others that such positions require. Outraged, his actions present a narrative that says: "how dare you sacrifice others to benefit yourself if you are not yourself willing to sacrifice for others in turn." Though Jardir may spend the lives of his army, and though Arlen harbours doubts and fears—'What *had* he given the world? Would thousands of young men march with his weapons, only to be slaughtered in the night.'—both are at least uncomfortable with what they are sacrificing and attempt to make up the debt through their own

[62] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 509.

sacrifices.[63] As Arlen says to Renna, "[c]an't trust no one else to do what you won't do for yourself".[64]

A Successful Act of Scapegoating – Arlen Outcast

Arlen's characterisation through most of this novel is marked by a distancing. In the events leading up to his rescue of Renna he is forced to confront elements from his past that he wished could stay buried (the "festering wounds" from before). His presence as the perpetually hooded figure, a man who speaks gruffly and hides his original Brook accent, derives from his own experience as a scapegoat in the first novel, *The Painted Man*. After finding the lost spear of Kaji (the first deliverer) Arlen returns to the Krasian people (whom Arlen deeply admires for their drive to fight the demons) to demonstrate the fighting wards on the spear. This begins as a moment of triumph and hope as Arlen leads a hoard of dal'Sharum through the maze, all cheering in support of him as, for the first time in centuries, demons are actually killed instead of just banished with the sun. But the moment shifts as Jardir betrays him. He ambushes Arlen, takes the spear, and leaves Arlen to die in the desert.

While *Barren* resonates back to the Trial of Renna Tanner, Arlen's scapegoating sets an opposite precedent in the book before the Trial. The first attempt to kill Arlen sees him thrown into a pit with a demon. But Arlen survives. In the moment there is a brief hope that this would cause Jardir to change his mind, that Arlen need not be betrayed, killed, and outcast. Instead, it forces Jardir's hand to more directly and personally carry out the act of scapegoating. The series' first major of act of scapegoating is crucially a successful one that primes the reader to fully engage with and immerse themselves in the Trial of Renna Tanner one book later.

[63] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 410.
[64] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 500.

Arlen's scapegoating is a successful act of sacrifice. It secures Jardir's place as leader of his people and as the returned Deliverer. Yet, Arlen does not die. This shows that in relation to acts of scapegoating, it is not so much the death that matters, but the act of outcasting that establishes community boundaries. This is exactly like martyrdom both in the sense that it is the narrative of the act that constructs the society (Jardir enforces a forgetting of the Par'Chin, following his "death"), and that the repetition of that narrative shapes a shared identity. The key distinction is that scapegoating reinforces a dominant narrative through a harmful, othering, and marginalising act, 'the immolation of the 'other' on the altar of the 'same'.[65]

This experience of betrayal and victimisation leads Arlen to tattoo his skin with wards, and to consume demon meat to survive the desert. In this way he undertakes a symbolic death where Arlen from Tibbet's Brook dies, and The Painted Man is born. The tattoos and the demon flesh unlock greater powers within him, but also start him on a journey of doubting his remaining humanity. The altering of his form, and his literal internalising of the monster cause him to further ostracise himself: cast out as scapegoat victim not just from Krasia, but from humanity itself.

Arlen is a scapegoat who survives, and the trauma of being victimised by a community that he felt he belonged to causes him to internalise the belief that he does not deserve to belong anywhere. In the opening moments of coming to consciousness out in the desert where Jardir left him to die, Arlen hears a voice in his head,

> *Don't lie to yourself* [...] *You've done your share of betrayal. You ran from your father when he needed you most. Abandoned Cob before your apprenticeship was up. Left Ragen and Elissa without so much as an embrace. And Mery...*[66]

[65] Kearney, p. 1.
[66] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 391.

He is the one betrayed, he is the victim, the scapegoat, and in this moment the reader is shown the scarring effect of such an act on an individual: while he yells out loud calling Jardir a coward, the words directed inward all lay blame at his own feet. As a victim, he draws a connection between his own guilt at unrelated failures to this pain. He rationalises it to himself: here are all of the people that you abandoned, you deserve to be abandoned in turn. 'Perhaps he should just lie down and die.'[67]

He survives the scapegoating, but in the aftermath he enacts an obsessive self-denial. It is reminiscent of the obsession of disorder that I discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Thomas. Both Arlen and Thomas internalise a self-loathing from their "monstrous" qualities that leads to an entrenched belief that they not only do not belong with others, but do not deserve love. Thomas does so in response to a belief that he has killed Justine, Arlen does so in response to consuming demon meat and developing some of their powers. At least, those are the incidents that the characters fixate upon. Underpinning those events are the wider issues of being Othered by their social communities. Thomas' obsessive self-denial manifests in an extreme self-denial and isolation. Much the same can be seen in Arlen as he sheds his name, accent, and "normal" clothing, and changes his entire body via tattoos so that others literally see him differently. He denies his old self—Arlen from Tibbet's Brook—and insists upon a new identity: The Painted Man. This was not sustainable for Thomas, and it is not sustainable for Arlen. The emphasis that the series places on the intertwined duality of Arlen and Jardir, as well as the way that Renna brings Arlen back to being more human through love and empathy, suggests that it is less the literal act of consuming demon meat that places Arlen "outside" of humanity, but rather the direct result of Jardir's act of scapegoating.

In *The Painted Man*, Arlen is scapegoated by Jardir: betrayed at what should be a moment of triumph. The structure of scapegoating suggests that there should be a narrative or ideology

[67] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 391.

represented by the person being outcast (Arlen) that those in the dominant position (Jardir) seek to remove from their community so that their dominant status quo does not change. In this instance Jardir casts out his friend Arlen because he cannot allow for a non-believer to lead his people. There is a pivot point at which Arlen could rise up, become the deliverer, and lead the Krasian people forward against the demons, but in this moment Hasik asks of Jardir: "How can a man who does not bow to the Creator be the Deliverer?". To which Jardir replies, "[h]e cannot. […] For the sake of all the world, it must be someone else".[68]

Even if Arlen could lead them to victory over the demons, their culture would have to accept and respect the atheism that Arlen represents and this would fundamentally change what it means to be Krasian from the inside. For though Jardir's phrasing suggests a positive goal of protecting "*all* the world", it is not the goal the text presents as problematic but the means: 'Without me, Krasia falls.'[69] Placing this in the context of sacrifice as an analytical tool, the reader is shown through this act the beginning of the critique of Jardir's imperialist methodology wherein he is willing to sacrifice any life, even that of his dear friend and brother in arms, and in particular the entire northern culture, to his ultimate goal of a unified people that might drive back the demons.

At the heart of Arlen and Jardir's juxtaposition are competing beliefs about unity. Arlen fights for choice, for the idea that people need to be afforded the knowledge, power, and opportunity to fight back for themselves and others. This is a vision of sustainable unity rooted in agency. Jardir on the other hand knows that unity will be required to overcome the evil of this world, but he cares only for that end result, and not for how it is achieved or what is lost in the process. Crucially, this divergence in philosophy occurs only after Jardir's act of

[68] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 173.
[69] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 175.

scapegoating. Alone in the desert, Arlen reflects back on his moment of almost triumph and comes to a realisation.

> Looking back at his visit to Krasia, Arlen realised that it wasn't as magnanimous as he had believed. Whatever he had told himself, he had wanted to be more than a weaponsmith, or one fighter amongst many. He had wanted glory. Fame. He had wanted to go down in the histories as the man who had given men back the fight.
> *As the Deliverer, even?* The thought disturbed him. For the salvation of humanity to mean anything, for it to last, it had to come from everyone, not just one man.[70]

This recognition that unity and change need to come from everyone, derives directly from the experience of being a sacrifice in the name of the unity of an exclusionary community. This suggests that as a character who was successfully scapegoated, but who did not die in the process, Arlen occupies dual positions: both the scapegoat, and the witness to the scapegoat. Witnessing scapegoat narratives, knowing the innocence of the victim, 'reveals the truth of the persecution'.[71] Witnessing a scapegoat narrative, even one's own, confronts the witness with the systemic social issues at play. When Jardir sacrifices Arlen, the reader and Arlen are confronted by an unbending imperial, religious hegemony that demands conversion or death. On reflection, this position resonates with that of Jeorje Watch.

In *The Skull Throne* (book 4 of the Demon Cycle) Arlen challenges Jardir on their divergent ideologies:

> "You talk of unity, but you don't understand the meaning of the word," the Par'chin said. "What you call unity I call domination. Slavery."
>
> "Unity of purpose, Par'chin," Jardir said. "All working toward one goal. Ridding the Ala of demonkind."

[70] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 399.
[71] Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 119.

"There is no unity, if it depends on one man alone to hold it," the Par'chin said.

"We are all mortal."[72]

This scene takes place in Jardir's perspective, shown by the speech attribution of Arlen as 'the Par'chin' rather than by his name. The text here positions the reader with Jardir, to be accused alongside him, to be confronted with the truth and the problem of the situation. In reflecting on the chapters within *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature*, editors Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm note that all of the chapters engage with the notion that

> affective homogeneity in times of war is momentary if not illusory, and that the literature of sacrifice is multivalent and conflicted, expressing anxiety not only about the costs of individual deaths in pursuit of a 'higher cause' but also about the definition of national units of social identity in the first place.[73]

The call of war, especially when existence is threatened, is clearly a powerful unifying force, but as it comes in response to threat (perceived or real), something that is by nature temporary, any unification it might bring, particularly on the back of high costs, is a unification that cannot last. In part, to return to Arlen's perspective, the fact that the state requires sacrifice means that this unity is not born of choice. To draw it back into the moment of scapegoating, the ousting of Arlen, as well as the acts of sacrifice that Jardir's war on the north brings about, these very much mirror the more micro scale attempt of Jeorje Watch in Tibbet's brook: unity by conformity to an identity norm.

[72] Peter V. Brett, *The Skull Throne* (London: Harper*Voyager*, 2016), p. 27.

[73] Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm, 'Afterword', in *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature: The Battle of Waterloo to the War on Terror,* eds. Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 255-262 (p. 256).

A Critique of Scapegoating

Though the series has multiple protagonists—with vastly differing perspectives at times—as the first character met, Arlen is structured as the primary protagonist. This positioning suggests to the reader that his views and thematic journey are of primary importance. In the wake of his mother's death and his father's cowardice he vows to 'give [the demons] nothing willingly, not now, not ever'.[74] When he rides into town on the night of Renna's trial to find her staked out in the night to die by demons for her "sin", he not only rescues her but shames the town:

> "I came from the Free Cities to teach the good people of Tibet's Brook to kill demons! […] But so far, I've seen no 'good people.' Good people do not feed helpless girls to the corelings! Good people do not stand by while someone is cored!"[75]

Here the critique is fairly clear cut (which is not to say unimportant or simplistic, merely that the text seeks to communicate its stance on hegemonic, patriarchal, religious victimisation clearly). However, throughout the series there is a more complex undercurrent of unease that also in part derives from the presence of that ever-present demonic threat in the narrative. Where the individual instances of scapegoating further specific social critique and raise the challenge that such monstrous acts cannot be justified, the need to defeat the demons and save humanity raises situations in which maybe the sacrifice of others is justifiable towards the greater good. The series constructs a kind of Trolley Problem as it recognises on one side the inherent problems in scapegoating individuals for the sake of community cohesion and the persistence of the status quo, but then also presents a scenario in which the choice may be to sacrifice some or everyone dies.

[74] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 169.
[75] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 506.

Arlen and Jardir, the two potential prophesied heroes, spend the entire series with opposing philosophies of how to save the world. Arlen believes that everyone is the deliverer, espousing a view that we have to all choose to stand up together in order to survive. Jardir's view is that he must unite by force everyone under his religious banner so that as one army he can lead the fight to the core. Where Arlen refuses to give them anything, Jardir is willing to sacrifice anyone and anything to the war to eradicate the demons: "*Unity is worth any price of blood*."[76] With the actual Trolley Problem the answer derived depends entirely on the adopted philosophical perspective and, in much the same way, this series does not come to a definitive answer on this front. However, the questions it raises are valuable ones.

A critique of what we might call "wasteful" sacrifice, or "pointless" sacrifice runs through the series, and is contrasted with "noble" or "necessary" sacrifice. It is most evident in moments when someone in power seeks to scapegoat others so that their power might persist. The way the text constructs these scenes places the protagonists in a position of outrage, challenging the person in power on behalf of those sacrificed. It is viewed as a waste of life, or as a corrupt act that places the self above others and fails to take on the responsibility that power and leadership should confer.

The first third of *The Desert Spear* (book two of five in *The Demon* Cycle) chronicles Jardir's journey from child, to trained warrior, to leader of his tribe's warriors, to prophesied Shar'Dama Ka, or Deliverer, who will deliver his people and the world from demons. In this section of the narrative, concerns are raised about the dwindling Krasian populace, and scorn is heaped upon the current Andrah and Sharum Ka (leaders of Krasia) who have grown old, fat, and lazy. They lack honour compared to the brave Sharum (warriors) who fight against and are killed by demons every night. It is Jardir's view that they have forgotten what it means to be Krasian and instead care more about their own positions and political power.

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[76] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 88.

As Jardir rises quickly to acclaim as a leader of his tribe's Sharum, the Sharum Ka fears his rise and so orders him to defend the most remote corner of the maze (the site where the Sharum do holy battle against the demons (alagai-sharak) each night) where he can gain no further honour and acclaim as demons rarely penetrate the maze so deeply. However, the consequence of this is that the Sharach tribe are given Jardir's previous place, and they are far fewer in number. One night this goes poorly and the Sharach fall back in a moment when to not would result in their wholesale destruction. Jardir breaks orders and takes his Sharum across the walls of the maze, racing to, and successfully saving, the remaining Sharach Sharum. It is in the next scene, as Jardir is brought to task for dereliction of duty, that the notion of wasteful sacrifice comes to light.

Aleverak, a Dama (priest) from Jardir's tribe cuts the Sharum Ka off mid-sentence to level the accusation that "[y]ou are supposed to stand for all the *Sharum* in Krasia, but you would sacrifice the Sharach just to quell a rival!"[77] The reader, familiar at this point in the narrative with the deeply religious Krasian society, where a man's honour matters above all else, will recognise the layer of disgust and pity to Alverak's damning of the Sharum Ka. There is a distinction drawn between the meaningful, noble sacrifice that the Sharum undertake each night as they risk dying on "alagai-talons"—a fate that they venerate, and believe will be rewarded in heaven—and dying to a demon for no purpose; or, perhaps, in this case, a purpose tainted by the selfish desires of a powerful individual who undercuts their choice.

This scene is mirrored later in the same novel as Arlen attempts to get Duke Euchor to commit aid alongside another Duke to fight off the advancing Krasian army. But Euchor is content to remain safe behind his walls, not willing to risk the cost to himself. Arlen challenges him, asking "[a]nd what of your hamlets? […] Will you sacrifice them as well?"[78] It may not

[77] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 110.
[78] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 424.

be, at first glance, entirely clear how this is, or even relates to, scapegoating. The structure of an act of scapegoating is that a representative is excised from the community in order to reinforce and maintain the status quo of said community. It is an act, as defined by René Girard, for which '[t]he purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric'.[79] What Euchor does is declare the boundaries of his community that he seeks to sustain and reinforce. Much as martyrdom is an act of sacrifice that extolls the value of something (a cause, an ideology, a person) via the sacrifice of life, so too does scapegoating. Euchor offers up the hamlets as sacrifice to the invading Krasians. In doing so, he extolls the value of the city of Miln (his own position, and that of the citizens of the city) as the most important thing to preserve. He scapegoats the wider duchy of Miln so that he might survive and prosper. Where martyrdom imagines a possible future world through the performing of its act, scapegoating is an act of defining the present. Where martyrdom enacts change, scapegoating etches the established boundaries ever deeper.

This seems at first somewhat distinct from other acts of scapegoating. There is no blame of the victim here. However, the value statement and the societal consequences fit an act of scapegoating perfectly. An act of scapegoating makes a statement that a person's existence within the community threatens that community's existence, and so they must be outcast. With Jeorje Watch, blame is very much a justification for his drive to more deeply entrench the religious and patriarchal hegemonies of Tibbet's Brook: Renna has sinned and therefore she could turn the whole town to sin and tear it apart from within. What occurs in Miln lacks that justification of victim blaming, but it follows that same sacrificial logic: if Miln the city spends its resources to fight and protect the hamlets of Miln the duchy, then that threatens the existence of the city, and so the Duke sacrifices them to the Krasian army to preserve the power position of the city and this throne.

[79] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.

The series makes it clear how problematic this is. This act is challenged by the protagonist. Through his eyes the reader has seen the fear, loss, and poverty that those in the hamlets live with every day; as well as the generosity that such communities show each other. Whole towns band together to re-build when homes fall to the demons. This is contrasted directly with the opulence of Duke Euchor, who begrudges charity and hoards secret knowledge of the past for his own benefit 'as another man might hoard food or gold. If [Arlen] gave Euchor the battle wards, the duke would not share them openly with his people. He would attempt to increase his own power by keeping them secret'.[80] The portrayal is clear: this is not a man making a hard but necessary choice to protect the citizens of his city, but rather a man attempting to make the choice most profitable and least costly to himself.

On both sides of the cultural divide within the series, there is this negative or critical perception of the selfish act of scapegoating that spends the lives of others cheaply for personal gain. In a genre so invested in exploring positive social change, it is not surprising that there is a negative perception of acts of sacrifice that use others for the benefit of the self while working to maintain the problematic status quo.

However, there is another common aspect to the long-form fantasy text: the presence of evil to be overcome, a villain to be defeated, a monster to be slain. In each of this thesis' case studies this is true, from *The Final Empire*'s The Lord Ruler, the myriad of monsters in *The Dresden Files*, the vengeful planet itself in N. K. Jemisin's work, or the demon queen in Brett's. *The Demon Cycle* presents this critique of scapegoating, of acts of sacrifice that use others rather than give of the self, but it then also complicates this critique by asking a difficult question: what if it is necessary? Jardir's journey is one marked by internal conflict, shame at the betrayal of Arlen in Book One, and grief at the lives lost along the way. These emotions war with his devout commitment to saving the world. He mulls over the notion of "necessary

[80] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 395.

evils". The text is clear that the sacrifice of others to maintain one's position is wrong, however does such spending of others' lives somehow become virtuous if done for "the right reasons"? And if yes, who gets to decide which reasons are the right ones?

For much of the series it seems as though any notion of a "necessary evil" is to be fundamentally rejected and opposed. But much like the role transition that Jardir undertakes from his construction in the first novel as an antagonist, to a core protagonist through the subsequent novels, so too does Arlen's resolute stance to give nothing over to the demons come to shift and widen in a way that recognises and allows for the realities of a situation that cannot be simply reduced to a black and white philosophy. In the final novel, *The Core*, Arlen and Jardir, (with some allies) journey into the Core in search of the demon queen while the surface world is attacked by demon princes. The ideals of these two characters have been complicated in this novel, and the uneasiness the series has with questions of sacrificing others plays out in a number of ways.

Jardir, has spent his entire life following in the footsteps of his ancestor, the previous deliverer Kaji, who successfully converted the north and waged war on the demons, driving them back into the Core and ushering in the ages of peace. The Evejah, the Krasian holy text, tells the story of Kaji's rise and his victory over the demons, and how he took his army down into the Core to ensure that the demons never return. Jardir however, leaves his army behind, breaking with Kaji's journey that has thus far been the foundational justification for all of the harm he has brought to the world or people in pursuit of defeating the demons. In their descent towards the Core, they find an abandoned, but still whole, Krasian citadel. Powerfully warded, it has existed here in pristine condition since the time of Kaji. This was as far as Kaji ever made it, he failed to reach the Core or the hive of the demon queen. One interpretation of this is as a final damning of Jardir's, and Kaji's, philosophy to save the world at all costs. Ultimately, it did not work. Sacrificing others, even for the sake of everyone else, seems at this moment in

the text pointless and the tone that runs through this scene is one of solemnity. The angry debate and tension that has dominated the character's progression towards confronting evil fades away, and the reader is drawn into Jardir's silent, internal contemplation of this immense remnant to his ancestor's ultimate failure. In response to this discovery the reader sees Jardir, instead of raging or fighting, reach out to his wife for the comfort of her love. He is overwhelmed by the need for support and reassurance.

While this representative of sacrificial expenditure begins to waver, Arlen, the champion of empowering choice, begins for the first time to find a faith. As they draw closer to their goal of the demon queen's hive, he becomes more reckless and more willing to accept cost. This culminates in a scene that is a dark opposite to discovering the lost Krasian city. Jardir and Arlen find the *alamen fae*, the descendants of Kaji's warriors a thousand years before, who have since been bred like cattle for the demon's larder. Arlen takes their simple weapons and wards them to harm demons, setting them against the demons as a distraction. The protagonists watch as the *alamen fae* fight, but when Jardir steps in to intervene, to save them, Arlen stops him. He spends their lives to improve his and Jardir's chances at surprising the demon queen. Arlen even goes as far as to suggest that perhaps Everam (the Krasian god) placed these people here for a reason, for "help when we needed it most." To which Jardir replies "[a]t what cost, Par'chin?"[81]

Coerced Choice and Acts of Chosen Sacrifice

The setting of this scene emphasises the internal conflict, and the unknown answers to difficult question. They are not only deep underground and in the dark where both the way out and the way forward are unknown, they have also gone beyond Kaji's final temple. This scene occurs

[81] Peter V. Brett, *The Core* (London: Harper*Voyager*, 2017), p. 819.

in a place that embodies the dangerous unknown. The debate that follows reflects back upon the journey of these two characters and the ideologies they have each represented and yet now come to question. It is full of language such as "cost", "price", and "excuse". The scene turns upon this philosophical debate of whether such acts of sacrifice can be justified—itself a complex, deeply perspectival debate—and then makes it more complicated than that. In this scene a question is raised: "Are we empowering their will, or manipulating it to our own ends." To which their captive mind demon interjects, laughing, "[y]ou are barely less savage than they. Both clinging to fictions you do not understand".[82] The very nature of choice, especially choice concerning giving one's life, is drawn into question.

This is a complication relevant to this entire thesis. The core dichotomy of this model of sacrifice is that individual choice promotes positive social change, while societal enforcement promotes negative social stagnation. However, if the individual choices can be coerced then potentially the social outcome could also be turned towards the benefit of those interested in sustaining the status quo like Duke Euchor. Authors Jan-Melissa Schramm, Randall Fuller, and Steve Attridge, in their respective chapters in *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature: The Battle of Waterloo to the War on Terror,* 'acknowledge the ways in which a willingness to self-sacrifice for the greater good might slide easily into *being sacrificed* by one's own nation state'.[83] We can see precisely the concern for this potential "slide" being raised in this moment: when Jardir questions Arlen about cost it echoes back through the series, calling to mind Jardir's challenge to the Sharum Ka in *The Desert Spear* where warriors of the Sharach tribe would have died for the Sharum Ka's political gain.

Had they fallen, had Jardir not prevented the scapegoating, there would be two narratives of that event. The *dal'sharum* of the Sharach tribe would have believed they died honourably

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[82] Brett, *The Core*, p. 821.

[83] *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature: The Battle of Waterloo to the War on Terror*, eds. Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 257.

on '*alagai* talons', assured their place in heaven having brought honour to their tribe.[84] In this narrative they have lived out their chosen and preferred end. However, they are entirely unaware of the other narrative, that of the Sharum Ka for whom their death is an easy price to pay to reduce the glory of his rival Jardir. The warriors would not be in that position to die without the machinations of the Sharum Ka; so, does that mean their choice to die for their people is noble and selfless, or did they never have a choice and in fact, rather than giving their lives, were their lives spent by a selfish man in power? The uneasiness brought about by this possibility of agency erasure or denial is an important facet in this series' critique of scapegoating as a practice. Not only is it problematic in the way it can be wasteful, or in the way that it spends others for the sake of the self, or in the way it can stagnate society or deny change or growth, but beyond that it is problematic in the way that it could negate choice.

It is worth noting that even in light of this possibility of coerced or manipulated self-sacrifice I do not think that this undoes the model of sacrifice that this thesis explores. This is mainly because of the intent to apply the model within literature where the reader has direct exposure to not only all possible information, but, from within the mind of the individual, clear experiential understanding of the factors that motivate and drive a choice. For instance, we could look at Vin in *Mistborn* who is coerced to sacrifice the power in the Well of Ascension, convinced that she is supposed to give it up and not use it, but in doing so unintentionally releases great evil upon the world. But in this instance, the individual act of sacrifice that turns out to be coerced is not an indictment of the act but instead, in the socially positive model of immersive fantasy, functions as a narrative growth point for the protagonist that feeds into larger thematic commentary as well as, primarily, a critique of the one who has done the coercing. This scene, in particular, emphasises such a critique. In the wake of the model established by Kelsier's martyr narrative, Vin should be lauded for the selflessness of giving

[84] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 24.

up the power. Faced with the ultimate temptation, she defies absolute corruption. So, rather than a failure, the scene is constructed more as a tragic lament as she makes the moral choice, not even using the power to save her love Elend who lies dying beside her, and yet still loses. The choice is affirmed and celebrated, and remains a powerful symbol.

I want to return to the question of the agency of the *alamen fae*, and the uneasiness present throughout Brett's series' with the idea that there could in fact be situations that justifiably call for scapegoating. The exaggerated fantasy world of literal demons creates a context in which the stakes are the most extreme and dire possible. Here the expenditure of others' lives for the perpetuation or survival of the status quo is explicitly framed in a manner so that what is being perpetuated is less an ideology and more concretely the literal existence of humanity in the world. Jardir's willing expenditure of lives is hard to discount when failure means the death of everyone. It is in that context that the reader must understand Arlen's choice. He seems to make the same choice as Duke Euchor of Miln: to try and save the *alaman fae* (the hamlets of Miln) puts their lives and mission (the city of Miln) at risk. The only distinction here being motive: Arlen's drive to save the world contrasted against the Duke's drive to preserve himself and his status quo.

While the text comes to ultimately champion martyrdom and choice as the means by which evil is defeated, the nature of the long-form narrative is that the road to that successful martyrdom is not a short or easy one. As a result, the uneasiness remains as the text does not provide a definitive answer to whether or not scapegoating can actually be justified, it never settles on one side or the other. What it does is raise the question and wrestle with it. Where there is no answer, it instead suggests a lesson: we should be wary of such practices due to their high potential, and even tendency towards being enacted for selfish reasons; but that we must also practically weigh the stakes at hand. *The Demon Cycle*, more than any other text explored in this study, recognises that acts of sacrifice, and the role they play in society, are not only not

clear cut and simple, but should not be. To return to Eagleton, whose entire work is predicated on the radical and useful nature of sacrifice to achieve change, that sacrifice can 'prove necessary is itself a tragic affair'.[85]

Scapegoated Characters as Agents of Change

Brett's series uses its scapegoated characters in two modes. The act of their being scapegoated brings to the surface of the narrative the social issues (typically stagnated communities and oppressive ideologies) of the status quo that the text seeks to critique. This is often emphasised and facilitated by the way that the reader is positioned; for instance, when the character being scapegoated is a protagonist whose perspective the reader inhabits, they are aligned with the ideology or identity being sacrificed for the community, and opposed against the sacrificing perspective. The other way that *The Demon Cycle*, in particular, uses its scapegoated characters is in their return to enable change that overcomes or solves the issues critiqued through the act of scapegoating in the first place. Crucially, in this series, the significant characters who are scapegoated do not die in the process. This enables further layers and stages of textual commentary. In contrast, the way that the Sharum Ka sacrifices the lives of the dal'Sharum to retain his position of power, is more final and serves, in that moment, as a critique of scapegoating itself.

This has to do with the way that scapegoating is all about included and excluded narratives where a community is protected from 'its *own* violence' by choosing from within its bounds what Girard refers to as 'victims outside itself'.[86] Those who are scapegoated, are excised from the community in part because those in power seek a reaffirmation of their position and

[85] Eagleton, p. 39.
[86] Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.

undertaking this act allows them to perform their ideology as a position of power and reunite through 'a common act of persecution'.[87] But they are also excised from the community because there is fear, or at least recognition, that to allow their narrative to persist within the community will change that community: perhaps some member who ascribes to the currently dominant norm, will shift to the new or different view which would weaken the position of those in power under the status quo. As McClymond usefully phrases it: scapegoating is 'primarily to do with constructing a legitimate channel for the expression of society's aggression against its own members'; it provides a means for those in power to resolve the conflict they find with dissenting or differing voices from within their own community and identity boundaries.[88]

In Arlen's case, his excision is about the persistence of Jardir's philosophy of enforced religious hegemony. His time as a self-imposed, nameless exile is about his fear that he has become a monster like the demons, and his determination to keep himself away from people lest he hurt them or bring them down with him. When he returns to society and reclaims his name, resumes wearing regular human clothes, and allows himself to return to his original Brook accent (instead of the gruff scary voice he used to keep people at arm's length), this part of Arlen's narrative is all about agency: specifically, the agency to choose one's identity rather than have one's identity and social position dictated by entrenched norms. This is the message and solution that the series seeks to champion. As it critiques the conversion of the populace by Jardir, it celebrates Arlen's own choice and the way that he works to empower the same choice in others. In rescuing Renna he affirms to her that "you got to fight demons, Renna Tanner. It's the only way to live with your head held high. Can't trust no one else to do what you won't do for yourself".[89]

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[87] Kearney, p. 1.
[88] McClymond, p. 15.
[89] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 500.

Renna's "return" from scapegoating is very similar in that her journey rests on a strong refusal to ever be used again; to never again be the trauma victim that her father made her, nor to be victimised as a political sacrifice by men like Jeorje. Instead, she chooses who she will be, and Renna chooses to be strong and fight back and forge her own path; and in doing so, she helps bring Arlen back too. The meaning presented through each of these character's arcs is amplified by the way the series brings these two significant scapegoats together. They choose each other, and in doing so create their own community built on the ideology of self-determination.

The Desert Spear is the book in which scapegoating comes strongly to the front of the narrative. Arlen's scapegoating is fleshed out by being told from Jardir's perspective. The reader is exposed to the way selfish members of both Krasian and Northern society spend lives to maintain their positions of power and through that the concept of scapegoating itself is called into question. And Renna's trial is carried out in a way that emphasises the problematic gender inequalities of this world as a core example of abuses of power and failure to learn the lessons that the presence of literal demons in the world *should* (the text argues) have taught its populace. It is a book that opens with Jardir's rise to power, a narrative in which the first dialogue spoken in the entire novel is: "People so weak and negligent deserve to be conquered"; however it is also a book that ends with the line: "I, Arlen Bales, promise myself to you, Renna Tanner."[90] The book ends with Arlen's choice to be human, and to end his time as outcast that Jardir began. Arlen and Renna's choice, the unity of the scapegoats, and the return of the scapegoats to society begins the process of change.

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The act of scapegoating is inherently problematic: it is backward looking, monolithic, marginalising, isolatory, and denies growth or change. It is also, due to the way that it is

[90] Brett, *The Desert Spear*, p. 9; p. 638.

typically performed from within a dominant community, powerful and effective. Societally we should be wary of instances of scapegoating and seek to ask questions of why this act is taking place: who is being outcast, who is benefiting, and why? As John B. Vickery powerfully states: 'the only admissible place for the scapegoat and his rituals is in the imaginative world of literature, where the destruction is solely linguistic'.[91] In literature where a real, innocent life does not have to be sacrificed, the act of sacrifice can perform its societal influence rhetorically, as well as bring the reader into more direct engagement with the dominant and minority narratives at play within the text. Its construction within the text enables the reader to both critique and challenge the act itself, as well as be made aware of its dangerous efficacy.

As Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm note, in their afterword to *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature*, it is '[b]ecause literature does not demand unwavering faith from readers, [that] […] War literature can thus foster a critical attitude towards the transactions of sacrifice, even as it acknowledges their enduring political and cultural traction'.[92] In fantasy literature this is much the same. In a genre invested in socially positive change, acts of scapegoating are at odds with the overall narrative drive and so come play a role in highlighting the problems of the stagnant status quo. The scenes of scapegoating within such long-form fantasy narratives are crafted to speak in dialogue with other instances of chosen (rather than enforced) sacrifice, such as martyrdom, so that the awareness of the social issues is concretely linked to an understanding of what kinds of change might resolve or help overcome those issues.

The typical nature of long-form fantasy's structure—multiple perspective characters and vertically complex meaning-making—allows for a complex engagement with, and usage of, tools and topics such as scapegoating. In Brett's work the reader experiences both the narrative perspective of the scapegoat and the scapegoater; as well as the experience of an act of

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[91] John B. Vickery, 'The Scapegoat in Literature: Some Kinds and Uses', in *The Binding of Proteus: Perspectives on Myth and the Literary Process*, ed. by Marjorie W. McCune, Tucker Orbison, and Philip M. Withim (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), pp. 264-278 (p. 277).

[92] *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature*, p. 262.

scapegoating denied, an act of scapegoating successful, and a distanced, macro view of scapegoating in which many lives are wasted. As such the role it plays in the fiction, that of a key social critique, is able to vertically build layers of understanding in the reader including critique of the act itself. It calls to attention abuses of power, and in a genre invested in imagining a way that the stagnant status quo might grow and change into a brighter future, acts of scapegoating bring the reader into direct contact with exactly the problematic elements that are sustaining the status quo. As martyrdom imagines a new world, scapegoating gives us handles on the old world.

Chapter Four turns to self-erosion to engage more intimately with the challenging questions of coerced choice and the enforced complicity of the marginalised individual within a systemically oppressive society. Where Brett's text raises these uncomfortable questions on a macro scale, N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy depicts the traumatic lived experience of these issues that the harmful status quo of the old world can inflict upon its inhabitants.

Chapter Four: Self-Erosion

> But this is what it means to be *civilized*—doing what her betters say she should, for the ostensible good of all. And it's not like she gains no benefit from this: a year or so of discomfort, a baby she doesn't have to bother raising because it will be turned over to the lower crèche as soon as it's born, and a high-profile mission completed under the mentorship of a powerful senior. With the experience and boost to her reputation, she'll be that much closer to her fifth ring. That means her own apartment; no more roommates. Better missions, longer leave, more say in her own life. That's worth it. *Earthfire yes*, it's worth it.
>
> She tells herself this all the way back to her room. Then she packs up to leave, tidies up so she'll come home to order and neatness, and takes a shower, methodically scrubbing every bit of flesh she can reach until her skin burns.[1]
>
> - *The Fifth Season*, N. K. Jemisin

> In the absence of a single guiding figure, or figurehead, evil becomes a small thing, an ordinary thing, both personal and systemic, as easy as breathing. It is a self-perpetuating system and the state of society is dependent on its continuation.[2]
>
> - Thomas Moules on 'evil in the works of N. K. Jemisin'

In 2015 N. K Jemisin won the Hugo award for best novel for her book *The Fifth Season*, becoming the first Black writer to receive this prestigious science fiction and fantasy accolade. She went on to make further genre history by becoming the first person ever to win three best novel Hugo awards in back to back years, and simultaneously achieve a further layer of success by being the first person ever to have each book in their series individually win the best novel award. It is not a stretch to state that this series is one of the most significant fantasy publications in the history of the genre, and certainly of this century. For a genre long

[1] N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (London: Orbit, 2016), pp. 75-76.

[2] Thomas Moules, '"I have done only what was necessary' An exploration of individual and structural evil in the works of N. K. Jemisin', in *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. by Francesca T. Barbini (Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2019), pp. 248-262 (p. 252).

dominated and held back by what Helen Young refers to as 'Habits of Whiteness', this milestone marks a key shift towards diversity in representation and recognition.[3] As the Hugos are audience nominated, I believe it also speaks to the way that contemporary fantasy readers are reaching for series such as this to provide answers about urgent social questions of reality. Through the perspective of an oppressed, middle-aged, Black mother with PTSD this series explores the consequences of humanity's consumption through the dual lenses of eco-apocalypse (the end of the world brought about by the Anthropocene's over-consumption of its resources) and the lived experience of racial oppression where the oppressed citizen of the world is reduced to a commodity and, most cruelly, made to be themselves complicit in that objectification.

This chapter aims to unpack the on-going, societally enforced acts of sacrifice that I have chosen to term self-erosion. Acts of self-erosion draw the reader's attention to the ways that oppression is systemic as well as how existence within, and under, systemic oppression forces the oppressed individual to give of themselves in order to survive. That giving up of the self, that on-going sacrifice, is traumatic and reductive. It can be passed down and inherited inter-generationally, and by eroding away at the individual from within it enables the larger system to perpetuate.[4] As martyrdom and self-denial strive towards change, self-erosion, as a social act, functions like scapegoating: it preserves and sustains the status quo. Jemisin's dual approach is thus carefully chosen to clearly articulate her point: the status quo of *The Broken Earth* series is the literal apocalypse of the planet, and so her question and challenge to the reader becomes "why would anyone want to preserve such a harmful status quo?" This implicit

[3] Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy: Habits of Whiteness* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[4] Throughout this chapter I have chosen to use the phrase "erode-away". This is technically a redundant phrase, to erode is to wear away, the concept is already included. With environmental erosion, water or the wind erodes at the earth. The act lies with the external force as it shapes the object. However, with self-erosion the external force is requiring the individual to shape themself. I have chosen the phrase "erode away" as it modifies the verb slightly. By adding a word it changes the imagery evoked. It adds an extra step in an attempt to rhetorically mirror the extra actor involved in self-erosion. It is a rhetorical and creative choice of but I believe it aids this chapter's discussion.

question is further emphasised by the fact that the oppressed peoples of this world, the orogenes, quite literally have the power to save the world from its eco-apocalypse. However, instead of being celebrated or even treated as equals, they are enslaved, indoctrinated, and often killed whilst still children.

The text oscillates between hope and bleak, confronting suffering. Its exploration of these questions and ideas repeatedly concludes that, quite simply, the world does not need to be this way, and in fact is only this way because of hatred and fear. On the one hand, the text works to get the reader to consider what aspects of our reality might not *need* to be the way they are. On the other hand, Jemisin fully capitalises upon the fact that if the world does not need to be this way, as well as being tragic, it also means it can be changed and in that this series finds hope. For the purposes of this case study, I will not be addressing the eco-critical elements of Jemisin's text beyond this brief surface level of associated metaphor in order to better focus attention on the acts of sacrifice and identity.[5]

This series, and this chapter, engage with the most complex topics and writing in this thesis. This is partly because Jemisin's writing is itself so accomplished and thematically layered, and partly because it engages with a key, current, and insidious social issue: what W.E.B. Du Bois called 'the problem of the Twentieth Century […] the color-line'.[6] A problem which Jemisin, and scholars like Helen Young, would argue was unfortunately not resolved in the Twentieth Century. On top of those complex elements, perhaps the facet that most contributes to the complexity of self-erosion is that as an act of sacrifice, unlike martyrdom,

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[5] For scholarship that engages with the eco-critical aspects of Jemisin's series see: les, Alistair, 'Repairing the Broken Earth: N.K. Jemisin on race and environment in transitions', *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene*, 7.26 <https://doi.org/10/1525/elementa.354>; Ingwersen, Moritz, 'Geological Insurrections: Politics of Planetary Weirding from China Miéville to N. K. Jemisin', in *Spaces and Fictions of the Weird and the Fantastic*, ed. by J. Greve and F. Zappe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 73-93; Bastiaansen, Fenne, *The entanglement of climate change, capitalism and oppression in* The Broken Earth *trilogy by N.K. Jemisin* (unpublished masters thesis, Utrecht University, 2020); Binjen, Kai, *The World as a Whole: Culture, Ecology and Holistic Worldbuilding in N. K. Jemisin's* The Broken Earth *trilogy* (unpublished masters thesis, Utrechet University, 2020).

[6] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 83.

self-denial, and scapegoating, it is an act that is largely invisible due to its internal and systemic nature. This is exactly where fiction, and particularly immersive literature such as Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* can offer valuable insights. It is also where, in the context of this thesis, the argument can proceed aided by the knowledge found through the previous chapters.

Martyrdom draws attention to the ways that large scale social narratives can work to either unify or divide peoples by providing or denying shared cultural memories. Looking to self-erosion will highlight how oppressed peoples are made to erode themselves and how doing so also erodes their connections to others like them. This loss of connection then reduces their capacity, like the skaa, to imagine themselves differently. Self-denial highlights how individual acts repeatedly juxtaposed against the status quo can, over time, strive not only towards changing the state of the individual but also, potentially, the state of the status quo. Self-erosion works the same way but flipped: instead of the individual's choice to change, here society's insistence pushes the individual towards conformity with the dominant norm in a way that allows for the persistence of the status quo. Scapegoating shows how the dominant group in a society can sacrifice out-group members in order to reinforce the dominant in-group position. Though acts of self-erosion are undertaken by individuals, they are mandated by those dominant in-groups through various means of socially constructed systems. Here, instead of directly sacrificing the individual, the dominant societal group constructs a society in which the out-group fears being outcast and so works to conform themselves to "acceptable" (limited) forms of identity and existence. Self-erosion, and, in particular, Jemisin's narrative, is, in a sense, a convergence point for the three previous modes of sacrifice

Defining Terms: Self-Erosion

In contrast to the first three chapters of this thesis, where I was able to draw on modes of sacrifice with readily accessible and understood terminology and a long history, here I encountered a gap in scholarship. There is no pre-existing term to describe this tragic practice of lived marginalised experience. As someone whose positionality places him in most categories of currently dominant privilege, I am wary of inventing or appropriating a term to speak to a form of sacrifice that many live with on a daily basis. My use of self-erosion has emerged after careful thought and research, as the subsequent paragraphs demonstrate, but my intent is that this might be a terminological placeholder to facilitate conversation.

I arrived at this term for the act of sacrifice at the intersection of societally enforced and on-going sacrifice only after much deliberation and debate. In 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', Audre Lorde makes the following statement:

> I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live.[7]

These two sentences perfectly describe the act of sacrifice that this chapter seeks to unpack: the plucking out of aspects of one's identity, the notions of eclipse and denial that are ultimately traumatic, destructive, and fragmenting. All of these represent a kind of sacrifice enforced on an individual by dominant systems and narratives that press upon those different and minority individuals. Those pressures manifest in ways that offer people choices that are not really choices: give up part of yourself to belong, or die.

[7] Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 114-123 (p. 120).

I explored many possible terms for this act of sacrifice. Self-erosion is the closest to representing the myriad components of what this act of sacrifice entails. For instance, I discussed ideas of self-distortion or contortion that reflected the warping of an identity, or similarly ideas of dismemberment, repression, or dislocation in relation to the self, but while some of these conjured images or ideas of loss, and others the element of choice, none of them fully captured the combination of factors that Audre Lorde so passionately and urgently articulates. There is not a word for this that adequately represents the influence of social determinism, the pressures of conformity, the trauma of internalised oppression, or the way that the repetition of these kinds of choices begins to solidify a self in a manner that prevents reclaiming pieces that were lost in the process. Beyond those factors of the act itself, such a word would need to account for the way that these sacrifices serve to reinforce the systems that enforce the sacrifices in the first place. This final aspect is apparent through the connection with scapegoating.

As I explore in Chapter Three, scapegoating is a single act of socially enforced sacrifice where those in power sacrifice an individual to perpetuate their status quo. Self-erosion then is unique and represents the largest potential for harm and trauma amongst the modes of sacrifice that this thesis explores. Here, those in power structure society in such a way as to get the individual to sacrifice themself to the status quo. The individual, in a quiet, insidious, invisible, on-going way, in a sense scapegoats themselves—or at least contributes to their own scapegoating. They are pushed to the fringes of the dominant norm and made to hover there, neither fully outcast or apart (here the final consequence for an individual "fully outcast" by this pressure is to be killed by it) but definitely not fully belonging either. And in that liminal space there exists a constantly outward pressure that, if surrendered to, would outcast the individual: they would cease to exist. As a result, the individual in that space fights, struggles,

suffers, and, at times, sacrifices parts of themselves to that pressure so that the fight might become easier.

This is what I am calling self-erosion: the act of sacrificing a part of the self in order to survive less painfully, as well as sacrificing a part of the self in order that a different aspect of that self might be allowed to flourish. This is an unfair paradigm wherein the marginalised and oppressed individual is denied a whole, multiple, varied being and must face reductions and limitations that they are required to enforce on themselves, in order to *be* anything at all. A clear example of this (and one that is core to the case study that this chapter will explore) would be that of a woman setting aside her power so that she might get to be a mother. The word choice of "get" here is particular and deliberate. One might wish optimistically to refute the idea that someone might be "allowed" to be a mother or have a baby; but this speaks exactly to challenges of self-erosion and its nature as embedded within systemically oppressive structures. We can understand that Essun is "allowed" to be a mother only because she sacrifices her power, for if she did not, then she would continue to be hunted and ostracized by the world, by the people who took her first child. She only "gets" to be a mother through this self-erosion. It is the system of the status quo (typically white, patriarchal, and hetero-normative) that insists she cannot be both; and so, not wanting to be neither (powerless and childless) she carves away one of those facets of herself.

I chose self-erosion for that specific combination of words: both "self" and "erosion". "self" emphasises the way that this impacts the individual, and that in fact the individual is the one undertaking this act of sacrifice (even if it is actually a coerced or constructed "choice"). "Erosion" captures the image of how societal pressures, norms, and expectations wear away at the individual and bring about the "choice" and need to sacrifice. It also contains within it the key elements of a gradual grinding down over time (even over generations) until the "choice" becomes inevitable under that weight; as well as how, in the image of the metaphor, the pieces

that the water (society) erodes away from the stone (self) are carried away, lost, permanently removed. I find some implicit support for my choice of terminology as "self-erosion" with Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic who, in explaining microaggressions and assumptions about race, creatively describe these lived experiences as '[l]ike water dripping on sandstone'.[8]

W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of the double consciousness is useful here. This is where the Black person lives in 'a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world'.[9] Double consciousness gives a name to the way that the oppressed subject must live with a 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'.[10] That inescapable awareness of seeing oneself not just on one's own terms but also through others' perspectives, is a lived experience that many who live with privilege are not burdened with. The pressure of that gaze, and the awareness of that gaze, leads some oppressed individuals to attempt to escape both it and that social position by "passing".

Passing as a term and concept originates in 1800s America where light-skinned Black people were able to sometimes escape and avoid slavery by "passing" as white. The term gained wider usage following Nella Larson's novella *Passing* in 1929 which explores a bi-racial character passing as white. It has become a useful term and a recognised occurrence amongst social identity categories other than just race; Werner Sollors defines the term quite broadly, stating that passing is the 'crossing of any line that divides social groups'.[11] But Jessa Lingel, in discussing passing and bisexuality, notes that a 'potential intake of negative self-valuation occurs with each act of passing'.[12]

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[8] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), p. 2.
[9] Du Bois, p. 8.
[10] Du Bois, p. 8.
[11] Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 247.
[12] Jessa Lingel, 'Adjusting the Borders: Bisexual Passing and Queer Theory', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9.3-4 (2009), 381-405 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299710903316646> [Accessed 31st January 2020].

Passing is perhaps the closest sociological concept to the act of sacrifice that I am trying to define in this chapter. Often the drive behind the acts of sacrifice made through self-erosion is a desire, or need, to Pass. However, for the purposes of this thesis this term alone will not suffice. Firstly, because the term Passing is complex and, in some instances, as the respective works of Sollors and Lingel show, can be a positive and desired thing on behalf of the individual (such as slaves finding a way to free themselves). Yet in other instances it can be traumatic and eventuate due to limited choices rather than as a desired goal. It is also something that can occur entirely without choice, say for instance in the context of sexuality where an observer may subconsciously or passively assume, due to dominant norms, that a person is heterosexual when in fact they are homosexual; in doing so, the observer has made the person in question pass as heterosexual regardless of said person's choices or actions.

Secondly, Passing is the result, it is not the action itself. What I am looking at here is the acts of sacrifice in which people give up parts of their identity in order to pass, survive, or avoid hatred and oppression. If one were to ask the question, what does one have to *do* in order to pass?, the answer would be this process, this act of sacrifice that my final chapter explores.

One facet of self-erosion, a behaviour that works to perpetuate self-erosion, is Foucault's conception of how an external "inspecting gaze", and the internalising of that perspective, leads to self-policing behaviours as individuals become their own prison keepers.

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.[13]

Internalisation that constructs the individual's actions towards supporting the dominant status quo is a key aspect of self-erosion. The "overseer" is internal, but it represents the ideology and norm of the dominant status quo. Even though it is an internal psychological construct, in a sense a piece of the self, it functions as if there were a real external overseer who was a part of, or a representative of, the dominant status quo. Frantz Fanon describes how an individual should move through the world with a natural self-awareness or schema of their body as it exists within space and time, and in relation to other things. However, in 'The Fact of Blackness', Fanon writes of how, as a Black man, he finds a 'historico-racial schema' beneath the 'corporeal' bodily one that, rather than self-defined, is provided 'by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories'.[14] And that this externally applied defining of self through others' observations comes to "crumble" his understanding of his body and self to instead be replaced by a 'racial epidermal schema': his Blackness is observed and understood in a social context that means his "racial epidermis" defines and limits him.[15] This is because it makes him 'responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors'.[16] The limiting an individual experiences in the process of self-policing is the way that these kinds of oppressive societal pressures impact and shape individual identity into forms convenient to the status quo.

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[13] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Golin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Pepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 155.

[14] Frantz Fanon, 'The Fact of Blackness', in *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), pp. 109-140 (p. 111).

[15] Fanon, p. 112.

[16] Fanon, p. 112.

Where Fanon's writings provide insights into the internalising of external views and the self-objectification of Blackness, Helen O'Grady, in *Woman's Relationship with Herself: Gender, Foucault and Therapy*, explores the way that Foucault's concept of self-policing applies to the lived experience and definition of women. She does so to emphasise the ways that this can be traumatic and painful for women.[17] For 'when a person fails to conform to accepted identity modes, aspects, or even the whole, of their sense of self can be experienced as "wrong"'.[18]

O'Grady also reaches out to the work of other key scholars, such as Susan Bordo (1990), bell hooks (1996), and Maria Lugones (1990), to acknowledge the way that these aspects of self-policing can exist diversely, and be intensified, when individuals and systems are understood intersectionally. In considering this further influence of axes of marginalisation and oppression O'Grady notes how

> experiences of violence and abuse can also intensify self-policing. This involves heightened vulnerability to self-surveillance, harsh self-judgements, insidious comparisons with the apparent normality of others, various self-negations and personal isolation.[19]

The layering of intersecting marginal identities, experiences of violence and abuse, an internalised gaze, and the lived experience of "self-negation" are all aspects explored throughout N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy.

In Jemisin's text, one of the ways this discussion is held, is through the character of Essun who has (in overly simplified terms for these introductory purposes) given up her power so that she might be a mother free to raise her children without persecution. O'Grady appends a

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[17] O'Grady is careful to note and unpack that these traumas, pains, and acts of self-policing are not unique to women, and that her research merely works to speak to that specific facet of the topic.
[18] Helen O'Grady, *Woman's Relationship with Herself – Gender, Foucault and Therapy* (East Sussex: Routledge, 2005), p. 19.
[19] O'Grady, p. 38.

footnote to the quote I have referenced above in which she, drawing on more of hooks' work, notes how

> [a]s in the case of groups marginalized by the dominant culture, many women living in situations of domestic violence are forced to intensify surveillance of their behavior in order to try to minimize levels of violence against them and their children.[20]

Self-policing is obviously of relevance to how Essun conceals and limits parts of who she is in order to survive. What is particularly powerful about O'Grady's discussion here is the way that she, in response to the above list of "intensified" elements of self-policing, follows up with this statement: 'When this occurs an exposé of the broader cultural context is crucial.'[21] O'Grady, much like Jemisin, recognises that the traumatic consequences for individuals' identities require an interrogation, critique, and rebellion against the system that has caused and continues to require these acts.

Self-policing however, much like Passing, is relevant and useful but does not perfectly cover all of the significant defining factors. In this instance, what is lacking is the way that self-erosion can involve the permanent loss of the suppressed, limited, policed aspects of the self. Self-erosion, as this case study explores, also engages with the way that these acts of sacrifice, and the loss involved with them, can be inherited generationally in ways that both prefigure and compound future acts of sacrifice. This aspect of self-erosion is deeply tragic. There is tragedy in the loss experienced by generations prior. But beyond that, those living in the present who have inherited the trauma and pressure to sacrifice in this way may not know or be able to remember that something was sacrificed and lost all those generations ago. In this way the

[20] O'Grady, p. 38.
[21] O'Grady, p. 38.

trauma becomes out of reach and potentially irreconcilable, especially if the system bringing about this trauma persists.

Speculative Fiction and Social Issues

The *Broken Earth* series presents a complex world and a narrative that spans thousands of years. Most of the contextual details relevant to this thesis will unfold as they become relevant to the discussion. However, before any detailed analysis can begin, there is one element of the world that Jemisin has imagined that needs to be explained: Orogeny.

Orogeny is the "magic" of this world, the core impossible element. It is also the subject around which the discussion and experience of hatred and marginalisation is structured. All people in this world have an internal sensory organ at the base of their skull called sesuna. The sesuna account for that feeling of being observed, a kind of extra-sensory perception or connection to the world around you.

Orogenes however, have more complex sesuna or sessapine which allow them to "sess" (a verb that exists at the intersection of feel and know) the physical earth around them. Orogenes can plunge their awareness into the soil, the bedrock, volcanoes around them and, with varying degrees of power and control, move the earth. They apply pressure at key pivot points, leveraging a mental fulcrum against the heat, friction, and stillness of the earth to move mountains, cause earthquakes, or just pull the heat from one area. In the world of the Stillness, where the people live in constant fear and preparedness for the next "Fifth Season" (apocalypse), Orogenes represent a possible power to protect places and people from the earthquakes and tsunamis that might destroy their homes by diverting those disasters elsewhere, or even preventing them entirely. However, rather than praised for their salvific powers, Orogenes are society's monsters. They are the creatures with unfathomable power who

could end your life, your whole town's life, the whole world's life without even moving. To be an orogene in this world is to either end up enslaved and tamed, or to be beaten to death by a "good man" looking to protect his village.

N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy speaks to the lived experience of racial oppression, exploring how such hegemonies systemically oppress marginalised communities and individuals, how those systems bring about layers of self-objectification that serve to maintain those systems, and how lasting change becomes possible through a combination of action to change the system and careful storytelling to imagine alternatives. Caution is required when discussing what a text may be actively doing in the world, but I draw on the work of sociologists who argue that fiction of this type can play a relevant and active role in enabling and assisting real world social change. Jemisin's trilogy is explicitly framed by a socially-active intent. It also works to redress systemic issues of the fantasy genre lacking representation of voices of colour.

The Fifth Season's dedication reads, '*For all those who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question*'.[22] This is not an epigraph quote to inspire thought, nor an opening line of fiction presented by a character. This is the author's dedication. This is why she has written this novel. It is designed and intended to speak to this lived experience. But the events of the series do not stop at depicting the suffering and trauma involved in an existence shaped by a constant, exhausting fight for respect. The series as a whole first raises awareness of that struggle and the systems that self-interestedly create and perpetuate that struggle. But then it moves beyond that to imagine what it might take to change such a system. It is "for those who have to fight" in part because it provides representation and recognition of a narrative that those benefiting from it would rather widely forgotten. In this way it works to combat isolation and self-doubt for those living with oppression, but also to raise awareness in

[22] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, front material.

those who may be unintentionally benefiting from that oppression and may be in a privileged position to assist.

It is also "for those who have to fight" in the way that it offers hope and a road map. In a 2018 interview, Jemisin was asked for her thoughts on speculative fiction and its relationship with exploring justice. She noted that the fairy tales many of us grew up on had clean and simple justice, but as a result, many of them had been now retired as no longer useful in depicting reality: 'We don't have good fairy tales for the justice system that we're currently living in.'[23] But, Jemisin would argue, 'that is where fantasy writers […] tend to be trying to create the fairy tales that we need to survive'.[24] It is in the light of these comments from Jemisin that we might best understand her assertion that 'we pursue in reality the things that we're capable of imagining, and those of us who are in industries or fields that play with imagination have a responsibility to depict futures that are for everyone'.[25]

Sociologist Philip Schwadel, commenting in part on Brian Stableford's *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (1987), states that

> sociologically most interesting, is sci-fi's *directive* function. Directive communications convey information with the goal of affecting attitudes, or, as Stableford puts it, they "command, exhort, instruct, persuade, and urge in the direction of learning and new understanding." Directive communication challenges the audience, questioning their worldviews.[26]

Or to turn to this quote from Daniel Hirschman in the same issue of *Contexts*, '[s]ociologists will need new metaphors, new ideal types, new counterfactuals, and new guiding lights as we

[23] N. K. Jemisin, 'A True Utopia: An Interview With N. K. Jemisin', by Abigail Berola <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/12/03/ a-true-utopia-an-interview-with-n-k-jemisin/> [Accessed 1st January 2021].
[24] Jemisin, 'A True Utopia: An Interview With N. K. Jemisin'.
[25] N. K. Jemisin, 'The WD Interview: Author N.K. Jemisin on Creating New Worlds and Playing with Imagination', by Jera Brown <https://www.writersdigest.com/be-inspired/the-wd-interview-n-k-jemisin> [Accessed 1st January 2021].
[26] Philip Schwadel, 'grokking modernity', in 'Why Sociology Needs Science Fiction', *Contexts*, 17.3 (2018), 12-21 (p. 15).

navigate the 21st century. We face new problems like anthropogenic climate change, and old enduring ones, like the Color line. Science fiction can help'.[27] As Jemisin's series deals explicitly with both anthropogenic climate change and the lived experience of racism, it seems particularly well positioned to aid in sociology's search for "new guiding lights".

Though the *Broken Earth* trilogy is distinctly its own secondary world, and very much not a simple allegorical parallel to our own world, there are small elements of our own world that underpin the text. For instance, as Tomas Moules notes, the second novel

> *The Obelisk Gate* draws an explicit parallel between the early days of the Fulcrum [an oppressive institution within Jemisin's world] and the Confederate slave-holding American South at the time of the Civil War, referencing quotes from various 'Articles of Secession' and altering them to mention orogenes [the oppressed people of Jemisin's world].[28]

Again, this is not done to suggest that the imagined world of The Stillness is ours, but instead to emphasise the urgency for the reader to take from the experiences of this world and bring them back to their own real life.

As an immersive fantasy text, the structure of the narrative requires the reader's acceptance. Those immersive qualities create a prime opportunity for empathy and understanding through or beyond biases and assumptions. One of the theoretical frameworks that this chapter will engage with is Critical Race Theory. I will unpack this theory more fully in a 'Defining Terms' subsection just before this chapter's first focussed case-study section on the novel. For now, as another facet of this discussion of socially-active texts, I want to briefly touch on just one fact of this legal and social movement: "Legal storytelling." Legal storytelling

[27] Daniel Hirschman, 'untitled introduction', in 'Why Sociology Needs Science Fiction', *Contexts*, 17.3 (2018), 12-21 (p. 13).

[28] Thomas Moules, "'I have done only what was necessary", An exploration of individual and structural evil in the works of N. K. Jemisin', in *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. by Francesca T. Barbini (Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2019), pp. 248-262 (p. 253).

‘urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives.’[29] This storytelling is being urged for two reasons. Firstly, because Critical Race Theory is, at its core, about a search for missing *language*. The theory came about due to a realisation that ‘there was, seemingly, no language in which to embark on a race-based, systematic critique of legal reasoning and legal institutions themselves’.[30] And secondly because Critical Race Theory defines voice as the ‘ability of a group, such as African Americans or women, to articulate experience in ways unique to it’.[31] By telling and receiving stories from voices that can “articulate their unique experiences”, authors hope to present their narratives as Hirschman’s “new counterfactuals”.[32] The hope would then be that these enable a “questioning of worldviews”, as Schwadel puts it; and ultimately, as Delgado and Stefancic articulate, an “assessment of our master narratives”.[33]

Helen Young, in her influential book *Race and Popular Fantasy Fiction: Habits of Whiteness*, addresses how fiction within the fantasy genre has an entrenched tradition of whiteness that is only now beginning to be dislodged and diversified. Young hyphenates “genre-culture” to draw attention to the way that they are inextricably intertwined, which in turn emphasises why it is significant that ‘the loudest voices - authorial and audience alike - were those of White men for much of the genre's history’.[34] It is in that context that voices such as Jemisin’s are crucial. Especially so in the light of Critical Race Theory’s assertion that ‘members of [America’s] dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is like to be nonwhite’.[35] Jemisin’s immersive text provides a distance from the contexts and assumptions

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[29] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 11.
[30] Delgado and Stefancic, pp. xiv-xv.
[31] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 186.
[32] Hirschman, p. 13.
[33] Schwadel, p. 15; Delgado and Stefancic, p. 11.
[34] Young, p. 6.
[35] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 46.

of reality. Then, through the structural acceptance of the reader, it works to engender an empathy and understanding of, in some way, "what it is like to be nonwhite" and how those marginalising experiences are ones that reduce and harm individuals existing within our oppressive social systems. If readers are to change their own world, they require the opportunity to imagine different possibilities, just as the characters in Jemisin's novel are inhibited from realising change by being denied the language and opportunity to imagine themselves and their world differently. Jacqueline Jones Roster calls explicitly for the scholarly role of imagination (and the stories that promote it), stating that 'imagination functions as a critical skill in questioning a viewpoint, an experience, an event, and so on, and in remaking interpretive frameworks based on that questioning'.[36]

Jemisin's series, more explicitly so than the other three discussed in this thesis, directly reaches for the reader and seeks to instil an empathy and understanding that hopes in turn to engender real world social action, or at the very least contribute to a shift away from stagnant, unquestioned norms that enable the perpetuation of systemic social oppressions. 'When we can identify and understand how people create and sustain such an oppressive world, we have gained important tools we can use to change it.'[37]

***The Fifth Season* – How Acts of Self-Erosion Change Identity Over Time**

The Fifth Season is the first novel in N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy. It moves through three distinct perspectives, cleanly delineated by the inclusion of either pronouns or names in the chapter titles. It opens confrontingly with the direct address 'you are here' before going on

[36] Jacqueline Jones Roster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 83.
[37] Jeffrey P. Aguinaldo, 'The social construction of gay oppression as a determinant of gay men's health: homophobia is killing us', *Critical Public Health*, 18.1 (2008), 87-96 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581590801958255> [Accessed 29 December 2019], p. 94.

to note that 'you need context'.[38] The reader comes to realise that someone is telling this story to another character (a woman we will come to know as Essun) but that Essun's chapters are always in this second person address that in part cannot help but speak also to the reader. We do need context, just as Essun does—though the reasons why she needs to be told her own life story do not become clear until the very end of the trilogy, until we have the context to understand what this story-telling is attempting to re-affirm and salvage. The other two perspectives in this novel are that of a young girl named Damaya, and that of an angry young woman named Syenite. The reveal of this first third of the *Broken Earth* narrative is that these three characters are all one: Damaya is who Essun was as a child, Syenite is her younger-middle years, and Essun is who she has become in the "present" of the narrative.

I have put "present" in quotation marks because time is tricky in this trilogy. In most other books we would most likely describe Damaya and Syenite's stories as the past, and the story of Essun as the present as that is where most of the narrative takes place, and it is the part that most feels like a "now" even though every perspective is written in the present tense. This narrative device serves to make the lived experiences of each of these individuals always immediate for the reader and still very real for Essun even though they are technically events of the past. This is one of the ways the *Broken Earth* constructs its discussion of how the past, particularly past choices and past sacrifices, continue to construct the present, even over impossibly long geologic spans of time. Technically speaking the real "present" of this world is a time and place after the events of the entire trilogy have occurred; it is the space in which the narrator, Hoa, is telling this entire story to Essun. And in that sense though the "present" moment in the world might be *after* this story, because it is actively being told to Essun, and to us in the present tense, the entire story is in fact taking place "now". And this is crucial to how this narrative functions, to what it is trying to tells us: 'you are here', be present, all of this

[38] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.

matters, all of it is lived experience; and, 'you need context', you cannot understand who you are *now* if you do not understand where and who you came from, or how you came to *be*.

The structure of this first novel then works to provide context for Essun. Each of these characters, each of these distinct, individually named people that Essun is at moments through her life serve to illuminate the oppressive social structures of this world and how they bring about a series of actions on Essun's part in which she sacrifices parts of herself to survive. It is by looking at the "choices" of Damaya, Syenite, and Essun that we can come to understand self-erosion.

In 2010 Karen D. Pyke's article in *Sociological Perspectives* put forth a call and a challenge to address "internalised racial oppression". Pyke's article presents the argument that a 'critical approach that highlights the social structural and cultural mechanisms that maintain and reproduce the systemic processes of domination is needed to remedy an over emphasis on the psychological outcomes of White racism's internalization among the oppressed'.[39] Her point is that while sociology has examined systems of oppression, and psychology has explored the impact on the individual, the existing scholarship lacks a recognition that the system brings about an internalisation of oppression that in turn works to perpetuate that system. Pyke acknowledges that there is a hesitance in looking at internalised racial oppression in this way because it has the potential to place blame onto the victims. However, Pyke advocates strongly that this need not be the case, and that such topics can be approached intentionally where scholars look to the experience of the individual within a system in order to learn and critique that system itself: redirecting the "blame" to where it should be.

Jemisin's novel functions in this way: the focus is on the micro level of individual experience, but in so doing it draws attention instead to the macro level of the oppressive

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[39] Karen D. Pyke, 'What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries', *Sociological Perspectives*, 53.4 (2010), pp. 551-572, DOI <10.1525/sop.2010.53.4.551> [Accessed 5th December 2019], p. 556.

systems. The early part of this chapter draws on Pyke's significant article. This is because it so excellently and clearly dissects the processes of the individual inculcating internalised oppression but also takes pains to collate the existing key scholarly material from sociological and psychological fields on racism, oppression, and hegemony. My level of engagement with Pyke's work should also reflect that following Pyke's 2010 publication there has been only one larger scale work taking up her challenge: *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* edited by E.G.R. David. Published in 2014 this book also opens by establishing that the topic of internalized oppression remains largely unaddressed. For the purposes of this thesis, it is Pyke's sociological emphasis that is the most relevant.

All of the *Broken Earth*, but especially *The Fifth Season*, is structured around interconnected or mirrored narrative layers, each operating at different scales. This is embodied in the opening of the novel which begins small and then zooms out in stages to establish these interconnections. The novel opens: 'Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?'[40] The question is clearly rhetorical, we have no choice but to start wherever the novel dictates, but the presentation of choice is nonetheless seductive. This is the core of this narrative, the false appearance of choice being offered. It is followed by this opening passage:

> Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we? Get it over with and move on to more interesting things.
>
> First, a personal ending. There is a thing she will think over and over in the days to come, as she imagines how her son died and tries to make sense of something so innately senseless. She will cover Uche's broken little body with a blanket—except his face, because he is afraid of the dark—and she will sit beside it numb, and she will pay no attention to the world that is ending outside. The world has already

[40] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.

ended within her, and neither ending is for the first time. She's old hat at this by now.

What she thinks then, and thereafter, is: *But he was free*.

And it is her bitter, weary self that answers this almost-question every time her bewildered, shocked self manages to produce it:

He wasn't. Not really. But now he will be.[41]

This passage establishes two things that the reader needs to know, two implicit pieces of "necessary context" to underpin the literal context the text will begin to provide in the next paragraph. First, that the novel draws an innate connection between the literal world outside and the personal internal world of the self. The "endings" here reflect and amplify each other, with ultimately the weight given to the micro scale of the personal: 'and she will pay no attention to the world that is ending outside [for] [t]he world has already ended within her'.[42] Second, that this woman, her son, and people like them are imprisoned or enslaved within their world, their freedom denied to such an extent that a mother is forced to realise her innocent son is only truly free in death.

The opening proceeds from here to consider wider perspectives of "worlds ending", asking the reader to imagine this same ending but 'writ continentally', '*planetarily*', and then returning back to the personal.[43] This cycling of scaled perspectives further reinforces the way this narrative intertwines all of these facets—personal, societal, global—and asks of the reader to understand how they each impact the other. At the end of this introduction we are left with the following almost oratory stanza and a repeated refrain that echoes T.S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men':

[41] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.
[42] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.
[43] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season,* p. 1; p. 8.

> This is what you must remember: the ending of one story is just the beginning of another. This has happened before, after all. People die. Old orders pass. New societies are born. When we say "the world has ended," it's usually a lie, because *the planet* is just fine.
>
> But this is the way the world ends.
>
> This is the way the world ends.
>
> *This is the way the world ends*.
>
> For the last time.[44]

This close to the introduction has a tone of inevitability to it, the short, clipped, declarative sentences stating bold facts; but it also retains a key element of hope: that as old stories end, new stories can begin, and that, most significantly, these endings are themselves going to come to an end. The final section, with its repeated refrain, visually steps the reader back down those interconnected scales, each sentence diminishing in visual length across the page. It shifts from planetary, to continental, to personal, with that micro layer being emphasised in its italics to express its significance. We are told that all of these endings are true, and happening, and inescapable, but that this, finally, will be the "last time", suggesting that, perhaps, those who before might have only been truly free in death, might get to live free in a new world, a new society, as a new self once these old stories have finally ended.

Where Eliot's empty, hollow society is going to fade away into nothingness—"not with a bang, but with a whimper"—Jemisin alters the final line to arrive instead at "for the last time". This is Jemisin's looking forwards. It is a fundamental opposite to Eliot's bleak fading away. Jemisin's text is deeply aware that achieving social change within an oppressive system is extremely difficult as the embedded structures of such a system work to perpetuate things as they are. Hence the dual apocalyptic and hopeful message in the prologue: there will be a new

[44] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 14.

world, a better world, but first *this* world has to end so that a hopeful alternative might have a chance to grow and flourish.

Defining Terms: Critical Race Theory

In turning now to the specific portrayal of characters and their self-erosion, it is important to remember Pyke's assertion that to 'forge effective methods of resistance, it is necessary to understand how oppression is internalised and reproduced' because 'systems of inequality are maintained and reproduced, in part, through their internalization by the oppressed'.[45] By giving primacy to the voice of the oppressed, by listening to those stories, those "systems of inequality" may be challenged. This is where an understanding of Critical Race Theory becomes useful. Delgado and Stefancic describe how

> [c]ritical race theory sprang up in the 1970s, as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, more or less simultaneously, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back. Realizing that new theories and strategies were needed to combat the subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground, early writers, such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, put their minds to the task.[46]

As both theory and activist movement, Critical Race Theory works to combat systemic racism: racism built into the legal systems of a nation. As I noted earlier in the chapter, this kind of work is necessary because people are socially constructed beings who live within those systems, and as such are vulnerable to systemic determinism. Critical Race Theory defines this as 'the idea that our system, by reason of its structure and vocabulary, is ill equipped to redress

[45] Pyke, p. 552.
[46] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 4.

certain types of wrong'.[47] Just as self-awareness is often much harder to achieve than awareness of others, so too is it difficult to see the issues of a system one lives inside (and this is further compounded if it is a system that one benefits from and therefore assumes to be "good"). It centres on language:

> There was, of course, law that had a lot to do with the lives of some communities of color: poverty law, welfare law, immigration law. But there was, seemingly, no language in which to embark on a race-based, systematic critique of legal reasoning and institutions themselves.[48]

Critical Race Theory is rooted in a recognition of a social problem that could not be solved, a system that could not be changed, a situation that, by some, could not be recognised, because there was no language for it. Without first a way to describe or define the issues at hand there also cannot be a means of imagining a new world beyond those issues.

Unpacking the three perspective characters of *The Fifth Season* in part explores how oppressive systems deny oppressed subjects language in which to constitute themselves, or with which they can express dissent, difference, or dissatisfaction. This denial, or outright control or suppression of language, plays a large role in individuals' internalisation of racial oppression. This in turn leads to those individuals sacrificing parts of themselves that do not fit the accepted "language" in order to survive within the system. Moving through each of these perspectives, the self-erosions present stem directly from these oppressive systems: Damaya's ability to self-define is reduced to a uniform and limited identity as a commodity within the system; Syenite, having internalised the "vocabulary" of the Fulcrum and the empire finds herself complicit with the system; and Essun, broken and reduced, slowly learns to "speak" and imagine differently, and through that work towards systemic change.

[47] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 31.
[48] Delgado and Stefancic, pp. xiv-xv.

Damaya: Childhood and Indoctrination

Damaya's perspective begins with a chapter in which she has been locked away in the barn by her family, a strange man arrives to take her away, and Damaya confronts and wrestles with the way her family and the rest of her village view her as a monster. This chapter is fraught and tense. Inside the mind of a child her thoughts flip from confident assurances that this is all going to turn out fine if she can only find the right thing to say, to a tragic acceptance that this is the truth of the world: that her family fears her rather than loving her, not because of anything she has done, but because of what she might do, because of what she could do as an orogene, as a monster.

Throughout the chapter Damaya's internal contemplation goes through stages of establishing thoughts and then revising them in a way that, to the reader, affords the first insights into how the external assumptions and expectations of a world come to be internalised by a marginalised individual. Huddling cold and alone in a barn, waiting to see if she will, as she understands it, be sold by her parents, Damaya moves through a range of emotions:

> A giggle bubbles up in her throat, and at once she crams her fist into her mouth to stop it from spilling out. They'll hear Damaya laugh at her mother's embarrassment, and then the child-buyer will know what a terrible child she really is. Is that such a bad thing? Maybe her parents will get less for her. That alone makes the giggles break free, because Damaya hates her parents, she *hates* them, and anything that will make them suffer makes her feel better.
>
> Then she bites down on her hand, hard, and hates herself, because *of course* Mother and Father are selling Damaya if she can think such thoughts.[49]

[49] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 27

Already Damaya has begun what will be a life-long journey of internalising others' views of her in ways that permanently alter her self-perception. As she bites down on her hand and 'hates herself' she physically polices her thoughts as she simultaneously reaffirms what feels like fact: her parents whom she loves, and therefore must know best, they in their positions of power, must be right to get rid of her, the monster who hates her parents. Jemisin's choices in opening this series—from the infant son beaten to death, to this child being given away in fear as what is viewed as 'any citizen's duty'—begin constructing necessary links of empathy between these characters and the reader.[50]

The reader experiences Damaya's innocent confusion as she questions herself 'Is there a difference?' and resolving 'Maybe' in response to the realisation that rather than hating Damaya, her mother '*fears* Damaya'.[51] All of the *Broken Earth* is narrated by a character named Hoa. It is constructed within and presented from a perspective with the insight of an adult. As the events are framed from a place of adulthood, the reader's confusion is amplified by an adult way of understanding the world, or at least by the understanding that Jemisin's work is beginning to construct: that fear can breed hatred, and that fear, especially fear of the other, is rooted in irrationality for how could you be so afraid of a child that you would sell her, or beat him to death?

This textual element, particularly for Damaya's chapters, is crucial to the empathy Jemisin is working to construct. For if the reader were experiencing the story only as innocent Damaya, they would not be presented the layers of how Damaya is being shaped in this scene: yes by the hatred and fear of her parents, of her town, but also by the man who has come to take her away. For Damaya he represents a chance at something different and so even though she knows that 'child-buyers do terrible things', because 'some part of Damaya is tired of being

[50] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 32.
[51] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 27

afraid and angry' and because he smiles at her, 'she doesn't even think twice before she smiles back. She trusts him immediately. She knows she shouldn't, but she does'.[52] The reader is told, both by her own acknowledgement that she "shouldn't" trust him, and the phrase "child-buyer", that they should be wary of this man. But as Damaya continues down a path of trusting, and even coming to love this man, Jemisin weaves in a showcase of how an oppressed, isolated individual comes to change themself to fit what a system wants from them.

Pyke, noting the importance of Antonio Gramsci's explanations of hegemony, states that '[a]ll systems of oppression not thoroughly coerced through brute force and overt repression involved the dominant group's ability to win consent of the oppressed'.[53] This man, Schaffa, smiles at Damaya. He asks her what name she would prefer to go by and accepts her self-identification. He is going to take her away, even Damaya knows this, but he offers his hand and 'she likes that he makes it *feel* like a choice'.[54] And once she is on board with him, believes in him, has in a way hardened her heart to the parents that are giving her away and instead opened it towards this man who smiles, then he tells her this:

> "You're firemountain-glass, Dama." He says this very softly. "You're a gift of the earth—but Father Earth hates us, never forget, and his gifts are neither free nor safe. If we pick you up, hone you to sharpness, treat you with the care and respect you deserve, then you become valuable. But if we just leave you lying about, you'll cut to the bone the first person who blunders across you. Or worse—you'll shatter, and hurt many."[55]

Having earned her trust, Schaffa begins telling her a story. In some ways it is a seductive story. It is one that says: you can be useful, and important, and powerful. But it is also a story that says you will never be any of these things on your own, and that you will only ever matter on

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[52] Jemisin, *The Fifth* Season, p. 29; p. 29; pp. 29-30.
[53] Pyke, p. 556.
[54] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 30.
[55] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 38.

our terms, if you exist as we tell you to exist. Note the power dynamic embedded in the construction of subject and object in what Schaffa says here: not, "if you hone your abilities" but if "*we* hone *you*". Schaffa here sets the social narrative, the rules by which Orogenes like Damaya must exist or be killed.

Damaya's first chapter shows how easily and quickly these kinds of externally provided and established social narratives become internalised and instilled. As Schaffa "explains" the world to Damaya, and "the way things are", Damaya swallows it whole-heartedly:

> She begins to cry. Because he's right. All of it, everything he says, it's right. She hates Mother for putting her in here, she's hated Father and Chaga for letting Mother do it, she hates herself for being born as she is and disappointing them all.[56]

In the span of a conversation, in only a few pages of reading, Schaffa has gone from the man she 'knows she shouldn't [trust]' to 'everything he says' being right.[57] Schaffa presents an insidious mingling of truth and fiction that convinces this child to internalise the idea that her self-hatred makes sense because if she does not do what the world needs of her then she will be a monster. He reveals the way that her family is afraid of her. She can see it in their faces. In realising that truth, she swallows what he tells her about how only he and the people he represents can show her the "right" way to be, and that she cannot be valuable on her own. It perfectly fits Pyke's definition of internalised racial oppression as 'the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one's racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one's race and/or oneself'.[58]

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[56] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 38-39.
[57] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 30; p. 38.
[58] Pyke, p. 553.

In this chapter Jemisin lays out the baseline for the way that individuals are set on a path towards self-erosion. In the final lines of the chapter as Schaffa takes Damaya away, Jemisin ends the scene with this exchange:

> "Don't look back," Schaffa advises. "It's easier that way." So she doesn't. Later, she will realize he was right about this too.
>
> Much later, though, she will wish she had done it anyway.'[59]

The chapter closes here with a break in time, an insertion by the narrator of key future knowledge that in this moment it is in fact easier for Damaya (who will become Essun one day) to not look back, to cut her parents and her brother from her life, to leave behind that aspect of herself as carrying it will be painful and slow her down. (It will also, in terms of the goals of the organization that Schaffa represents, make her easier to mould into the desired shape of an orogene, into their particular firemountain-glass weapon). But the break in time here, the insertion of the hard lessons that Essun will come to learn, is that she will come to regret leaving that behind. As surviving in this world erodes away at yet further aspects of herself, as Damaya will come to be destroyed and give way to Syenite, who in turn will become Essun, and after all of that she will wish she had looked back and held on to the memory of the once loving parents who gave birth to her and raised her.

Damaya's part of the narrative exists in only four chapters: 'Damaya, in winters past', 'Damaya, grinding to a halt', 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', and 'Damaya, in finality'. Looking at these titles side by side, the language chosen here reveals that everything about Damaya's narrative in this story is about endings, leaving behind, and change via loss: self-erosion. 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', perhaps as the key noun in the title suggests, will in some ways be the most pivotal. The first section of 'in winters past' details the erasure of Damaya's innocence as to her place in the world. A moment in which she definitively shifts, in

[59] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 41.

the eyes of the world and in terms of how she views herself, from a child like any other to orogene-monster, to "other". Here the Damaya of winters past is taken away from the Damaya of "now" and left behind.

In 'Damaya, grinding to a halt', Schaffa tells Damaya a story of how the world came to be as it is now, of a hero named Shemshena who saved the world from a monster named Misalem. The choice of "grinding" is significant not only because it relates to these ideas of erosion, but because of its present tense; in this chapter Damaya is not "ground" down, not worn away and erased, but is currently and will continue to be "grinding". And the "grinding" in this case, through this storytelling, is the continued erosion of the innocent, "normal" Damaya of winters past:

> While [Schaffa] told [the story], she imagined herself as Shemshena, bravely facing a terrible foe and defeating him with cleverness and skill. With every *you* and *your* that Schaffa speaks, however, she begins to understand: He does not see her as a potential Shemshena.[60]

This child is deliberately and directly denied the imaginative leap to view herself as a potential hero. Whereas in the previous chapter she was made to confront the fact that her parents no longer loved her, that she could no longer be their "normal" little girl, here the "grinding" continues. Here Damaya internalises the truth that, like her family and her town, the rest of the world will also not view her as their hero, but always instead as their Misalem. She will always be the threat to be contained, killed if necessary, and never never believed that despite their power they might not want to rule everyone else: "Misalem claimed he had no desire to rule in the Emperor's stead, but who could believe that? A man willing to threaten a city to get what he wants will stop at nothing."[61]

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[60] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 92-93.
[61] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 91.

In 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', she is being taught (indoctrinated) into the official (socially acceptable) mode of being an orogene. Here the theme of grinding continues. Before we as the reader are afforded any insight into this institution or what it is like to be there, Damaya's self-perception immediately explains the effect of this place upon her:

> For the other *grits*—and that's what she is now, an unimportant bit of rock ready to be polished into usefulness, or at least to help grind other, better rocks (my emphasis added)[62]

At the close of the previous Damaya chapter she realises that she is constantly being tested, both explicitly and implicitly, and in the opening lines of 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', the reader is shown how quickly an individual can, via acts of self-policing to avoid failing those tests, come to internalise a new and limited view of oneself as "an unimportant bit of rock". Again, the construction of the language here positions Damaya as the passive object rather than the active subject. It is not her own efforts that will "polish" her capabilities, but rather it is just her passivity that is required so that she might be "ready to be polished into usefulness" by those who know better.

The lessons at the Fulcrum are ostensibly those concerning the practice of orogeny. And for the students, and especially so for Damaya who is very talented at orogeny, those official lessons are seductive. They are classes in refining one's power. And considering that orogeny is by definition the power to reach out and shape the world around you, of course these marginalised children will strive to succeed at it. However, what these official lessons do is distract from the equally real, but more subtle, social lessons that the Fulcrum is instilling, the ones not taught in classes but via punishments, reminders, and admonishments.

If any grit fails to bathe properly, brush their teeth, have an orderly bed, or comb their hair there are specific punishments to deter this behaviour. In particular, grits who, at morning

[62] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 191.

bed check, arrive in "incorrect dress" are "corrected" by being switched. Crucially, '[t]he switches do not break the skin—instructors are trained to strike just enough—but they do leave welts, which are probably meant to chafe underneath the stiff fabric of the uniforms'.[63] The imagery Jemisin presents here shows how the institution of the Fulcrum (and the wider society that it represents) leaves marks. It does not cut you open or destroy you. It marks you and forces you to carry those marks, hidden "underneath" a uniform in a way that puts distance between others' ability to empathise with these children, as well as in a way that "chafes". These marks, physical and psychological, are constant, painful reminders that you are different and that you must behave: an impossible, unsustainable, liminal situation.

The "uniformity" here is also key as these lessons result in these children internalising the following: '*You are representatives of us all* […] *When you're dirty, all orogenes are dirty. When you're lazy, we're all lazy. We hurt you so you'll do the rest of us no harm*.'[64] These children are made to be responsible for their peers in the same way that Fanon articulates being made 'responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors'.[65] This reduces any individual agency or identity by insisting that each of these people is functionally the same as any other; it requires of each individual a further level of self-policing to avoid punishment not only for themself but for others like them; and it puts barriers in the way of what could be an actual, affirming cultural connection or shared identity by instead emphasising that what makes these children like one another is 'cursed and terrible'.[66] It is also a process of indoctrination and objectification that works to reduce individuality. Martha Nussbaum refers to this as Fungibility where the 'objectifier treats the object as interchangeable […] with objects of the same type'.[67] As far as the world is concerned, all orogenes are the same. This is true

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[63] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 192.
[64] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 192-193.
[65] Fanon, p. 112.
[66] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 193.
[67] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24.4 (1995), 249-291 <www.jstor.org/stable/2961930> [Accessed 03 January 2020], p. 257.

even in the context of the Fulcrum which emphasises the usefulness of orogenes as tools, but of course one hammer is much like another.

Turning once more to Damaya's chapter titles reveals a pattern and a break. 'Damaya, in winters past', 'Damaya, grinding to a halt', 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', and 'Damaya, in finality'. Three of these chapters follow the convention of Damaya's name, followed by a comma, and then a statement in a way that emphasises that the statement is about her. However, in this chapter, 'Damaya at the fulcrum of it all', that convention drops away. This break in the pattern denotes a shift in meaning: in this chapter the statement is not "about" her. In this chapter, Damaya is not "the thing at the fulcrum of it all", the thing around which all of this pivots; that reading would be presented only if the comma were there: 'Damaya, at the fulcrum of it all'. Instead the title becomes a simple description of the fact that Damaya is physically present at the fulcrum of it all. So, the question then becomes, what, if not Damaya, is the fulcrum of it all? Again Jemisin is careful in the construction of this title. Throughout the novel the Fulcrum (the institution) is always capitalised, except for here in the title. What this achieves is an emphasis that it is the Fulcrum that is the fulcrum of it all. Or, to unpack that, this institution, with its social indoctrination of orogene children into uniform, indistinct orogene adults, is 'the point [in the world] against which a lever is placed to get a purchase or on which it turns or is supported'.[68]

The Stillness needs pliable, compliant orogenes in order to survive the changing of the seasons, and so they take their lever of social determinism, internalised mechanisms of self-policing, and a social pressure to self-erode to survive and they place this lever here in the Fulcrum to apply pressure. In doing so they gain purchase and their world order continues to turn, supported by the social narratives that they reinforce. The Fulcrum is the heart of this

[68] *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/75290> [accessed 23rd October 2019]. s.v. fulcrum.

world, the pivot and pressure of how this world is sustained, the place that moves the world into this position, this construction, this status quo.

'Damaya, in finality', presents Damaya a year into her time at the Fulcrum. Its opening lines are, like most of Jemisin's opening sections, a gut punch. Damaya has learned to know better than to 'want such a thing' as a friend or 'to believe that she will ever deserve one'.[69] But it is the next sentence, a narratorial interjection presented in brackets, that really emphasises Damaya's newly internalised norm: '(Friends do not exist. The Fulcrum is not a school. Grits are not children. Orogenes are not people. Weapons have no need of friends.)'[70] These direct statements of "fact", drilled out with no softening commas or further qualifications lay out the "truth" of the world. They offer no reasons that could be argued with, they only define how things are.

After spending time with Essun and Syenite between these two Damaya chapters, the reader is primed to expect rebellion and disagreement. Jemisin instead presents this harsh declaration of the status quo in a way that prepares for the fact that this is the last we will see of Damaya. This narratorial interjection and Damaya's end are directly linked. Damaya is being erased by the social narrative that the Fulcrum has forced her to internalise, by a year of self-policing in order to survive, and by education that has structured her into the socially acceptable model of an orogene as a tool of the state. Jemisin's trilogy places a focusing lens onto lived experience. In imagining, grappling with, attempting to understand the Other, the seminal scholarship—fanon, hooks, DuBois—tends to revolve around an adult figure: someone (or someones) fully formed and moving through the world independently under their own agency. What Jemisin forces us to engage with, particularly through the perspectives of children, is the

[69] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 297.
[70] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 297.

way that these kinds of marginalisation and oppression are constant and inescapable, even for what we would like to imagine is the innocence of a child.

But Jemisin's point is not just to present the tragedy and torture of this kind of lived experience, but also to write of strong women who do survive, and who do fight despite the weight of it all and leaving pieces of themselves behind in the process. It is important to both understand and to hope. At the end of 'Damaya, in finality' Damaya chooses a new name. It is an act of defiance, of resistance, of self-determination. Specifically, she chooses 'a rogga name'.[71] Damaya here knows that as grits pass their final tests they take new names, orogene names, but she fights here to not let their structure reduce her choice. And so, Damaya ceases and Syenite begins:

> [Syenite] forms at the edge of a tectonic plate. With heat and pressure it does not degrade, but instead grows stronger.[72]

Jemisin forces the reader to confront both the horrible social pressure and the hope for change and survival at the same time. The imagery here is of the "edge" of things, the boundaries where the heat and the pressure is the most intense, and where the norms of the status quo most grind at those who exist there. Syenite knows she must exist at the boundaries as she will never be welcomed into the centre. But here she makes the choice to let that hone her. She refuses to let that pressure erode her away as it has Damaya. They are not the same person, they respond to the world differently. They both recognise that, in this world, 'Crying is weakness' but a distinction is drawn: 'Crying was a thing Damaya did. Syenite will be stronger.'[73]

This moment of name choice is a crucial structural pivot for this novel as it is here that it is revealed to the reader that Damaya, Syenite, and Essun, the three perspective characters of this novel, are in fact the same individual at different phases of her life. It is of course a

[71] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 331.
[72] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 331.
[73] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 331.

surprising twist, but the question is why "reveal" this facet? Why tell this story as if it were three women rather than stating up front that these three perspectives are in fact different stages of one woman's life? I would contend that the "reveal" structure requires that the reader empathise with each of these women as individuals first. This means that even though the reader comes to know that these women are all in fact one person they will continue to recognise the key differences between them. Presenting these perspectives as different characters emphasises—in hindsight and for the rest of the novel—that drastic changes have occurred in this woman's life; and that the lived experience of discrimination erodes away at an individual. It requires them to periodically sacrifice parts of themself in attempts to grow, attempts to just survive, or even because the cost of carrying those parts has become too great.

It is not *just* that the person who is Damaya changes her name to better self-identify, it is also that Damaya is gone, just as Syenite will come to be gone. They are in many meaningful ways distinct individuals who happen to exist within one body and one physical continuation of time. Jemisin's reveal in this novel allows for those distinctions to exist first so that the reader feels, experiences, and understands them as different much more powerfully than would occur by being told early and just "knowing" that they are different. This structure allows the reader to experience the process of self-erosion on an intimate level as one individual makes herself into entirely different people in order to survive under systems of oppression.

The key element here is the way that Damaya/Syenite's choice represents both an awareness of the way the world is attempting to construct her as well as a fundamental shift in identity: a choice to be someone else. The way Jemisin's text is constructed suggests that these two facets are fundamentally linked. The fact that Damaya has become inescapably aware of the way the dominant social norm is shaping her—either to conform or be pushed past the "edge" of social existence—means that she is no longer the naïve or innocent child. In this

moment Jemisin's work powerfully articulates an awareness of how social construction fundamentally changes a person and in some way requires a response.

Damaya slowly internalises the way she is perceived as fact rather than just perception: she is the Misalem, she is the tool, she needs to be controlled. But through all of that she remains Damaya. It is as if the innocence of the child either affords or results in a kind of denial that in part preserves the state of childhood. But on the other hand, this also allows for an insidious social construction as the child's trust in adults and the world creates a space for those stories, punishments, and rewards to instil certain tenets of identity. All of this changes her, but it is slow, it is a constant erosion and so she remains Damaya, the capable grit hopeful of praise and approval (by the institution's standards). In becoming aware of the way that the system is pressuring her to erode herself, something fundamental shifts and thus she is no longer Damaya.

One of the key axes of Jemisin's commentary derives from this use of the child's perspective (both here with Damaya and then with the character Nassun in books two and three). Jemisin's series places the reader directly into the lived experience of oppression and marginalisation as a child. Her work strives to promote empathy, to have her audience come to care about, connect with, and through that understand these characters and some of this experience. The child perspective emphasises that this lived experience is life-long, while the reader's experience of associating childhood with innocence allows for the desired empathy to be powerfully evoked by having that quality taken away. Return to the epigraph: '*For all those who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question.*'[74] This is what *The Broken Earth* is trying to share. Much as the exploration of orogenes and orogeny work as the impossible fantasy element to discuss the lived experience of racial oppression through a careful distancing effect to allow for wider connection and comprehension, the role of the child

[74] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, front material.

in these books functions in the same way: it layers and emphasises by coming at the same discussion from a different angle. Why, the reader asks, do these children have to fight for respect, for love, for acceptance? And if the text works to its fullest potential, then hopefully they will come to ask the same questions of reality.

Syenite: Adulthood and Complicity

The shift from Damaya to Syenite is from childhood to adulthood. It is a shift from naïve denial to a choice to endure the social pressures and retain individuality and perhaps autonomy. However, the Syenite chapters reveal that this choice to endure has its own flaws and limitations. Syenite's journey revolves around the ways that oppressed individuals can become complicit in sustaining the oppressive system, even without their direct awareness. As a component in the text's critique of social oppression, Syenite's chapters present three facets for discussion: reduction and marginalisation via commodification; being confronted with the hidden truths of the world; and the first part of the series' wider discussion of how running away from the system cannot be the answer. Where Damaya's chapters move steadily downwards from shattered innocence, through indoctrination, to leaving childhood behind, Syenite's chapters have a rise and fall pattern as she struggles with and against the station in life that she has been given. She begins as the complicit, socially determined subject, moves through confronting her own commodification and then that of others like her, attempts to escape the system entirely, and ultimately is once again broken by that system. It is in here that many of her acts of self-erosion can be seen, more so than in Damaya or Essun's chapters. As such, this section of the chapter is longer than those for Damaya and Essun. In order to best accommodate this I have split it into sub-sections, beginning with Syenite as complicit and

socially determined, moving to Syenite confronting commodification and pursuing new narratives, and ending with Syenite attempting escape and being broken by the system.

Syenite: Complicit and Socially Determined

The first Syenite chapter—'Syenite, cut and polished'—engages with ideas of rules, manners, etiquette, and what people are "allowed" to do. Jemisin uses epigraphs at the end of chapters to reveal pieces of history and these are typically thematically aligned with the ideas of the chapter that the reader has just completed. This chapter closes with the following epigraph:

> Tell them they can be great someday, like us. Tell them they belong among us, no matter how we treat them. Tell them they must earn the respect which everyone else receives by default. Tell them there is a standard for acceptance; that standard is simply perfection. Kill those who scoff at these contradictions, and tell the rest that the dead deserved annihilation for their weakness and doubt. Then they'll break themselves trying for what they'll never achieve." – *Erlsset*, *twenty-third emperor of the Sanzed Equatorial Affiliation, in the thirteenth year of the Season of Teeth. Comment recorded at a party, shortly before the founding of the Fulcrum.*[75]

This frames the role of the Fulcrum and emphasises that the Syenite who the reader first meets is one who has been through their indoctrinating process. This Syenite, true to Damaya's choice of name, is one who is committed to enduring the social norms of this world. She is also, however, one who has been able to "endure" by performing the role of obedient orogene and striving for the impossible state of perfection that might finally earn her some acceptance and respect. The repetition of this over time has worn away at her, eroding her down into someone

[75] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 76.

who comes to believe that if only she becomes the best Fulcrum orogene then, finally, she will be free and happy and herself.

One of the most prevalent tools of systemic oppression of the last century is the lie that the West functions as a meritocracy. 'Meritocracy obscures oppression by suggesting that racial disparities in hiring or school admissions are decided according to "objective" standards applied equally to all.'[76] The epigraph quoted above commands that the dominant group tell the orogenes that they "belong among us" but that "they'll never achieve" this. This is the lie of the meritocracy and it is a powerful tool because it allows for the internalisation of racial oppression without directly being "about" racial difference; even though the enforced societal inequality has been constructed along racial lines, the dominant group escapes accusation on this front by framing any disparities as a difference in individual merit. Here the language of the conversation changes and so the oppressed populace is denied the ability to challenge or question the actual problem.

This is further exacerbated by the isolating nature of systemic oppressions which work to cut marginalised individuals off from others with shared experiences and identities. Pyke identifies a cycle where, as the subjugated come to identify more with the powerful, they then come to further 'accept the ruling values and structural arrangements that keep them down', which in turn can lead them to identify further with those in power, and so on.[77] The excerpt above that precedes the founding of the Fulcrum is an exact example of how Pyke explains the trap that marginalised individuals can be lured into by powerful systems:

> The empty promise that the oppressed can escape their "otherness" by shunning their difference lures them into supporting the very rules that define them into

[76] Pyke, p. 556.
[77] Pyke, p. 557.

> existence as the "other"—as those who are not allowed to share power. "Become like us and you will be accepted into our group." But they never are.[78]

This process isolates the oppressed individual into an in-vain striving for belonging amongst an identity group that does not want them. This idea of "shunning their difference" is another useful way to conceive of acts of self-erosion. The individual is made to sacrifice the parts of themself that make up who they are, their difference, and that in and of itself is traumatic, but this is furthered by the way that it also cuts ties that might have tethered them to a group in which they could have once belonged. In this way not only is the individual oppressed and made to conform. As this happens to many individuals, the groups that they originate from are splintered and eventually lost.

Cut off from others like them, people like Syenite are left with two "choices": keep striving to meet that impossible standard of perfection, or be outcast to at best be alone and at worst die. Thus they become complicit: specifically because one of the clearly modelled traits of the dominant group is a negative perception of those who are lesser and so those isolated, trapped individuals in the process of self-eroding come to look down upon the remaining "others" in a process referred to as "defensive othering". In the article 'Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis', the authors explain defensive othering as acts wherein marginalised individuals attempt to gain acceptance into the dominant group by trying to distance themselves from others in their marginalised group.[79] This is where one might attempt to visually pass as belonging by, for instance, matching fashion with the dominant group.

Defensive othering is often performed via language construction. This can be seen among the Fulcrum where Orogenes distinguish between themselves as Fulcrum trained (right, proper

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[78] Pyke, p. 557.

[79] Michael Schwalbe, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michele Wolkomir, 'Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis', *Social Forces*, 79.2 (2000), 419-452.

citizens) and those with orogenic power who are not raised within the system. These "others", raised outside the Fulcrum, are referred to by the orogenes as "ferals." As Erlsset, twenty-third emperor of the Sanzed Equatorial Affiliation states above, 'tell the rest that the dead deserved annihilation for their weakness and doubt'.[80] Syenite becomes complicit in the perpetuation of the Fulcrum by desiring promotion within it and her internalisation of the negative judgements of ferals, or even of orogenes who cannot move beyond the lower levels of power.

Early within the novel the idea of orogenes as tools is presented. With Syenite, Jemisin adds layers to this imagery through a deeper, more intersectional and bodily commodification. Syenite has been assigned a mentor for a Fulcrum job, but that what it really means is that she has been assigned to bear his child so that his orogenic powers might be passed on to children the Fulcrum can raise to be perfectly tractable. The chapter talks around this reality, not giving voice or name to this duty, as if by doing so Syenite and the Fulcrum can deny its existence. While it is slowly revealed that Syenite will be required to bear the child of a powerful orogene, from the opening of the chapter the reader knows only two things: firstly, Syenite is for some reason upset at this assignment and that it will be something that will degrade her self-esteem, and secondly that she is hiding her displeasure. Look to the first line of the chapter, the reader's first experience of Syenite: '*This is shit*, Syenite thinks, behind the shield of her pleasant smile.'[81] By starting internally the reader is shown that Syenite is putting up a façade and is herself aware of it, and that she uses the social pleasantries to not only hide but to "shield", to protect her real disdain and frustration.

The scene proceeds like this, emphasising the minute and deliberate ways that Syenite conceals her true feelings, and true self behind the image of the obedient orogene. She casually turns the cup in her hands so 'they will not shake', and takes a sip of her drink to make her

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[80] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 76.
[81] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 61.

question seem casual.[82] The narration acknowledges that with her hands below the desk, Syenite *could* clench her hands without the other woman noticing but, even so, 'She doesn't'.[83] This is exactly the self-policing behaviour that O'Grady describes where 'the very experience of marginalization also can render self-policing an important survival strategy'.[84] There is undercurrent of mutual awareness between the two characters of this scene. Two women, one having done what she is asking of Syenite, both revolted by the requirement of their station, but neither of them willing to let the other "notice" their distress. For means of survival, instead of rebelling, they both become complicit in the perpetuation of this norm in which their bodies are state commodities. Crucially there is no external observer in the sense of an actual member of the dominant society, yet both of these women control themselves in accordance with those standards. They have internalised that external gaze, even when as works to reduce them.

As the chapter title suggests, this is 'Syenite, cut and polished'.[85] She is perfectly behaved because to be otherwise is to be punished, outcast, further reduced, and so she allows nothing to slip past her self-policed "shield". Unpacking Jemisin's choice of "cut and polished" reveals the dual nature of Syenite's erosion. The image of cutting and polishing calls to mind a gemstone. With a gemstone, an object that society has decided has value, its value only becomes apparent once cut and polished. A raw gemstone holds little value to society. Syenite, having gone through Damaya's indoctrination process, has been shaped into something that now has value. No longer the raw, dangerous "fire-mountain glass", she is somehow now something beautiful, useful, and valuable because of how she has been shaped.

This opening scene reveals, through Syenite's internal thoughts, that she is also cutting and polishing herself. She actively works, actively polices herself, to ensure that she will not only continue to be valuable to society, but that she will in fact continue to become more

[82] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 61-62.
[83] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 61.
[84] O'Grady, p. 38.
[85] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 61.

valuable. But only if she obeys, only if she continues to cut and polish herself, only if she erodes away more of the “valueless” pieces of who she is, has been, and could be. This image of cutting and polishing of people, and of selves, perfectly encapsulates what Pyke demands we address: that oppressive systems require internalised racism which in turn perpetuates oppressive systems. Jemisin’s portrayal of Syenite and the way she erodes away at her identity in order to survive drives towards generating an empathy and understanding in the reader of what these kinds of systems are doing to people. If we look to the self-erosion within a text, we can begin to learn about and critique harmful social systems.

This part of Syenite’s journey explores bodily commodification as a tangible, physical, confronting example of the way that oppressive systems both literally use people as objects, and, terrifyingly, via self-erosion can bring individuals to objectify themselves. In 1995 Martha Nussbaum wrote an article entitled simply ‘Objectification’. In this she works to define and unpack sexual objectification by first addressing a number of literary and media examples in which people are framed as, and reduced to, objects to be gazed upon. Nussbaum describes objectification as ways of treating ‘a person as a thing’ and that there are seven different ways that objectification can be carried out.[86] A number of these can be seen directly in Syenite’s experience.

In this discussion of bodily commodification, consider Instrumentality (where the ‘objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.’), Denial of Autonomy (where the ‘objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.’), and Denial of Subjectivity (where the ‘objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.’).[87] The two women in Syenite’s introductory scene talk around the subject, both of them knowing what Syenite will be required to do even

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[86] Nussbaum, p. 256.
[87] Nussbaum, p. 257.

as the reader does not. The chapter comes to reveal and explore how the Fulcrum requires Syenite's body. She becomes an incubator for their investment of power and control. Despite her own orogenic capabilities, she has become most useful for breeding. The fact that she is being bred in the hopes of propagating another orogene's abilities rather than her own only serves to deepen this reduction of selfhood and significance. Syenite has no choice here. If she refuses then she loses everything and so, once again, she erodes away a piece of herself (bodily autonomy, any vision of a future-self choosing motherhood) in order to survive.

As the external world views and treats her as an object, the reader is shown how that perception becomes reality not just because of that external gaze, but because the social pressure of it requires Syenite to alter herself to match. Objectification becomes self-objectification where 'a person *internalizes the perspective of the other*, of an external observer'.[88] Self-erosion lets her survive, and thus the objectifying system perpetuates precisely because '[s]elf-objectification impairs the ability of oppressed groups to act in their own behalf'.[89]

The close of this chapter, following the first time Syenite and Alabaster reluctantly sleep together to appease their superiors, showcases this process of internal justification. Syenite works to shape herself into someone who can survive and thrive under this oppressive system, someone who can endure this task. She tries, very hard, to convince herself that this task is not horrific and heavy but actually good and proper:

> But this is what it means to be *civilized*—doing what her betters say she should, for the ostensible good of all. And it's not like she gains no benefit from this: a year or so of discomfort, a baby she doesn't have to bother raising because it will be turned over to the lower crèche as soon as it's born, and a high-profile mission

[88] Eileen L. Zurbriggen, 'Objectification, Self-Objectification, and Societal Change', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1.1 (2013), 188-215 <doi: 10.5964/jspp.v1i1.94> [Accessed 9 December 2019], p. 196.
[89] Zurbriggen, p. 211.

> completed under the mentorship of a powerful senior. With the experience and boost to her reputation, she'll be that much closer to her fifth ring. That means her own apartment; no more roommates. Better missions, longer leave, more say in her own life. That's worth it. *Earthfire yes*, it's worth it.
>
> She tells herself this all the way back to her room. Then she packs up to leave, tidies up so she'll come home to order and neatness, and takes a shower, methodically scrubbing every bit of flesh she can reach until her skin burns.[90]

Note how the things she tells herself here are all focused on the result and the reward: promotion, her own apartment, more "autonomy". The experience of pregnancy is reduced to just "discomfort", and childbirth is skipped altogether as if it will be nothing worth remembering. Syenite, of course, cannot look directly at the trauma of the required act of unwillingly having sex with someone on the orders of "her betters". Instead, she is "*civilized"* and that is an easier self-definition to swallow than commodity. The final two sentences enact the principle methodology though which Jemisin constructs her social critique in this series: she shifts from the abstract social discussion or theory down into the lived physicality of these experiences. Syenite can rationalise these events all she likes, the world can insist upon polite fictions and abstractions, but none of that will change the fact that she has been used, that she feels unclean, or that a part of her has been forever changed by this experience.

Syenite: Confronting Commodification and Pursuing New Narratives

Through Alabaster and Syenite's relationship, Jemisin brings the reader two lessons about this world, and through them about systems of oppression. Alabaster takes Syenite to visit a site of a node-maintainer. From Syenite's knowledge, orogenes with limited or lesser capabilities are

[90] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 75-76.

given the unenviable job of node-maintainer: a fixed location from which they monitor and maintain the seismic status quo of an area. From her time rising up in the Fulcrum, this is the image of a failed orogene and it reinforces her internalised need to excel and be the best orogene. The best orogenes, like Alabaster, get their own rooms, and get to travel and retain some autonomy. Syenite is right that the node-maintainers are not in enviable positions. However, what Alabaster shows her is much worse. The node-maintainers are orogenes who could not master a level of control satisfactory to the Fulcrum and so instead have their sessapinae (extra-sensory organs that allow orogenes to sense and move the earth) surgically cut so as to remove the agency of the individual and reduce them to only a living body with the base function to instinctively quell quakes in the surrounding area. A person becomes a nameless node, significant only as a part of a machine serving the larger system.

As Jasmine A. Moore describes it, 'Orogenes are coded and commodified for use without end. […] [Jemisin] demonstrates that caste and race are social systems designed as a veneer for the insidious order of industry and empire to firmly mire the world for thousands of years'.[91] The reader is confronted by Syenite's own personal horror at this discovery, which is deepened by the challenging imagery of this scene.

> The body in the node maintainer's chair is small, and naked. Thin, its limbs atrophied. Hairless. There are things—tubes and pipes and *things*, she has no words for them—going into the stick-arms, down the goggle-throat, across the narrow crotch. There's a flexible bag on the corpse's belly, *attached to* its belly somehow, and it's full of—ugh. The bag needs to be changed.
>
> She focuses on this, these little details, because it helps. Because there's a part of her that's gibbering, and the only way she can keep that part internal and silent

[91] Jasmine A. Moore, *Sankofa: Framing Afrofuturistic Dialectical Utopias in N.K. Jemisin's 'The Fifth Season', Nisi Shawl's 'Everfair', and Nnedi Okorafor's 'Binti'* (unpublished masters thesis, The University of Alabama, Huntsville, 2018), p. 23.

> is to concentrate on everything she's seeing. Ingenious, really, what they've done.
>
> She didn't know it was possible to keep a body alive like this: immobile, unwilling, indefinite.[92]

Syenite's descriptions are, in part, medical and removed in a way that emphasises the objectification of the person; she focuses on the machinery of the apparatus, its tubes and pipes. These alone could conjure, for the reader, sad images of a coma patient, but there the sadness would be of the accident or illness that brought about the situation and the equipment would at worst be neutral and at best construed as life-saving. Here, the way the body is depicted casts the devices as profound invasions that alter the body itself. The description of the "goggle-throat", the use here of a more abstract image applied to the body, renders it as in some way no longer identifiable or, at least, as no longer right.

In 2009, discussing feminism, pornography, and sexual objectification, Rae Langton engages with Nussbaum's seven modes of objectification and expands upon them. Two of Langton's additions are of key relevance to the above description of the node-maintainers. She describes a reduction of a person to a body or body parts where the objectifier's gaze is 'not interest in the other as a person, but as a body'. In addition to that, there are objectifying acts of silencing in which 'one treats it as silent, lacking the capacity to speak'.[93] Syenite's gaze is drawn to the specific elements of the body in part as a survival mechanism as she grapples with the horrific tableau, but also because what has been done to this person emphasises specific bodily components from the 'bag on the corpse's belly' to the "*things*" in the "stick-arms". This, coupled with the silencing effect of the agency-revoking surgery, results in the most extreme objectification as instrumentality: not just treating someone as a tool, but physically

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[92] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 139-140.
[93] Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 229.

crafting them into a tool. This is further emphasised by contrasting Syenite's descriptions with Alabaster's spoken response to the situation:

> "Drug away the infections and so forth, keep him alive enough to function and you've got the one thing even the Fulcrum can't provide: a reliable, harmless, completely beneficial source of orogeny."[94]

Note how Alabaster refers to the orogene/rogga in the chair by a pronoun, as a "him". This is missing in Syenite's observations, and her use of "its" belly and "the" stick-arms is reflective of both the way this individual has been reduced, and Syenite's deep need for a distancing effect to even begin to process this situation.

The Fifth Season juxtaposes the commodification of this individual and that of Syenite. Throughout the scene she attempts to remain "cut and polished", to conceal her horror and despair. Alabaster relentlessly, unapologetically, and bluntly explains that this individual, the node-maintainer, was likely raped by someone who "paid for the privilege" to satisfy their "helplessness fetish" where they "like it more if the victim is aware of what they're doing".[95] To the dominant society orogenes are not people they are tools, their bodies just flesh to be used, and that is bad enough. However here a new layer of horror is opened up wherein more satisfaction for the dominant group or individual is derived from knowing that the person being treated like an object can feel and understand what is being done to them. This horrific notion manages to suggest that the oppressors here, on some level, must know that orogenes are people for if they were just the desired tools then they could not possibly "know" or "feel" the abuse in this manner. Somehow this makes them more culpable, and this world that much sadder.

Syenite's own situation of bodily commodification becomes more traumatic in light of the idea that those in charge know exactly what such requirements are doing to her. Everything

[94] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 142.
[95] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 142.

in this scene throws back the polite curtain and makes it impossible for the reader or Syenite to retain any positive ideals or possibilities for the status quo. It is extreme, but this is to be expected through fantasy's mode of exaggeration. The node-maintainers, more than Syenite's own bodily commodification, are not an example of self-erosion. This is more a type of almost silent scapegoating (scapegoating in that the dominant group sacrifices members of the out group in order to persist the status quo, but silent in that it is not being used publicly to reinforce those narratives socially). Chapter Three established that scapegoating, as a textual function, brings to the surface elements of the text for critique. Here this role goes a step further. It showcases exactly what this system is capable of (and undertakes regularly and normally), the difficult nature of that truth then becomes more poignant by being contextualised as the system in which Syenite is complicit.

One of the perspectives within Critical Race Theory contains scholars and activists who approach the theory as realists or economic determinists. This group emphasises the ways that 'racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status'.[96] Here, racism has a direct economic value that reinforces power. Delgado and Stefancic draw attention to how Derrick Bell argued that civil rights advances 'seemed to coincide with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites', and that this would be later shown to be true.[97] They explain how archival research carried out by legal historian Mary Dudziak revealed that '[w]hen the Justice Department intervened on the side of the NAACP for the first time in a major school-desegregation case, it was responding to a flood of secret cables and memos outlining the United States' interest in improving its image in the eyes of the Third World'.[98] The node maintainers, and indeed the orogenes are an economic investment, and a requirement

[96] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 21.
[97] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 22.
[98] Delgado and Stefancic, pp. 23-24.

for the empire of Old Sanze to persist. As long as the most profitable pathway is oppression, then change remains outside of the empire's self-interest.

Jemisin's work wears away at any excuses or assumptions the reader might mistakenly harbour in much the same way that her characters are forced to erode away at themselves. Only by wearing away at the polite fictions can the ugly truth beneath the surface be exposed and potentially dealt with. Jemisin allows this process to unfold slowly. By ducking in and out of each of characters' perspectives and moving forwards and backwards through time, she is able to subtly and gradually reveal the stark brutality of enforced state action that underpins the more subtle forms of oppression. In this way, the structure and flow of her narrative mirrors the slow, inexorable grinding down of the characters but in an inverse direction. As they are inevitably ground down by this world, it is the novel's hope that the reader's (perhaps naïve) assumptions are also inevitably ground down and that they are then inspired to produce change.

In her chapters, rather than being told a story as Damaya is, Syenite is instead exposed to the extent to which the state has been constructing the narratives of the past and of the orogenes in order to maintain state-superiority and orogene-oppression. These narratives work to disrupt and erase any existing shared cultural narrative for the orogenes. As I explored in Chapter One with the skaa, more than a thousand years of racial oppression and limited cultural narratives allow only for the perpetuation of that oppressive status quo. A key repeated element in Damaya's chapters is the story of Misalem, the dangerous threat to society. That story, and the social roles that it repeats and reinforces are further supported by the narratives that the Fulcrum requires of the grits. The reader is shown the impact of these upon Damaya, and through her the other orogene children. However, Damaya herself does not fully grasp the wider impact or significance of these. She does not like that she is cast forever as Misalem, as something to be feared and hated, but as a child she cannot conceive of its true nature as a constructed history and a state tool of social determinism. As a limited subject inside of this

system, Damaya is comparatively powerless: as a child she cannot be blamed for her trust and naiveté; and as an oppressed minority she has no choice but to exist within the system, and to take what it provides her whether that is shelter or bigotry.

Syenite, as an adult moving through the world, retains an increased possibility for understanding and for enacting change. Iris Marion Young takes issue with any perspective on social justice that 'defines liberation as the transcendence of group difference' by emphasising 'equal treatment'.[99] She argues instead that 'positive self-definition of group difference is in fact more liberatory' because of the way that presenting alternative identity narratives 'plurali[zes] norms' and 'reclaims the definition of the group by the group, as a creation and construction, rather than as a given essence'.[100] In becoming aware of the empire's constructed history and false face, if Syenite wishes to change or grow then she needs a new identity narrative, preferably a shared one.

Change for Syenite is catalysed by her developing relationship with her mentor Alabaster. Her time as Damaya in the Fulcrum was marked by isolation within that competitive environment. While that isolation provided a form of protection, a way for her to endure the social pressures, it also meant that, without closely bonded peers, the only experience she had of being seen was by a societal view of her as lesser. Alabaster represents a peer and a friend, a fellow orogene with whom she can connect. He brings a third perspective to what has been, for her, a largely binary existence. The act of perceiving and being perceived is mutual and reciprocative. In Alabaster, Syenite encounters an orogene who does not behave like any other she has ever met: he skirts the rules and seemingly remains unpunished, and he uses the "slur" *rogga* 'the way other people use *orogene*'.[101] Alabaster's repetition of this language choice attempts to redefine the group identity of orogenes, deny the narrative of the Fulcrum and

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[99] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 157.
[100] Iris Marion Young, p. 157; p. 153; p. 172.
[101] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 120.

empire that they have a "given essence", and create space in which orogenes other than himself might be able to imagine themselves differently.

For Alabaster, it is the system itself that is the problem, which means that change is possible: the world they inhabit is not naturally and inevitably this way, it has been constructed and so therefore it can be reconstructed. Delgado and Stefancic state that if

> race is not real or objective but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity.[102]

Jemisin positions Alabaster in such a way as to widen Syenite's perceptions. He has her ask questions, and, in doing so, enables her to step outside of the societal box she was forced to fit inside by eroding herself down to size. He challenges the internalised narratives of Misalem and the Fulcrum. He does so not by presenting a different, competing narrative per se, but by asking questions of the existing narratives and their origins.

On encountering a ruin in the distance, Alabaster asks Syenite why the world does not try to learn from other, prior civilisations and if their ways might work better. Syenite replies, "[b]ecause it *didn't work*. Those people died. We're still alive. Our way is right, theirs is wrong".[103] There is no nuance to Syenite's thoughts here. The responses are clipped sentences that retain a feel of rattling off correct answers in class. Alabaster, however, immediately unpicks her assumptions by highlighting the logical flaw in Syenite's answer. He emphasises to her that "[s]urvival doesn't mean *rightness*".[104] Their exchange centres around the way that the Fulcrum, and the empire that it serves, are able to persist in large part because 'internalised

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[102] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 51
[103] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 124.
[104] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 124.

racism results in the incorporation of inferiorizing stereotypes into cultural values and traditions [...], so that oppression becomes institutionalized as a norm'.[105]

There is a resigned assumption on the part of the populace that the world simply is how it is, and that because they need to survive this world that keeps geologically tearing itself apart, then this *must* be how the world "needs" to be. The people of The Stillness learn key survival techniques via teachings handed down through what they call "stonelore": literally lore and teachings inscribed in stone tablets. It is a very concrete manifestation of how a 'dominant group controls the construction of reality through the production of ideologies or "knowledge" (Foucault 1977 [1975]) that circulate through society where they inform social norms, organizational practices, bureaucratic procedures, and commonsense knowledge'.[106] Stonelore says to not trust metal as it rusts, and to instead inscribe what is important in stone. The imagery here is that of the most important things, things that need to be preserved. Preserving these words and ideas in stone creates the sense that they are also immutable. But this too is only a perception, just a narrative crafted by the dominant power group. Alabaster reveals to Syenite that "stonelore changes all the time. […] Every civilization adds to it; parts that don't matter to the people of the time are forgotten".[107] This means that, for the people of this time, what is worth preserving is the "wisdom" that orogenes are "born evil—some kind of agents of Father Earth, monsters that barely qualify as human".[108] It is a confronting revelation, but one that, perhaps surprisingly, contains hope within it.

As Thomas Moules unpacks,

> [t]he role of the Fulcrum is further complicated by the fact that it is ostensibly an orogene-led and created organization: "Orogenes built the Fulcrum […] we did it

[105] E. J. R. David, Tiera M. Schroeder, and Jessicaanne Fernandez, 'Internalized Racism: A Systematic Review of the Psychological Literature on Racism's Most Insidious Consequence', *Journal of Social Issues*, 75.4 (2019), 1057-1086 <doi: 10.1111/josi.12350> [Accessed 9 December 2019], p. 1065.

[106] Pyke, p. 556.

[107] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, pp. 124-125.

[108] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 124.

> under threat of genocide, and we used it to buckle a collar around our necks but we did it" (Jemisin, 2016a, p. 418). They are given the illusion of choice between enslavement and death, and through this illusion, the orogenes are made to feel *complicit* in their own enslavement.[109] (My emphasis added.)

The transition from Damaya to Syenite is marked by a choice to endure, but what Alabaster makes her confront is that enduring the system only allows that system to continue to exist. I want to be clear here, it is not my point (nor Jemisin's I would conjecture) to blame Syenite. It is not her fault that the world is this way, and nor should she be blamed for trying to survive within it. Pyke notes that '[b]laming the victims serves to mystify and protect White racism', and that must be kept in mind when undertaking study of internalised oppression.[110] In acknowledging and unpacking the complicity of Syenite, and others like her, the point is to see through that to the systems that have *made her* complicit through social pressures, limiting narratives, and false choices. It is in that systemic context that Syenite's journey must be understood. Acts of self-erosion, under the paradigm this thesis proposes, are not acts of individually chosen sacrifice, they are *societally mandated*. Syenite's acts of sacrifice that reduce her and contribute to the perpetuation of this society are not fully of her volition and certainly are not her fault.

In the chapter with the node-maintainer, 'Syenite on the highroad', she literally and symbolically steps off that highroad. 'Cut and polished', self-interested self-denial, these are paths that she can no longer walk. Her dreams of proving herself within the Fulcrum system to earn some measure of autonomy would require that she allow those less successful than her to suffer more so that she might suffer less. Thus the system turns every potential relationship and connection into one of competition instead of possible support; opportunities for belonging are

[109] Moules, p. 252.
[110] Pyke, p. 560.

instead denied and reinforce isolation and otherness. Learning the truth, being confronted with what her sacrifices have supported, requires that Syenite make a choice in terms of what she is going to do with that information. The remainder of Syenite's chapters explore whether or not it is possible to forget, or deny, or avoid the problem.

Syenite: Attempting Escape, Being Broken by the System

In stepping off that highroad, Syenite and Alabaster, ultimately, attempt to escape the oppressive system entirely when circumstance brings them to an offshore island and community. Due to the high level of destructive seismic activity in this world, the notion of living on an island is horrifying and should be impossible as regular tsunamis would wipe out any settlements. That is, unless they had orogenes to keep them safe. The island, Meov, lives comfortably with their own orogenes among their populace. On Meov, all are equal, and the contributions of the orogenes are celebrated. Moore describes Meov as a 'utopian promise' that 'ponders the notion of historical alternatives: what would the world look like without slavery and the structures of colonisation'.[111] The Fulcrum does not know this island exists, and so it seems, finally, that Syenite and Alabaster can be free. Their regular, mandated sex results in pregnancy, but with arrival at the island, one of the many 'utopian promises' there is that they can raise this child free of indoctrination and that Syenite might regain some autonomy and agency in a re-definition as mother. The time spent on Meov represents for Syenite, and presents for the reader, an attempt at healing. In addressing Jemisin's construction of the island, Moore states that 'Jemisin experiments with the Meov social order, making them racially homogenous and free of hierarchy or sexual/gender roles […] to heal historical traumas

[111] Moore, p. 29.

involving black and brown bodies'.[112] Meov in this sense represents a society with a shared cultural identity that includes orogenes/roggas without hatred or oppression.

However, there is a tension to Syenite's narration whilst on Meov. This is best embodied in a half-step name change. She shifts from Syenite to Syen. Not a full change as from Damaya to Syenite, or the change from Syenite to Essun yet to come, but a half-step. That liminal identity change matches the liminal space of the island and is an example of the tension to these scenes. On the one hand, things are better. Syen finds love, can relax, does not have to hide who she is. But as time passes, two years, she finds herself restless. When questioned about it and what she might be looking for she professes uncertainty, but 'she thinks, almost but not quite subconsciously: '*A way to change things. Because this is not right*.'[113] She falls in love on the island, but 'not for the first time does Syenite think, *If only this could last*. She knows better than to wish for something so impossible'.[114] All of the happy and comfortable events are underpinned by the knowledge of the node-maintainers' suffering, and set against the backdrop of a society for whom the renegade Alabaster and Syenite are not merely people who have transgressed but investments and assets who have stolen themselves.

For the reader, Syenite's journey from "cut and polished" to happy mother is one of steady, positive growth achieved via an on-going challenging of the internalised racism and social assumptions that had eroded her into the obedient slave. However, due to the structure of the narrative, having met Essun first, the reader experiences this time of Syenite's life with the knowledge that another break is coming, that, despite this positive growth, something is going to happen to change her into a jaded, broken, and yet fundamentally strong woman. Much like the half-step, double meaning of the name Syen, the chapters in Meov serve to both model how things could be better, but also, as things fall apart in the end, emphasise that

[112] Moore, p. 29.
[113] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 371.
[114] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 372.

Syenite was right, it is “so impossible” for something like this to last as long as the system remains unchanged.

The chapter in which Syenite becomes Essun is named ‘Syenite, fractured’. As Syenite she was supposed to be stronger than Damaya, honed to strength by pressure, but here at the end, despite her strength, she fractures. When the Fulcrum finally returns to claim Syenite and Alabaster, she finds herself cornered by Schaffa (the man who once told a young Damaya a story of Misalem and Shemshena); and with no way out, rather than being enslaved again, rather than dooming her son Corundum to such a life, she kills Corundum and ‘tears the world apart’.[115] All the tension that has underpinned the chapters on Meov, Syenite’s restlessness and fear, comes to bear here in this moment and is represented visually on the page and in a stuttering shift in the pacing as if the whole world narrows down to this one room, this one moment.

‘Syenite, fractured’ is written with rapid pacing as the Fulcrum boats approach. It depicts scenes of action and desperation in a manner unseen in the rest of this largely quiet and contemplative series. Alabaster throws boulders at the ships, Syenite races across the island to shear off a portion of land to fall and crush a ship. There is a sense of more classical high-fantasy heroism to the first two thirds of this scene. For readers familiar with the genre, this will be seductive and will purport a win for the strong and powerful heroes. But Jemisin’s construction of this scene, and the moment of self-erosion, work to critique these narrative expectations. Pyke notes that ‘ideologies of individualism, self-determination, and meritocracy pervasive in Western culture […] contribut[e] to an exaggerated belief in the ability of individuals to resist complex structures of power through localized actions’.[116] Systemic oppression is far too large for one individual to overcome. Even *Mistborn*’s engagement with

[115] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 442.
[116] Pyke, p. 561.

racial oppression recognises this: Kelsier's martyrdom is a catalyst, not the solution. Novels two and three of *Mistborn* wrestle precisely with how you go about building a new system to address the instilled issues of the oppressive one.

The swift pace of the chapter stutters in the final third. The rising energy of the heroics drop off as Alabaster is deeply injured, the Fulcrum ships break through the barricade, and Syenite finds herself cornered in a room, on a sinking ship, with her son in her arms 'and she remembers everything she's tried to forget'.[117] Syenite is drawn back to her childhood, back to being Damaya. 'She feels alone again, and helpless as she was that day near Palela, lost in a hateful world with no one to rely on except a man whose love comes wrapped in pain.'[118] The narrative is physically broken by an asterism following this line from Schaffa: "But his child will be a more than worthwhile replacement".[119] At this point the chapter flicks between a snapshot moment in the scene, out to short interjections from the narrator Hoa, back into the scene, and so on. This stretches time, making the snapshot moments feel longer and larger than they would through pure chronological representation. The interjections also frame this as a moment of significance as once again, just as when the novel began, again 'you need context'.[120] Hoa as narrator interjects to frame the events in motion. It is important that the reader understand here that '[e]ven the hardest stone', such as syenite, 'can fracture. It just takes the right force, applied at the right juncture of angles. A *fulcrum* of pressure and weakness'.[121] The break point for Syenite is her son. Meov allowed her to reclaim an identity as mother, a piece of herself she had thought lost and here the system requires that she, again, give that up.

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[117] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 440.
[118] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 440.
[119] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 440.
[120] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.
[121] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 440.

The name Essun is not mentioned in this chapter, but the change is signalled. Schaffa begins to speak to her, "Syenite—", but she cuts him off, "*That's not my rusting name! I'll say no to you all I want, you bastard !"*[122] There are multiple interpretations layered into this assertion. Partly, she identifies as Syen, the name given to her by Alabaster. She also, here, is denying the Fulcrum and its insistence that its subjects take orogene names with the convention being types of stone so that they identify themselves further as just objects to be moved around by external forces. There is also a call back to her childhood, to Damaya who she left behind. Syenite gives adult voice to the child who was taken from her as she affirms her right to say "no", to either give or withhold consent. This line is of course also a signal that Syenite is ending, that she is about to change and become Essun, that she is going to have to give up something so fundamental to herself that her self will change.

As I said, the name Essun is not mentioned here, instead the connection is more subtly layered into the structure of the narrative itself. The opening of the novel, where the reader meets Essun for the first time, is marked by the death of a child. But Jemisin emphasises that connection further with a structural mirroring. In order to try and understand something so incomprehensible as the death of a child, the opening of the novel widens out in scale, successively pulling back to address the ending of a continent, and then a planet, as they mirror and frame such a personal ending.

In 'Syenite, fractured', as she 'tears the world apart', Hoa pulls back to provide context (and perhaps distance). Following another asterism, his narration starts at the macro: 'Here is the Stillness', 'Here is a place', 'There's an island', 'This is the moment'.[123] Just as Syenite focussed on the bodily details of the node-maintainer in order to try and grasp the horror of that situation, Hoa also steadily presents the facts of the fallout: the emergence of a land bridge of

[122] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 441.
[123] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 442.

sorts, the shattered ships. And in carefully moving forwards through the concrete details can arrive to this:

> When all the death is done and the obelisk is calm, only a handful of people are still alive in the ocean below. One of them, a woman, floats unconscious amid the debris of her shattered ship. Not far from her, a smaller figure—a child—floats, too, but facedown.[124]

There are no names here, for this is what the system reduces the people to: bodies in the water. Syenite no longer exists. The woman pulled from the water and returned to the mainland 'will wander, lost and losing herself, for two long years', the same amount of time she spent on Meov as if undoing all she has gained in that time.[125] The tone of this scene is sadness. The way it is constructed presents no anger towards Syenite and her actions. The work Jemisin has done in crafting an empathetic connection with this perspective, and the clarity with which she articulates the role of the Fulcrum, enables this moment of self-erosion to fully function: there is no blame for the individual, only increased awareness of the harm of the oppressive system.

There is a potential uneasiness here as one reading could view Syenite as sacrificing her son to save herself in perhaps a desperate scapegoating of his life for hers. However, this is where Jemisin's careful narrative structuring is again so crucial. The reader comes to this moment late in the novel. By this point they are have not only experienced the opening scene of Essun returning to find her son beaten to death by her husband, they have also witnessed the lasting trauma of that moment carried forwards by Essun. Syenite's killing of Corundum echoes that moment, and resonates in retrospect with Essun's 'bitter, weary' assertion from the first page of the novel that Uche, as an orogene child, was never really free, but that once his father had killed him, now he would be.[126] The reader knows in this moment that this choice

[124] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 443.
[125] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 443.
[126] *The Fifth Season*, p. 1.

of Syenite's is an act of love to save him from an uncaring world, even as it erodes away at everything she had hoped for.

Syenite becoming Essun is rooted in the "choice" to kill her child. It is violent, and sad, and traumatic. It is symbolically layered. Corundum is exactly what the Fulcrum wanted from placing her and Alabaster together, and should he lack control he could have ended up a node-maintainer like many of Alabaster's other children. But on Meov, he became just a baby boy: giggling, and happy, and loved. In loving him, Syenite was able not to erode a part of herself, but instead to *build* on a facet of mother. In raising him outside of the Fulcrum there was embedded hope of an un-indoctrinated individual. Zurbriggen, in her detailed unpacking of the scholarship on oppression, objectification, and self-objectification, notes that one of the necessary components for the 'perception of injustice is the ability to *imagine and desire* an alternative reality for oneself'.[127] Syenite, through being confronted with the horrific truth of the empire, and through the joy she finds in Meov and Corundum, had found herself able for a time to envision herself differently. As she kills Corundum, she sacrifices the parts of herself that believed she could rise up within the Fulcrum and find autonomy within the oppressive system, and she sacrifices the parts of herself that believed she could live free and happy as a fully autonomous individual and mother. Here her physical act results in the death of her son, but the sacrifice, the act of self-erosion, is to remove that vision of herself as a mother *and* an orogene *and* someone who lives free, someone who 'giggles' while reading because she 'loves books that are just for fun'.[128]

[127] Zurbriggen, p. 207.
[128] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 420.

Connecting the Pieces: Self-Erosion of Damaya, Syenite, and Essun

Damaya/Syenite/Essun's personal journey can be summed up as a struggle towards realising a full and complex self. Damaya is one person, Syenite makes a half step towards Syen, and finally Essun moves through three full and distinct phases of herself while remaining Essun. The first Essun, the one Syenite becomes, is the product of each moment of self-erosion that led to her emergence. She is a hard, jaded woman, lacking the kindness, naiveté, and trust of Damaya. She is also without Syenite's stubborn arrogance. Essun makes the "choice" to live free as a mother, and does so successfully for ten years. However, the price for that is her power. Meov teaches her that if she tries to live free as an orogene, then the Fulcrum will come to claim what they own. And so she supresses that part of herself, and hides who she is. She sacrifices her power, something she was born with, something she is good at, something that makes her special, in order to be a mother. The lived experience of racial oppression is having to choose which facet of yourself you want to keep. As O'Grady explains, 'experiences of violence and abuse can also intensify self-policing. This involves heightened vulnerability to self-surveillance, harsh self-judgements, insidious comparisons with the apparent normality of others, various self-negations and personal isolation'.[129]

The next phase of Essun's life is the Essun who moves out into the world to save her daughter following the death of her son. This Essun, despite the death of another child, is one who refuses to change yet again. Hoa notes that '[y]ou're still trying to decide who to be. The self you've been lately doesn't make sense anymore; that woman died with Uche. She's not useful, unobtrusive as she is, quiet as she is, ordinary as she is'.[130] This Essun is the product of all of her, Damaya, and Syenite's internalised racial oppression, and the self-hatred that it

[129] O'Grady, p. 38.
[130] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 42.

brings. As she sets out to try and find her daughter, to kill her husband for killing their son, she thinks '*No.* I *killed Uche. By being his mother*'.[131] This early scene becomes later contextualised by Syenite's self-erosion. When the reader meets Essun at the start of the novel, they connect with her in her grief. It is easy to agree with her thoughts: 'That should never have been enough to provoke a father to murder his child. Nothing should have done that.'[132] But as someone who has also killed one of her children, she cannot untangle her hatred of Jija from her hatred of herself. There is of course a significant distance between their motivations: constructed hatred, as opposed to learned fear. But it is the similarity that brings a new motivation.

At the end of 'Syenite, fractured', Hoa instructs the reader: 'This is how it began. Listen. Learn. This is how the world changed.'[133] It is a strange instruction as it comes in the second to last chapter of the novel but reads as one might expect a story to begin. It echoes the exhortation from the end of the novel's prologue, that repetition of '*This is the way the world ends.* For the last time'.[134] The break point for Syenite is when the Fulcrum comes for her son. That is what shatters her resolve and ambition to succeed by the Fulcrum's standards, and what prompts her, even at great personal cost, to leave that system behind and try to live as a normative person. The break point for Essun is when a normative person, a loved one, comes for her son. As Syenite was forced to confront her own complicity in the system, Essun is made to confront the way that the normative people of the world, those benefiting from the system even if they are not literally in power of the dominant group, are also constructed and complicit. The hatred stems from the system that it is embedded in. Just as there was no escape on Meov, there is no escape in the small town of Tirimo.

[131] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 60.
[132] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 23.
[133] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 443.
[134] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 14.

Damaya, Syenite, and Essun's journey is, for the most part, a reductive one in which she gradually erodes away at herself in attempts to survive the oppressive system. This textual split of perspectives and division of identities via self-erosion is used by Jemisin in *The Fifth Season* to explore the lived experience of racial oppression and attempts to show the reader the trauma of systemic oppression. The next stage in Essun's journey, playing out partly in *The Fifth Season* but largely presented through the following two novels, begins to explore potential responses to oppressive systems and attempts to realise change. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* is about how the world ends "for the last time." It works to unapologetically tell a story of suffering and harm. But it does so not to guilt or blame people, but to inspire hope for change. If systems are constructed then they can be torn down and rebuilt, so long as we can imagine an alternative.

In discussing the on-going act of individually chosen sacrifice—self-denial—those acts within the literature perform a function of presenting who or what the individual would like to be and in so doing are able to present models of existence that challenge external norms and expectations. As Thomas denies his hunger he says "I am not a monster" but also "vampires do not need to be monsters", and by continuing to make that choice, to perform that identity, he works to bring a new world, and new norms into existence. By extension, that repetition is presented to the reader and works to emphasise the existing problematic, harmful norm as well as work to open new modes of thinking, outside of the text. Self-erosion, as the on-going act of societally mandated sacrifice, performs an opposite function. Damaya's choice of name recognises "I cannot be a child any longer", and Syenite's killing of her son says "I cannot be a mother and an orogene". Where Thomas' acts of sacrifice are inspirational in a way that asks questions of assumed limitations, Damaya/Syenite's acts of sacrifice are disheartening in a way that asks questions of their perceived necessity and whether or not anything can be done to ensure that such things need never again come to pass.

If it were just a single act of sacrifice, of giving up a part of oneself, it would be unfortunate but potentially easily written off as a tragic circumstance or poor choice on an individual's part. The on-going nature of self-erosion draws attention instead to the way that the unrelenting pressures of a system bring about these instances of sacrifice. For Jemisin this technique is crucial. The forwards march of this series is one that grinds down its orogenic characters, and in so doing also grinds away any instinctive excuses or assumptions the reader might make. Jemisin works to ensure that the reader cannot "turn a blind eye" or fail to recognise that the lived experience of racial oppression (particularly in the contemporary environment from which she is writing) is born from, and perpetuated by, systemic issues that are then internalised by its oppressed populace.

Essun: Motherhood & Self-Building

The rest of Essun's journey, and the novels *The Obelisk Gate* and *The Stone Sky*, explore, rather than the lived experience of oppression, the possible responses to awareness of systemic oppression: anger and destruction on the one hand, and, on the other, counter narratives and how they can contribute to building something new.

Jemisin uses the community of Castrima to explore the idea of challenging old or existing social narratives by living a new one. It is a process built on performativity where if this community can live each day again and again without its inherited prejudice then perhaps a new norm can be forged and that inheritance left to the past. Once internalised by an individual and incorporated into cultural traditions, trauma and oppression can be inherited generationally. Even having left her prior lives behind, Essun retains and practices traditions instilled in her by the Fulcrum. When training her daughter Nassun to control her orogeny, and keep it hidden, she re-enacts the same ritual that she experienced as Damaya with Schaffa: "She got really

quiet. Then she said, 'Are you sure you can control yourself?' And then she took my hand." She bites her lip then. "She broke it."[135] Not only does Essun repeat this ritual to ensure that her daughter will not lose control (an act which would result in all of their deaths at the hands of the town), but she brings along all of that same indoctrinating and identity constructing language.

Just as Schaffa told Damaya she was firemountain glass, too dangerous to be left around to cut someone, similarly Essun tells her daughter "*You're fire, Nassun. You're lightning, dangerous unless captured in wires. But if you can control yourself through the pain, I'll know you're safe*".[136] She recites one of Schaffa's phrases that Damaya clearly internalised years, and chapters, ago, directly passing down: "You are lightning, dangerous unless captured in wires."[137] In part the reader understands that this comes from a place of both love and fear after the death of Corundum. Essun needs to ensure that the world cannot take her daughter away and that her daughter will be safe from those who would do her harm. However, it also serves to pass down into Nassun's core identity a perception that she is different, and dangerous. The harm of these actions is captured in Nassun's assertion that 'Mama has said occasionally that she loves Nassun, but Nassun has never seen any proof of it'.[138]

In approaching internalised racism from a psychological perspective, the authors of 'Internalized Racism: A Systematic Review of the Psychological Literature on Racism's Most Insidious Consequence' note the following:

> One of the most basic tenets of CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] is that thoughts that occur most frequently and are most easily accessible in memory are the ones that tend to be believed. Thus, according to the CBT concetpualization of internalized racism,

[135] N. K Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate* (London: Orbit, 2016), p. 153.
[136] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 154.
[137] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 95.
[138] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 78.

members of oppressed racial groups have been—both in subtle and overt ways—consistently receiving the message that they are inferior to the dominant racial group.[139]

When this message of inferiority is being reinforced by your mother, and later manifested in violence by your father, what choice does Nassun have other than to understand herself in those terms as monstrous. The status quo is constructed through the performativity of repeated social and cultural narratives, through stories told and enacted both externally upon individuals and internally within individuals. However, performativity and the above explanation of CBT suggest that if a society can change the thoughts that occur most frequently, then they can shift what is being believed and create new norms. This is where Castrima comes in.

On her search for Nassun, Essun finds herself enmeshed with a new community named Castrima, led by an orogene/rogga named Ykka. 'Ykka thinks Castrima is something special: a comm where rogga and still can live in harmony, working together to survive.'[140] Ykka's drive is to change the social narrative, the accepted expectations of how communities and orogenes work. Essun arrives at Castrima at her lowest point, having even '*given* [hope] up because it hurts too much', and so she is deeply skeptical of the long-term success of a place like Castrima.[141] She saw Meov fall after all. However, in slowly becoming a part of this community she notices a distinct difference to everywhere else she has ever lived in the empire: 'the old Castrimans look at you with suspicion, but the good thing is that they look at all the newcomers the same way. It's not your status as an orogene that bothers them. It's that you haven't yet proven yourself. (It is surprising how refreshing this feels. Being judged by what you do, and not what you are.)'[142] The lived experience of Castrima is of being perceived in a manner fundamentally different to the previous stages of her life, and in an essentially equal

[139] David, Schroeder, and Fernandez, p. 1066.
[140] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 201.
[141] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 105.
[142] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 127.

fashion as "all the newcomers" are treated the same way. This begins to slowly shift Essun's internalised expectations.

One of the key tactics that Ykka undertakes is a reclamation of naming conventions. Names within the empire are constructed in three parts: personal name; use or caste name; and comm name. These are, respectively, one's given name used in conversation (Binof), the role one plays in society which also connects them to others who perform that role (Leadership), and the name of the community to which one belongs (Yumenes): Binof Leadership Yumenes. Syenite's name is recognised officially by the state as Syenite Orogene Yumenes, or the even more specific and hierarchical Syenite Fourring Yumenes where her Fulcrum rank (four rings) is treated as her use name. The Empire's view of its citizens is reflected in the denominative choice of 'use' name rather than "job" or "role" name. When Essun first arrives at Castrima, Ykka welcomes her in and introduces herself as "Ykka Rogga Castrima". Essun is shocked, '"*Rogga?"* You use this word all the time, but hearing it like this, as a use name, emphasizes its vulgarity. Naming yourself *rogga* is like naming yourself *pile of shit*. It's a slap in the face. It's a statement—of what, you can't tell'.[143] Alabaster uses the word orogene like a slur instead to draw attention to the limited role the Fulcrum has constructed, and to emphasise that his "use" is to be a rogga, to be hated by the world. Here Ykka is making 'a statement', and the truth of it can be found in the simple offering of 'Welcome'.[144] Ykka puts emphasis here on "caste" name rather than "use" name, and via the connection of "Rogga" and "Castrima" she works to create new language to describe this new social system. Her self-definition reaches out and performs a new narrative in which "Roggas" belong together and they also belong in Castrima.

[143] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 268.
[144] Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*, p. 268.

Castrima is an attempt to build a non-oppressive system, to create an alternative world to the one that the Empire and the Fulcrum have supported for thousands of years. However, Critical Race Theory reminds that '[w]hen we are tackling a structure as deeply embedded as race, radical measures are in order—otherwise the system merely swallows up the small improvement one has made, and everything goes back to the way it was'.[145] Crafting new worlds through narrative alone is incredibly difficult, and so building cannot be the only response to oppressive systems, there must also be a component of destroying the obstacles in the path of the new world. It is in this light that Jemisin explores the relevance of anger and rebellion.

The Stone Sky adds a deep historical layer to the story's discussion of systemic and generational oppression. The series already exhibited an awareness of the way that constructed historical narratives, via stonelore, can shape and limit possible identity narratives. The third book of the series takes this further by telling the story of the narrator, Hoa, and how thousands of years ago his people were made into tools of the state, came to learn of their own history of oppression, and rebelled against that system. It was that rebellion that started the apocalyptic Seasons that the world of Jemisin's text experiences. Hoa makes the following statement that nicely frames what I want to discuss here in terms of anger and destruction of oppressive systems:

> Ah, my love. An apocalypse is a relative thing, isn't it? When the earth shatters, it is a disaster to the life that depends on it – but nothing much to Father Earth. When a man dies, it should be devastating to a girl who once called him Father, but this becomes as nothing when she has been called monster so many times that she finally embraces the label. When a slave rebels, it is nothing much to the people who read about it later. Just thin words on thinner paper worn finer by the friction

[145] Delgado and Stefancic, pp. 64-65.

> of history. ("So you were slaves, so what" they whisper. Like it's nothing.) But to the people who live through a slave rebellion, both those who take their dominance for granted until it comes for them in the dark, and those who would see the word burn before enduring one moment longer in "their place" –
>
> That is not a metaphor, Essun. Not hyperbole. I did watch the world burn. Say nothing to me of innocent bystanders, unearned suffering, heartless vengeance. When a comm builds atop a fault line, do you blame its walls when they inevitably crush the people inside? No; you blame whoever was stupid enough to think they could defy the laws of nature forever. Well, some worlds are built on a fault line of pain, held up by nightmares. Don't lament when those worlds fall. Rage that they were built doomed in the first place.[146]

Here, Jemisin scathingly calls out the blasé and harmful contemporary perception that western society has moved beyond its colonial and racist pasts, that such narratives are "thin words on thinner paper". She also puts forward the argument that anger at the existence of such systems is necessary and justified; in part because they cause suffering, but also because those systems were 'doomed' due to their nature as ultimately unsustainable, and thus all of that suffering was also ultimately pointless. If something better and sustainable could have been built—but it never came about because those with the power insisted upon this unbalanced, hierarchical, oppressive hegemony—then the blame lies solely with them and they deserve the collapse that was always coming. The direct address of Hoa is instructional. It is not presented to be convincing, or coercive, or re-assuring that rage is an appropriate response. He *tells* Essun, and the reader: "Rage".

This anger and the drive to end such harmful systems, to burn the world 'before enduring one moment longer in "their place"', is presented through the narrative of Nassun—Essun's

[146] N. K. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* (London: Orbit, 2017), pp. 6-7.

daughter.[147] Her story charts her initial attempts to remain her father's daughter and "earn" his love, and it is a tragic tale that follows his inability to get past his hatred of orogenes and his attempts to have her "cured" of her orogeny. It is a tale that ends with Nassun killing her father in self-defence, an inversion of Syenite and Corundum's story but an act of self-erosion nonetheless: Nassun is forced to give up the part of herself that thinks she can be loved by her father, by her mother, by anyone. In terms of narrative function, Jemisin uses the perspective of the child here to great effect in generating reader empathy just as she did with Damaya's chapters.

The plot of *The Obelisk Gate* and *The Stone Sky* explores the possibility of ending the apocalyptic seasons by using orogeny to place the moon back into orbit around the unstable planet. This is the task that Alabaster asks of Essun. However, the choice Nassun makes, and the journey that she embarks upon, is to use the same opportunity and energy to finally and fully destroy the world. She is made aware of the fact that she could catch the moon and "save the world", aware of the idea that 'someday, Father Earth might be appeased at last. Someday, the Seasons might end and all could become right with the world'.[148] However, what sticks in Nassun's mind, what she cannot get past, is that even if she did "save the world" 'fathers will still try to murder their orogene children, won't they? Even if the Moon comes back. Nothing will ever stop that'.[149] Given the oppressive system into which she was born, the inter-generational internalised oppression that she has inherited, and the direct experience of abuse and hatred from her own father, Nassun has no ability to imagine an alternative world. It is not her fault that she must deal in the absolutes of a child: "Nothing will ever stop that." And so, for her, 'some choices aren't choices at all, really', not when those choices can '[e]nd the world's pain'.[150]

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[147] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 7.
[148] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 41.
[149] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 41.
[150] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 41.

In discussing the way that the orogenes are 'commodified for use without end' in a manner that will 'firmly mire the world for thousands of years', Moore states that '[t]o this end, the only utopian compromise is to destroy the institutions that continue the legacy of competition, hierarchy, and caste'.[151] Destruction is utopian in this context. That is a difficult juxtaposition to reconcile as those nouns seem oppositional in nature. This is exactly why the empathy generated with Nassun is so necessary. It is important that the reader understand how anger, in this context, is fair and justified and understandable. However, the narrative cannot stop at just destruction. Nassun cannot envision an alternative, but that does not mean such a thing would be impossible.

Alabaster's narrative is also one of destruction. Following the death of his son, and as Syenite becomes Essun, he withdraws, recovers, and grieves. When he and Essun are later reunited, she asks him, from a place of hurt, why, if he was alive, did he not come to find her. In that moment she sees how he, like she after the death of Uche, has hit absolute rock bottom with nothing of himself left to give. At this point the only option is to start pushing in the other direction back at the world:

> The answer is in the way his eyes deaden. This was the look that was on his face as you stood in a node station once, over the abused corpse of one of his sons. Maybe it's the look that was on his face when he learned of Innon's death. It's certainly what you saw in your own face after Uche's. That's when you no longer need an answer to the question. There is such a thing as too much loss. Too much has been taken from you both—taken and taken and taken, until there's nothing left but hope, and you've *given* that up because it hurts too much. Until you would rather die, or kill, or avoid attachments all together, than lose one more thing.[152]

[151] Moore, p. 24; p. 24.
[152] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, pp. 104-105.

For oppressed individuals living within a system that requires politeness and control and shame of themselves all the time, it is difficult to arrive at a place of rebellion. Such acts would be too proactive, too wild, too dangerous. The internalised view is that the little costs of self-erosion are better than the large cost of capital punishment, especially when loved ones are brought into the equation. However, for both Alabaster and Essun, "there is such a thing as too much loss." Alabaster could not come and find Essun after the death of their son because to try and re-build that life would require yet more politeness and acquiescence to the system that killed their son. Jemisin's play with grammar and syntax in this paragraph emphasise the ceaseless pressure of living within this unsustainable system. Her writing style throughout the series makes careful and strategic use of commas and their absence, and here the commas are absent from "taken and taken and taken". Commas here would suggest pauses, that there might be moments of respite. But not only is it ceaseless, that unrelenting pressure results in people "*giving*" up hope of anything better.

In the prologue of *The Fifth Season* Alabaster tears apart the world. He uses the power of the obelisks, and of the network of node maintainers to open a huge volcanic rift in the centre of the Empire. Here he sets the node maintainers "free" from their suffering in much the same way as Syenite did for Corundum. The reference back to the scene with the node maintainer from *The Fifth Season* draws a parallel between all moments of confronting the truth of the world and the systems in which we can all be complicit. This connection of scenes serves as a thematic marker: that moment with the node maintainer contains and represents ideas about needing to make a choice in response to such knowledge, as well as the way that these horrors and losses can and should drive change. Syenite and Alabaster failed to make the right choice after confronting the node maintainer, they ran away and it cost them two more sons. Now "too much has been taken from [them] both" and so a different choice must be made.

Alabaster takes his anger, and his hard-won awareness of the inescapable system, and decides to break that system by literally cracking open what Hoa referred to as the "fault line" it was built atop. His journal later explains that

> *[w]hat follows won't be good, but it'll be bad for everyone – rich and poor, Equatorials and commless, Sanzeds and Arctics, now they'll all know.* Every *season is the Season for us. The apocalypse that never ends. They could've chosen a different kind of equality. We could've all been safe and comfortable together, surviving together, but they didn't want that. Now nobody gets to be safe. Maybe that's what it will take for them to finally realize things have to change.*[153]

If the system is fundamentally unequal, then Alabaster realises he must tear down that system to create a new equality. He reasons that, for the orogenes, living with such systemic oppression, and the need for self-hatred and self-erosion that it brings, this is already an "apocalypse that never ends" so why should the people who are enforcing this "season" upon the orogenes be exempt from suffering and cost of their choices. As Moore succinctly explains, '[b]efore Alabaster creates the Rifting, time and history operated in obscurity to nurture an imperialistic ideological paradigm, and in order to no longer be complicit in it he forces an absolute change of the physical, financial, and sociological situation in which no one can wait out their impending doom'.[154] The last part of Moore's point is crucial. Alabaster does not just destroy the world and its social systems—that is what Nassun is driving for, oblivion so that all pain and suffering will stop and never occur again. Instead, he creates new global conditions in which the complicit oppressed, the active oppressors, and those constructed citizens who might be oblivious to the toxic social order are all made to confront the reality of their situation and, potentially, come together to do something about it.

[153] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 300.
[154] Moore, p. 32.

Alabaster's journal entry continues:

After that…it'll be up to you, Syen. Make it better. I know I told you it wasn't possible, that there was no way to make the world better, but I was wrong. I'm breaking it because I was wrong. Start it over, you were right, change it. *Make it better for the children you have left. Make a world Corundum could have been happy in. Make a world where people like us, you and me and Innon and our sweet boy, our beautiful boy, could have stayed whole.*[155]

Jemisin's narrative, much like Critical Race Theory, recognises that anger is valid and that stories alone will not change a system. However, neither will anger and destruction on its own lead to anything better. Nassun wants to "End the world's pain", but Alabaster takes that drive further, he believes in the world "ending for the last time": a final apocalypse that creates an opportunity to "start it over" and "Make a world where people like us […] could have stayed whole." So, a middle ground is required: direct action to dismantle oppressive systems, *and* new stories that enable something new to grow in the space made in the ground cleared of the old system. "Staying whole" was not possible under the old system, so for such possibilities to exist the only option is a new system; and for a new system to flourish the old system must be dismantled.

Here it is useful to remember the two "camps" of Critical Race Theory activists. The idealists focus on the idea that because '[r]ace is a social construction […] we may unmake it […] by changing the system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings by which we convey to one another that certain people are less'.[156] Ykka can be read as a Critical Race Theory idealist. She works to re-make the social script of "Roggas" as a caste of use to society, as just another group amongst a diverse community. The realists or

[155] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 300.
[156] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 21.

economic determinists emphasise that ‘racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status’ and that inequalities in that allocation are rooted in material elements such as ‘capitalists’ need for labor’.[157] Alabaster can be understood as a Critical Race Theory realist. He is inescapably aware of the way that orogenes are commodities in the empire which is why he works to literally tear apart the ‘physical, financial, and sociological situation’ that reduces people to automatons in nodes to maintain the status quo.[158]

Delgado and Stefancic state that a ‘middle ground would see both forces, material and cultural, operating together so that race reformers working in either area contribute to a broad program of racial reform’.[159] It is fitting then that in this text Essun comes to embody multiple middle grounds: between her mentor and her daughter, both idealist and realist, blending the macro of saving the world with the micro of saving her daughter. In the close of the narrative as Nassun works to end humanity once and for all, and Essun journeys to try to save both the world and her daughter, the text arrives at a final conflict. When Syenite ran away and became Essun, her acts of self-erosion were driven by the internalised lesson that she cannot be all things. The world will not let her be a whole individual, and so she gives up her power, hides it, so that the Fulcrum might leave her alone long enough to get to be a mother. But this is just another form of doomed complicity, as is made brutally apparent when her husband murders their son.

The Essun at the end of the novel has made new choices. She continues to sacrifice of herself throughout her journey but crucially she does so not in accordance with societal expectation for her own survival or advancement. Instead, she does so for love. She continues to sacrifice, but for her daughter and it is that reaching-out, rather than oppressing-in, that makes change possible. She affirms that her course of actions are ‘no different from what

[157] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 21.
[158] Moore, p. 32.
[159] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 26.

mothers have had to do since the dawn of time: sacrifice the present, in hopes of a better future. If the sacrifice this time has been harder than most…Fine. So be it. This is a mother's job, too, after all, and you're a rusting ten-ringer. You'll see to it'.[160] What matters in this quote is the re-building of her whole identity: "a mother's job" *and* "a rusting ten-ringer". She arrives at the climax of the series not giving up a part of herself so that another facet may survive, but instead works towards a world in which she can be both a mother and a person with power, talent, skill, and agency. In fact, it is those things together that enable her to change the world for the better.

In the final moments of the series Essun sacrifices yet again. However, instead of self-erosion, she undertakes an act of martyrdom. She stops fighting and lets the power consume her. She gives it all up, but she does so *for* Nassun in a way that performs her identity as mother and orogene. This is a sacrifice that Essun chooses and as such it brings a world and an identity into being rather than those mandated sacrifices that have reduced her and the world for so long. As she sacrifices her power and her life, she is able to change something fundamental to Nassun's internalised identity narrative: her mother does love her, she can see it. And if her mother can love her, then perhaps it is possible for the world to be different. In undertaking an act of martyrdom, Essun becomes a pivot point for this world; her act makes a new world possible both literally in how it changes the events that occur, and imaginatively as it alters what Nassun perceives to be possible. These are the moments following Essun's sacrifice:

> She inhales, her eyes widening as if she cannot believe what she is seeing: her mother, so fearsome, on the ground. Trying to crawl on stone limbs. Face wet with tears. *Smiling*. You have never, ever smiled at her before.
>
> And then the line of transformation moves over your face, and you are gone.

[160] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 284.

> Still there physically, a brown sandstone lump frozen on the lower steps, with only the barest suggestion of a smile on half-formed lips. Your tears are still there, glistening upon stone. She stares at these.
>
> She stares at these and sucks in a long hollow breath because suddenly there is nothing, *nothing* inside her, she has killed her father and she has killed her mother and Schaffa is dying and there is nothing left, nothing, the world just takes and takes and takes from her and leaves *nothing*—
>
> But she cannot stop staring at your drying tears.
>
> Because the world took and took and took from you, too, after all. She knows this. And yet, for some reason that she does not think she'll ever understand…even as you died, you were reaching for the Moon.
>
> And for her.[161]

Jemisin returns to that comma-less phrasing of "takes and takes and takes". This performs a number of functions. It shows how Nassun is at that rock bottom point from which you give up even the last hope you have left because 'you would rather die, or kill, or avoid attachments all together, than lose one more thing'.[162] It also draws for the reader a connection between Nassun, Essun, and Alabaster (and by extension other orogenes who have been brought to that end point of self-erosion) in a way that emphasises their shared experience—something Nassun is just coming to realise the importance of. And finally, it works in careful juxtaposition with a moment of hesitation and counterpoint embodied in "But she cannot stop staring at your drying tears." The repeated refrain of "takes and takes and takes" should flow on to a state of hopelessness, but here that progression, that expected narrative, is interrupted: "But". The text asks: with nothing left except grief, why carry on in such pain? And it answers: because even

[161] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, pp. 386-387.
[162] Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate*, p. 105.

here, at the end of all things, you are not alone. It answers very simply and powerfully: because love.

Hoa notes that '[t]here is always loss, with change'.[163] The contrast between Damaya/Syenite/Essun's self-erosion and Essun's martyrdom emphasises that it is the nature of that price as well as the position of who gets to set it that drastically alters the outcome of the act. In the time following Essun's martyrdom and Nassun's saving of the world in response to it, Hoa approaches Nassun for a conversation about what comes next as she struggles with the fear that the people of the world will not actually change. Hoa tells her:

> "Imprisonment of orogenes was never the only option for ensuring the safety of society." I pause deliberately, and she blinks, perhaps remembering that orogene parents are completely capable of raising orogene children without disaster. "Lynching was never the only option. The nodes were never the only option. All of these were choices. Different choices have always been possible."[164]

As with the reference to the real world 'Articles of Secession', here Jemisin's choice of "Lynching was never the only option" is deliberate. While this text has explored racially motivated murder, it does not at large focus on the image of lynching. Here she calls the reader's attention to the real world historical trauma of African-Americans and places it next to the image of "the nodes". If the text has functioned as intended, and empathy towards these oppressed peoples has been generated, and an understanding of the construction and consequences of oppressive systems has been achieved, then here at the end Jemisin works to ensure that that widening of perspective does not remain within the boundaries of the text. Even though Critical Race Theory is a real world scholarly pursuit and activist movement, it

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[163] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 397.
[164] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 395.

recognises and maintains that ‘[a]ttacking embedded preconceptions that marginalise others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction’.[165]

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N. K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* works to impart the following lessons: we are all complicit in our societal systems. Those systems make us all erode away at ourselves to serve their own ends. ‘Different choices have always been possible.’[166] The communication of these messages, among others, is enabled by the empathy generated via exposure to the lived experience of self-erosion as a form of on-going societally mandated sacrifice. When we look to instances of mandated or enforced sacrifice within the literature, we are able to begin unpacking problematic and harmful elements of the fictional society in a way that creates a space for similar reflection and challenge in reality.

[165] Delgado and Stefancic, p. 50.
[166] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 395.

Conclusion

"[T]here is no fire without fuel. No flame without ash."[1]

- *The Providence of Fire*, Brian Stavely

There is always loss, with change.[2]

- *The Stone Sky*, N. K. Jemisin

I find myself reading and re-reading this genre because it makes me think differently. It changes how I see others, the world, myself.

I find myself reading more and more contemporaneously, the older texts dropping away, because I feel that existing in the world right now is fraught with fear. The quote that resonates with me even after four years of this project is Hoa's statement that 'Different choices have always been possible'; and series like those touched on in this thesis do good work modelling what those possible different choices might look like. So it is here that I find hope to combat the fear.

In writing on the fantasy genre, or any area of Fantastika for that matter, there is always a scholarly thread of the looking glass, the mirror, the lens; in some way the whole point of the genre is to see differently. This is really what makes the genre matter so much, its boundless potential to 'engineer [...] possibility'.[3] It has always been about change. I think that Tolkien is fundamentally right about the inherency of the eucatastrophe, or at least that we need it. And it is that last part that I did not expect to discover through this project: that we need it.

Through the case-studies of Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn*, Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*, Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle*, and N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth*, one of the threads that

[1] Brian Stavely, *The Providence of Fire* (London: Tor, 2015), p. 247.
[2] N. K. Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* (London: Orbit, 2017), p. 397.
[3] N. K. Jemisin, '2018 Hugo Award Acceptance Speech for Best Novel', presented at *Worldcon 76* (San José, California: 19 August 2018) <https://youtu.be/Pt4UI_te7bs?t=8028> [Accessed 27 March 2020].

emerged consistently was that if there is an embedded stumbling block to change, it is the inability to imagine the self or the world differently. The epigraphs for this Conclusion draw attention to the fact that change requires sacrifice, but what this study of sacrifice has highlighted is that getting to that place of an act of sacrifice requires first imagining what that change might look like.

It requires a crumpled picture of a flower growing green. It requires a loved one to see the good in you. It requires the outcasts to choose each other. It requires a mother to reach out a hand.

To return to the fear, and to the more tragic side of this thesis, one of the sadder truths is that there are people, institutions, and instilled unthinking narratives that actively and passively inhibit others' ability to imagine differently. There are those who scapegoat others out of bigotry or ignorance or fear. So many still bear the weight of stonelore that should have been amended or discarded long ago.

The idea that 'Different choices have always been possible' evokes, like Jemisin's whole series, a tangle of emotions: distressing and enraging that different choices not only were not made, but still have not been made; but also hopeful because that possibility remains.[4] We can still choose differently. We are all of us constructed, but we are none of us determined. Another of Sanderson's characters, Dalinar Kholin, learns that the most important step a man can take is not the first one. '*It's the* next *one. Always the next step*'.[5] The adage goes that the best time to plant a tree was yesterday, but the next best time to plant one is today. Though the systems that we inhabit by their nature work to preserve themselves as they are, that weight can be overturned or spread.

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[4] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky*, p. 395.
[5] Brandon Sanderson, *Oathbringer* (London: Gollancz, 2017), p. 1133.

This thesis proposed a dichotomy of acts and of texts, two devoted to change and choice, and two devoted to burdens and stasis. Yet, in the end, all four series choose change. There is important work in laying bare the horrors and problems of the world, but horror alone is paralysing. Horror is the execution square, it is the node-maintainer's chair. Confronting the facts of reality is necessary to understand the ways we are constructed, but it does not help us imagine differently. We need to both 'Rage that [the world was] built doomed in the first place' and tell new stories.[6] That spectrum of actions, emotions, and responses from seeing the problems, to being able to imagine a world beyond those problems requires a crucial middle ground: how to move from one to the other.

Fantasy, especially long-form fantasy, works to take us on that journey away from the old world and towards the new. The way that it achieves those dual ends—critiquing the problems, and proposing solutions—is by speaking through acts of sacrifice. Which is appropriate, because acts of sacrifice are also the means by which we change; it is the middle ground, and the pivot point.

Terry Eagleton's call to action is that sacrifice contains radical potential for achieving social change, and that this work has been hindered in Western culture by persistent narratives that frame sacrifice as a burden to be avoided. Unpacking the systemic nature of oppression and stagnation in the imagined worlds addressed in this thesis shows already in just these examples the need to question those unquestioned norms. For though sacrifice may not be desirable, it may be necessary. The only other choice is to not change, and to not change is to be complicit in the perpetuation of stagnant, harmful systems.

When engaging with issues such as identity construction, the shaping of societies, the role of historical and political narratives, there is a tendency in scholarship (perhaps inevitably and reasonably so), to trend towards the abstract, the theoretical, the cold logic and reason of

[6] Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* p. 7.

it all. And in discussing both systemic issues and possible avenues for change, a level of pragmatism over naïveté is likely necessary to actually achieve any kind of change. There are economic and strategic logistics to social movement on large or small scales. However, it is important to remember that what we are looking at here, this one piece of the larger social puzzle, is still literature, still art, and thus the goal is not just to speak to the mind but to move the heart. Understanding must come not only from the intellect but also from empathy. Imagining differently must come not only from cleverness, but from wonder. Building such things—empathy, compassion, kindness—can take time. But time is something that these long narratives have in abundance. Committing to them, listening to what they have to say, paying attention to their most urgent moments where they are willing to give up in order to gain, these are the steps in learning to imagine differently.

Jemisin's work is *'For all those who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question'*[7] not only because it does powerful and necessary social work to try and take a next step towards change, but also because it might help those who have lived that fight for respect feel less alone and feel more understood. These texts reach out as Essun reaches for her daughter, beseeching us to imagine how things could be different and to then bring those new worlds into being.

We must choose sacrifice, not for ourselves, but for others.

Even in the face of everything awful.

Because love.

[7] N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (London: Orbit, 2016), front material.

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