Magic as a Tool of Social Construction:

Cultural and Gender Identity in Contemporary Fantasy

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts in English

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2015

Abstract

Contemporary fantasy is a genre that exists outside the boundaries of what consensus society constructs as socially normative. It re-appropriates and subverts facets of reality in order to place the reader in a position from which they can re-assess their own socially constructed identities, perspectives, and assumptions. Fantasy accomplishes this goal by expressing the familiar in a mode of hyper-exaggeration designed to highlight the ways in which the ideals and issues are constructed. In this way fantasy questions and critiques reality. This thesis examines how the contemporary fantasy genre uses magic as a tool to highlight the less visible social forces of reality such that the reader can gain insight into how and why social norms come to be established, as well as how they might be changed. It discusses the presentation of conflicting cultural and gender identities within fantasy worlds. Works by Brandon Sanderson, Robert Jordan, Jim Butcher, Peter V. Brett, and Patrick Rothfuss will be drawn on. By looking to the magic of the world as a focusing lens, these social conflicts and differences become clearer. The discussions undertaken in this thesis demonstrate an approach to contemporary fantasy literature that can be further utilised across a multitude of subgenres and social issues of contemporary reality.

Acknowledgements

For all of the effort and support that each of them put in towards helping make this thesis what it is, I would like to acknowledge the following people:

Dr. Mark Houlahan, my supervisor, for his patience, and his infallible knowledge and grasp of literary theory in all of its uses, he saw the shape of it all and provided firm guidance when tangents began to lead it astray.

Dr. Kirstine Moffat, for her keen eyes and fresh perspective in the closing phases of the thesis, she understood the drive of the thesis and was able to see what needed tightening from her external perspective.

Drs. Eveline Dürr and Gordon Winder, for their kind direction towards the key theories of contemporary anthropology in the early phases of my research, their years of teaching shone through in their careful explanations.

Dr. Fiona Martin, for her sharp editing skills and unbounded referencing experience, she caught the typography errors that others would have missed.

Janet and Julian Elder, for their support both financially and parentally, their presence in my life spurs me to do more and be the best I can be.

The University of Waikato, for the Masters Scholarship, support from the University has been outstanding and has made the entire process less stressful with their backing.

Hannah Wright, for her support in all things, as those who have undergone the thesis process, they understand the stress and the joy involved in the long process, they also are grateful for the people in their lives that spur them on to succeed.

Hannah Wright made this thesis possible.

Table of Contents

Abstract……i

Acknowledgements……..ii

Table of Contents……iii

List of Illustrations…… iv

Chapter 1 - Introducing Magic and Contemporary Fantasy…….....1

Chapter 2 - Magic and Culture……..…….25

Chapter 3 - Magic, Identity, Agency, and Perception……..……..70

Chapter 4 - Magic and Gender…..…….89

Conclusion……133

Bibliography…….140

List of Illustrations

Page	Illustration	Source
8	Tzvetan Todorov's Uncanny-Marvellous Scale	Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 44.
31	Aon Aon: First Language	Brandon Sanderson, *Elantris* (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 617.
32	Aon Ela: Focus, Center	Brandon Sanderson, *Elantris* (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 619.
96	Darlene Juschka's Metaphorical and Metonymical Relationships of the Gender Binary	Darlene Juschka, 'The Fantasy of Gender/Sex: Angela Carter and Mythmaking', in *The Influence of Imagination: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy as Agents of Social Change*, ed. by Lee Easton and Randy Schroeder (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), pp. 160-73 (p. 162).

Chapter 1 - Introducing Magic and Contemporary Fantasy

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that magic, a key element of fantasy, functions within the literature as a tool of social construction analogous to the forces that inform identity in reality, that is, the real world that the reader inhabits, the world outside of the text that provides context. This allows contemporary fantasy to be viewed as a social testing ground. By approaching the societies of the fantasy worlds in the same mode for approaching societies in our world, we can then gain new insight into contemporary ideas and issues, such as how cultural differences shape societies or how established gender roles could be changed. Contemporary fantasy as a genre operates in a mode of hyper-exaggeration; it places the familiar, the real, into extreme contexts in order to highlight both problems and potential solutions that can more easily be realised through an act of distancing and self-reflection.

By exploring two major facets of identity—culture and gender—I will show the ways in which fantasy worlds establish deep and varied identities with the express purpose not only of exploring different and new perspectives but also of suggesting possible routes for both large and small scale change. I will do this by analysing a number of novels, drawing parallels between magic (a literal force in the fantasy world, fundamental to its nature), as a force that both shapes and changes identities, and the analogous forces in our reality such as ideologies and economics. This approach will not only establish a firm connection between the fantasy world and reality, but will also serve to demonstrate exactly why I have chosen to discuss these questions in the context of the fantasy genre.

This thesis will be focused on the literary structure of immersive fantasy as it serves best to demonstrate these social forces in action. Farah Mendlesohn

writes that 'the immersive fantasy is a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world.'[1] By building these fully-formed worlds, these complete worlds, an immersive fantasy not only offers, but demands that we take up, that we become immersed in, a perspective not our own. By creating that which "is not", by pushing the concerns of reality into extreme contexts, we can discuss and explore ways of viewing the world that do not exist in reality. It is the intersectional nature of the immersive that gives the literature its ability to reflect powerfully back upon reality. The Lightweavers, an order of magic users in Brandon Sanderson's *Stormlight Archive,* use illusion magic to capitalise on their understanding of the performative power that perception can have over identity. The process of becoming a Lightweaver involves 'speaking truths as an approach to a threshold of self-awareness.'[2] They realise change in people by creating illusions, by creating that which "is not"; as such it becomes clear that in order to realise any form of change, a level of self-awareness must first be achieved. In this way, the distancing effect of fantasy creates the space in which a form of self-reflexivity can be achieved.

The anthropological theories that I will be applying to these fantasy worlds demonstrate how the imagined worlds become fully-formed and akin to reality. The theory of transculturation teaches us that meaning is defined in the third space of interaction, and the theory of the meshwork describes identity as being formed by the intertwining, the knotting, of agents. Fantasy is nothing if not an opportunity to interact and intertwine with extremely different perspectives and therefore it offers the reader great potential for growth and change in ways that cannot be found in the everyday life of the reader. It is, in this sense, a genre that

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[1] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 59.

[2] Brandon Sanderson, *Words of Radiance* (London: Gollancz, 2014), p. 665.

operates in a mode of hyper-exaggeration, taking ideas, issues, and circumstances and presenting them 'at a different intensity [...] at [their] maximum',[3] reaching beyond the boundaries of consensus reality in order to highlight, via the contrast with reality, the how and the why of some of the issues that contemporary society faces.

For the purposes of this thesis, the decision has been made to deliberately focus on culture and gender identities. Henrietta L. Moore writes that,

> [a]ll forms of social change involve the reworking of gender relations to greater or lesser degrees. This is because changes in production systems involve changes in the sexual division of labour; political conflicts involve the reconfiguration of power relations within the domestic domain and beyond; and gender as a powerful form of cultural representation is caught up in emerging struggles over meaning and in attempts to redefine who and what people are.[4]

In the following chapters the exploration of cultural groups and defined gender roles will highlight the deep connections between all facets of these fully-formed fantasy worlds and in this way demonstrate the intersectional nature of the secondary world.

Given that this thesis aims to undertake a discussion of purportedly fully-formed worlds, it may raise questions as to why other forms of analysis, beyond cultural and gender, are not being undertaken. Fundamentally this thesis intends to explore the role of magic in contemporary fantasy as a tool of social construction, and how this then allows us to effectively treat the genre as a social

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[3] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 93.

[4] Henrietta L. Moore, 'Understanding Sex and Gender', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. by Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 813-30 (p. 828).

testing ground. Therefore, in pursuit of this goal, the emphasis has been placed upon two key elements of social identity—culture and gender—as these two facets of identity are perhaps the most likely to be addressed in part in any given fantasy novel. This allows a strong cross-comparison between different instances of magic across different fantasy worlds in order to draw a connection between the social forces in reality that shape and change identity, and the magic in the fantasy world in its role as a force that shapes and changes identity. For while focusing on magic allows a discussion of a range of real-world social forces and issues—such as class, religion, or race—I have chosen to focus on gender because, as noted, gender relations are involved in "all forms of social change"; and I will be focusing also on culture because cultural groups and value systems provide the contextual basis and value systems via which gender roles—and other forms of identity—are constructed.

When examining questions of identity, be they rooted in cultural or gender differences, the questions being asked are centred around the boundaries of those categories that society performatively enforces. The nature of fantasy is to push the boundaries. Its nature is to question, to move outside of the norm, and so it is not surprising that as a genre it changes with each passing year. As the world develops new assumptions, so too does fantasy develop new questions, new ideas, new approaches. The term fantasy then becomes a very large umbrella under which a broad spectrum of subjects co-exist.

Fantasy changes a little each year without invalidating that which came before. If one compares Beowulf to say Sanderson's *Elantris*, the similarities in presentation are few and yet both can easily be discussed in a fantasy context. Even *Elantris* and Jim Butcher's *Dead Beat*, published in 2005, both of these novels are easily defined and discussed as fantasy, but both explore extremely

different ideas. With this in mind, I think that perhaps the most useful concept for addressing the question of fantasy as a genre that has yet been proposed is Brian Attebery's "fuzzy set". The fuzzy set concept views genres as 'categories defined not by a clear boundary or any defining characteristic but by resemblance to a single core example or group of examples'.[5] This creates a space for genre that includes its history and its contemporaneity, as well as leaving room for growth and change.

Accepting the fuzzy set allows critics to locate a text, or a specific type or area of the genre, as fantasy and address that text on its own terms, some of which may relate to that 'group of examples'.[6] In the case of this thesis I am primarily concerned with what I will call contemporary fantasy; that is, fantasy published from 1980 to today. Before dealing with contemporary fantasy, I will first explore the origins of, and major shifts in, fantasy as both a genre and its critical discourse.

Fantasy owes much to traditional folk-tales and fairy stories, to myths and legends, for it was those stories that first strove to further explore life outside the norm. With roots in the Old English of *Beowulf*, the Medieval tales of King Arthur and Merlin, and the Renaissance literature of *The Faerie Queene*, the genre progressed through to the Gothic tales of the nineteenth century and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm. These Gothic tales gave birth to the darker American tradition of horror through H. P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe; and following this darkness came the positive celebrations of life and humanity's success, by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien in the 1940s and '50s.

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[5] Brian Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 31.

[6] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 31.

Following Tolkien's breakout success, the fantasy world struggled to reproduce *The Lord of the Rings.* During this post-Tolkienian scramble, what has often been referred to as the modern fantasy era, there were a few notable successes, Ursula K. Le Guin being chief among these, but, as the rest of the world leapt to be Tolkien's successor, the majority of texts produced were pulp fiction, mass produced and limp. Tolkien wrote something that revolutionised a genre and the impulse to follow in his footsteps was a good one. The problem lay not in aspiration, but in execution. Many latched on to aspects of Tolkien's world, the elves and dwarves, the earth-shattering battles, but failed to find the real magic of the fantasy: the sense of commonality beneath the wonder, the reality that fantasy was obsessed with re-creating in new lights.

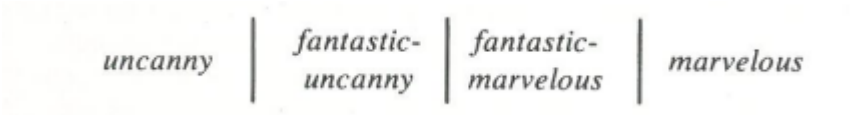
Around the time that Sanderson published his first book, *Elantris*, in 2005 he posted an article on his website that was at the time titled 'How Tolkien Ruined Fantasy'. It has since been changed to 'Actually, I don't hate Tolkien', as the title misrepresented his intent. Sanderson's article is a celebration of Tolkien's work. The point he raises is that Tolkien was published way ahead of his time. He likens it to 'a caveman discovering how to make a light bulb while his pals were still working on how to make fire.'[7] The world was not ready for epic fantasy. Now this is not to say that *The Lord of the Rings* should be lamented, it created the space for many later works to break exciting new ground. The point to be made here is that it took the fantasy genre about forty years to move past cheap imitations of Tolkien, almost a lifetime to understand what it was that this kind of fantasy was capable of.

[7] Brandon Sanderson, 'EUOlogy #17: Actually I Don't Hate Tolkien', <http://brandonsanderson.com/euology-17-actually-i-dont-hate-tolkien/> [accessed 8 February 2015].

The critics that I will be outlining below refer to this post-Tolkien era as modern fantasy. This is a good term; Tolkien marks a turning point for the genre that should be distinguished from that which came before. However, fantasy has since reached another turning point, one that is perhaps not so dramatic or sudden as that caused by Tolkien. This turning point for the genre can be located around 1980 when authors began to test the boundaries of what fantasy could do. This exploration and expansion of the genre lead to wildly successful texts such as Terry Pratchett's *The Colour of Magic* (1983) and Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986). These types of texts exhibit a distinct and deliberate distancing from Tolkien's work in order to grapple with the potential of fantasy; Pratchett's work heading in a more satirical direction, whilst Jones' writing addresses concerns of characters on a more individual level than that of world-shattering events and so is more suited to her target children's audience. But what came from this turning point, this distancing from misunderstood Tolkien, was a recapturing of what he was trying to do with large epic works such as Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* beginning in 1990. It took the genre almost forty years to realise that fantasy is primarily concerned with reality, and that it is merely presented in the fantasy world.

The evolution of fantasy scholarship follows a similar trajectory to that of the genre itself; taking time to come to terms with the capabilities of the genre. As I address each of these landmark criticisms of fantasy, it is my intention not to discredit, for as I have said earlier the change in fantasy over time does not invalidate that which came before. The subsequent section will highlight the facets of theory relevant to contemporary fantasy whilst noting the ways that the theory may no longer apply. I will approach this brief overview largely chronologically with one deviation. While Tolkien's 'On Fairy Stories' was

published earlier than the other significant critical texts on fantasy, it deals with theory, more relevant to modern examples of fantasy than does Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* and so I will begin with the latter.



First published in 1970 and then translated into English in 1975, Todorov's book was one of the first structural investigations into what exactly the fantastic was: what its goals were and how it accomplished them. Todorov located what he called the fantastic as lying between the uncanny and the marvellous (as noted in the above diagram)[8]. For him, the fantastic could only exist in the hesitation between, or the uncertainty of, a realistic explanation (the uncanny) and a supernatural explanation (the marvellous).[9] If a definitive answer was given as to the cause of the strange events then the fantastic would cease to exist. The most effective example that Todorov gives of the fantastic is Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw,* in which a governess taken to a large manse on the moors begins seeing ghostly and impossible things. As the novel closes, the page-turning question of our protagonist's sanity or insanity is left in doubt and thus the fantastic is sustained.

Using Todorov's definitions, an example of the uncanny can be found in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which reincarnation is achieved through the *science* of electricity; as opposed to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in which the monster derives from a *curse* and in this way falls into the category of the marvellous. In both of these novels the question of how the central impossibility was realised is definitively answered, and so, by Todorov's definition, without a hesitation these are not fantasy. The examples used here are all what would today be termed

[8] Todorov, p. 44.
[9] Todorov, p. 44.

classic Gothic novels. My usage of these texts as examples, as Todorov also does in *The Fantastic*, shows exactly where under the umbrella of fantasy Todorov's theory best applies; for Gothic literature with its monsters, curses, ghosts, and otherness definitely holds a significant place in the history of fantasy. If the onus of hesitation was placed as the defining trait onto contemporary fantasy then by far the majority of published works could no longer be recognised as fantasy. Instead they would be relegated into the escapist definition of Todorov's marvellous – that which provides a sense of wonder. I would argue that the sense of wonder is a defining attribute of the modern era, the post-Tolkienian fantasy that contemporary fantasy has tried to dissociate itself from.

In his now iconic essay 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien introduced the concepts of the secondary world, fantasy as sub-creation, and the eucatastrophic story. [10] Tolkien's ideas were foundational and indeed the concept of the secondary world, in particular, is still used to this day; however as the title would suggest Tolkien placed more emphasis on fairy stories. The difference being that fantasy defined as fairy story is designed to present a world of wonder that can never be understood by man. In direct contrast to this, contemporary fantasy, more than any other period of the genre, is deeply rooted instead in re-creating reality.

Sanderson suggests laws of magic of his own design, and in relation to the wonder of fantasy versus the realism of fantasy, Sanderson's first law is very useful. It states that the degree to which you can solve problems with your magic is directly proportional to the level of understanding of that magic.[11] In correctly functioning fantasy, for the reader magic is impossible in only one way: it exists;

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

[11] Brandon Sanderson, 'Sanderson's First Law', <http://brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/> [accessed 8 February 2015].

that is to say the reader must suspend disbelief at the existence of magic but past that point the magic must be contained by the rules of the world much as any other force, such as gravity, obeys the laws of physics. In this way, once its existence is accepted, magic can be understood; and if it can be understood it can be analysed and its impact upon the world discussed. What is key is that this instance of impossibility, the existence of magic, does not mean then that anything can happen. It does not follow that breaking one rule throws away the rest of them. Answers can only arise from reasonable progressions and if magic is to shape the events of a world, as it does in contemporary fantasy, then it must to some degree be understood. For Tolkien the magic, or 'enchantment'[12], was a thing of the 'elves' [13] and their world and ways were meant to awe. In contemporary fantasy we find worlds much more deeply engaged with their magic. It is in a sense a science of the impossible.

It is worth noting that Tolkien's eucatastrophic model of surprising success in the face of insurmountable odds is definitely something that contemporary fantasy has internalised; rather than a model for the climax though, it has become an element of story, a part of a character's cycle of narrative growth. As Tolkien describes the eucatastrophe it is easy to see why for so long fantasy was synonymous with escapism:

> It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of

[12] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 49.
[13] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 13.

> the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art.[14]

He tells us that the highest form of fantasy is that which ends, however unlikely, in joy. So while this concept has now been successfully adapted into a part of the contemporary fantasy narrative, it is easy to see how, as with much of Tolkien's writing, this has been misinterpreted to mean that fantasy should have a miraculous ending where something saves the day in a wondrous fashion at the expense of realism. What is perhaps most important to note about Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, is that compared to much of the escapist literature of the modern fantasy period, his work is far more similar to that being produced today. This is because even though Tolkien was perhaps more interested in a sense of wonder through fantasy, he understood that it gained its power through its connection to reality, through its ability to relate back to the reader. There is a reason that the heroes of *The Lord of the Rings* are the everyman hobbits and not Gandalf the wizard.

Stepping away from Tolkien, this next section will discuss the six most significant critics of modern fantasy, as opposed to Todorov whose theories address pre-Tolkien works. In the Preface to his book *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975), Colin N. Manlove sets out how he wishes to examine some of the more "well-known" works of modern fantasy, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia.* His aim is to assess texts based on how well they 'keep to their own terms',[15] to judge the merits of a work by what it presents. Manlove defines fantasy as '[a] fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the moral

[14] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', pp. 62-3.
[15] Colin N. Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. vii.

characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.'[16] He argues that modern fantasy ultimately fails in 'keeping to [its] own terms' as due to the scientific mind-set cultivated through the Renaissance the distance between the 'real' and fantastic worlds, or between 'nature and supernature',[17] became increasingly insurmountable. Manlove states that modern fantasy 'often lacks the "inner consistency of reality"'[18] and yet internal consistency has become the hallmark of functioning fantasy. According to John Clute's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) the defining characteristic of a fantasy text is a 'self-coherent narrative.'[19]

For Manlove, the problem with fantasy is that it fails to fully embrace the wondrous, the marvellous; he defines the gap between reality and fantasy as being insurmountable, but fantasy, when functionally succeeding, is entirely rooted in the concerns of reality. Manlove's qualm with modern fantasy arises from precisely this misconception that fantasy has no connection to reality. William. R. Irwin said it all in a footnote: 'It is evident that for Manlove the essence of fantasy is in its content.'[20] Manlove is right that, in terms of identifying a fantasy, the content is the final arbiter, but the meaning and import of the text lie in its external relationships as well as its internal ones.

Irwin, whom I referenced above, was, in a sense, much like Tolkien in that his ideas were ahead of his time (although perhaps not by quite so much as forty years). Irwin makes a deliberate distinction between fantasy and the fantastic in his *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (1976), perhaps intending to step away from Todorov's terminology. Any text can have fantastic elements,

[16] Manlove, p. 1.
[17] Manlove, p. 258.
[18] Manlove, p. 258.
[19] John Clute, 'Fantasy', in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), p. 338.
[20] William R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 56.

he argues, and so the mere presence of a fantastic element cannot determine a text as a fantasy—a direct contrast to the content-focused concerns of Manlove. Irwin's requirements for a fantasy are as follows:

> Whatever the material, extravagant or seemingly common place, a narrative is a fantasy if it presents the persuasive establishment and development of an impossibility, an arbitrary construct of the mind with *all under the control of logic and rhetoric* […] Fantasy results only from the persistence of a main and substantial tendency throughout the whole. No matter what is the central arbitrary nonreality that generates the fantasy-illusion, *all elements of the narrative are determined by it.*[21] [My emphasis added]

It is the combination of these two points that demonstrate how well Irwin understood fantasy. The impossible controlled by "logic and rhetoric", magic reasoned out such that "all elements of the narrative are determined by it" fits perfectly alongside Sanderson's first law thirty years before Sanderson wrote it. It also undermines the pervasive taint of escapism and wonder that plagued the post-Tolkien period of fantasy.

Alongside this genre definition, Irwin proffers five types of fantasy texts:

> Fantasies based on impossible personal change, those that show incredible societies, those that center on an unorthodox notion of innocence, those that originate in literary parody, extension, or adaptation, or in contravention of established ideas about historical fact, and those that represent a dominance of

[21] Irwin, p. 56.

> supernatural Powers in some part of the known or in a fictive world.[22]

It is here that some difference between Irwin's theory and contemporary fantasy appears as, in pursuit of the "self-coherency" that Clute describes, contemporary fantasy tends to bundle many of these tropes together in one text. This is not to say that the "types" that Irwin has noted are not useful frames for examining contemporary fantasy, but that taking just one may be too exclusive a framework.

Rosemary Jackson, like Irwin, takes a step back from Manlove's content-focused approach. As the title of her 1981 book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* would suggest, she considers fantasy as subversive in the sense that it 'disturb[s] "rules" of artistic representation and literature's reproduction of the "real".'[23] The book focuses on Fantasy produced in a Post-Romantic period ranging from Gothic Novels and Dickens up to Tolkien, with emphasis placed on the cultural implications of text and the psychoanalytical elements of fantasy.

Jackson exhibits an intention to expand upon Todorov's theories, and as such it is perhaps unsurprising that much of her research applies more readily to what would be called Gothic literature—as can be seen in her discussion, much like Todorov, of *Dracula, Frankenstein*, and the works of Henry James. That being said, many of her ideas are of relevance to contemporary fantasy via its development through the Gothic. The link between the Gothic and contemporary fantasy; the link between fantasy and the "fantastic" that Todorov and Jackson speak of, can be located under the umbrella of the fuzzy set. Especially important is Jackson's expressed desire for fantasy as a genre to move beyond the

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[22] Irwin, p. 100.

[23] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981) p. 14.

> nostalgic, humanistic vision, of the same kind as those romance fictions produced by Lewis, Tolkien, T. H. White and other modern fabulists, all of whom look back to a lost moral and social hierarchy, which their fantasies attempt to recapture and revivify.[24]

This quote serves to highlight Jackson's own dissatisfaction with the idea of the literary structure of the marvellous in which emphasis is placed on a separation of fantasy from reality, a movement that defined much of the modern fantasy era. More significantly, in defining fantasy as a mode of subversion, Jackson captures much of what would come to be the defining power of contemporary fantasy; stating 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.[25]

Even though one might object to the statement that fantasy is fully "determined" by its context, the salient point here is that fantasy is able to subvert cultural and societal norms, the boundaries of its context, precisely because it is so connected to that context. In this way fantasy can be said to be socially constructed, and then deliberately utilised to discuss and subvert that construction. This act is the mode of fantasy, as Jackson so terms it, because fantasy exists outside of the social context to which it is connected. By dramatically exaggerating facets of its own social context, its very existence subverts the established social structure by demonstrating categories outside of the normative.

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[24] Jackson, p. 2.
[25] Jackson, p. 3.

The other key facet to Jackson's interrogation of this genre is a focus on psychoanalysis born from a perspective that

> it is in the unconscious that social structures and 'norms' are reproduced and sustained within us, and only by redirecting attention to this area can we begin to perceive the ways in which the relations between society and the individual are fixed.[26]

This is another area in which contemporary fantasy differs from the modern fantasy era: contemporary fantasy is more intimately interested in the performative ways that instances of interaction between agents can subvert or influence the fixed "social structures and norms". Rather than the Freudian analysis that Jackson seeks to apply, contemporary fantasy is steeped more in an anthropological approach than a psychological one.

Jackson's goals are similar to my own in approaching the contemporary: a desire to explore fantasy's innate 'character deformation' which 'suggests a radical refusal of the structures, the "syntax" of cultural order.'[27] She asserts that as fantasy has the power to transform and re-present, it therefore must also have a 'responsibility to resist.'[28]

Unlike Jackson and Irwin, in her book *In Defence of Fantasy* (1984), Anne Swinfen returns to an approach akin to Manlove's and embraces the content of fantasy novels; focusing entirely on the modern fantasy period with large emphasis on authors such as Tolkien, Lewis, and Le Guin. She defines modern fantasy as that which

> employs structures, motifs and marvellous elements derived from its predecessors in myth, legend, fable, folk-tale and romance. […]

[26] Jackson, p. 6.
[27] Jackson, p. 87.
[28] Jackson, p. 175.

> unlike, for example, the writer of a medieval romance in what was virtually a universal Christian culture of Europe, the modern writer of fantasy cannot start from a widely accepted basis of belief. The moral premises must be established within the work itself.[29]

Once again the concept of internal consistency is noted, wherein the "premises must be established within the work itself"; as are fantasy's roots in myth and folk-tale. Swinfen's work is marked by the Eurocentric influence that Tolkien had on the modern period and, while the way that she conceptualises fantasy is applicable to the contemporary, her book is less critical analysis and more of a successful attempt at a justification of the genre. While fantasy no longer needs such a justification, Swinfen's insights on the nature of fantasy are poignant and apt. She describes fantasy's raison d'être as to 'comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it.'[30] When there are questions we cannot answer we must turn elsewhere for suggestions. It is fantasy that provides us with an elsewhere.

In a challenge to the established definitions of fantasy as a genre, Kathryn Hume claims that 'each observation [of fantasy] is accurate for that part of the whole to which it applies, but none can stand as a description for the entire beast.'[31] She fears the "exclusive" definitions of genre will ultimately be too limiting and yield little, if any, fruit. In Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature (1984) she argues instead that 'Fantasy is any

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[29] Anne Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 2.

[30] Swinfen, p. 231.

[31] Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 5.

departure from consensus reality';[32] essentially locating fantasy as a motivation for creation, comparable to mimesis, and therefore inextricable from all literature. To take ways of thinking about fantasy and apply them to other texts may shed new light on said texts; however, to follow Hume and take this to mean that fantasy must therefore not be a genre would deny the very uniqueness of fantasy texts. For while the umbrella of fantasy is ever growing, ever shifting, the texts falling under that umbrella have fundamental differences to texts outside the grouping. It seems to me that at times one must focus one's inquiry in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions, particularly when the subject material is as varied as that of fantasy.

While I am very much intrigued by the concept of fantasy elements being involved in all literature, fantasy as a genre is something that needs to be examined on its own terms as, fundamentally, the literary structures within the genre are achieving different goals through different means than other genres. Again, I understand Hume's impetus to not reduce or confine fantasy and by doing so creating "dead ends", but this is exactly why Attebery's "fuzzy set" concept is so useful. Fantasy is a genre that pushes out of the known boundaries and is constantly stretching itself to change and explore new frontiers; to limit it would be to deny its nature and would undermine the utility of examining fantasy as a genre. The point of such a genre examination is to create a space in which the reader can explore on one hand the unique qualities and facets of "non-reality" and on the other to discuss what the unique qualities are saying about the familiar. What perhaps should be taken away from Hume's writings is the equal emphasis that an inclusive definition places on the context in which the work is produced,

[32] Hume, p. 21.

the context of the created narrative, and the context of the world that receives the work.

So we arrive at Attebery, whose work *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), similar to my own here, comments on the above theories. I have mentioned earlier his concept of the logicians "fuzzy set" where genres 'are defined not by boundaries but by a center.'[33] He uses this term "genre" very deliberately and locates it in the middle of a spectrum between Hume's fantasy as an impulse for all creation on one end and pulp fantasy that adheres to a strict formula on the other. For Attebery, approaching fantasy as genre is a 'useful way of designating stories that are more alike than required by the mode, and yet less uniform than dictated by the formula.'[34] He recognises the qualities of the fantasy genre that single it out from those surrounding it; as Irwin noted, a fantastic element does not alone make a fantasy novel. Attebery's work is of particular note in the consideration of contemporary fantasy by the simple fact that the objects of his studies breach the 1980 turning point and in fact progress far into works published post-2000 in his *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (2013).

In order to locate contemporary fantasy within the umbrella of the genre as more than a time period I believe that, using the fuzzy set model, we can locate the heart of contemporary fantasy as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; for even though in the contemporary there is more of an emphasis placed on being able to understand the elements of fantasy, as well as less of a didactic split between good and evil, it is from Tolkien that many of the defining tropes and traditions are born. It bears repeating that the modern fantasy era was marked by in essence a misunderstanding of what Tolkien introduced; in this way *The Lord of the Rings* is actually more similar to contemporary works than to those that immediately

[33] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 12.
[34] Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, p. 11.

followed its publication. In discussing Manlove and Irwin I identified that in terms of locating something as fantasy we look to the content, but in terms of analysing the fantasy, it needs to be rooted in the context of reality. For exactly these reasons I place *The Lord of the Rings* at the heart of contemporary fantasy's fuzzy set definition. We identify a fantasy text as fantasy by its similarity in content to *The Lord of the Rings* but we find its relevance in its contextual relationships.

One question that this discussion may raise is: why bother reaching out to fantasy to address real world concerns? What could that possibly offer that, for example, a novel on the cultural clashes in post-colonial India could not already give me? What fantasy does is create space deliberately distanced from reality yet still tied to it by contextual influence, author, and reader interaction. The advantages of this distanced space is that the secondary world becomes, in function, a theoretical testing ground into which the ideas and issues of contemporary society can be proposed in the context of fictional societies. Gary K. Wolfe states that,

> [u]nderlying the belief in the fantastic world itself, which we have found arises from the union of idea and affect, is a deeper belief in the fundamental reality that this world expresses. I use the term 'expresses' rather than 'represents' because many of the finest fantasy writers have correctly rejected the notion that their work is in any sense mere allegory or apologue.[35]

It has become the norm in contemporary fantasy to write of new cultures, other societies that have not existed, and which do not exist in reality. Even Tolkien notes his distaste for the limitations of allegory: 'I cordially dislike allegory in all

[35] 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).

its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence.'[36] This lack of direct allegorical connection creates the space for very specific and deliberate social forces to arise such that a discussion of, say, an imbalanced class system can take place in a more pure form; that is to say, a discussion can take place solely surrounding the issue without the reader being limited by any preconceptions she may have concerning the class system in her own society.

I keep returning to the fuzzy set concept because I feel that it provides the most elegant solution to one of the biggest problems that the study of contemporary fantasy faces: the multiplicity of terminology. A part of this problem arises from the sheer similarity in language of fantasy, the fantastic, fantasies, phantasy, and so on; and part of the problem lies in the evolution of the genre over time. Even in colloquial terms we talk about high and low fantasy, terms which are in themselves misleading as they seem to indicate value judgements when in fact they merely refer to the level of magic, or elements of fantasy, within a text.

It is my intention for the duration of this thesis to reduce the terminology solely to fantasy. When used alone, the term fantasy refers to the genre, whereas *a* fantasy denotes a specific text within that genre. There may be specific elements of fantasy, or of *a* fantasy, that are referred to, but I will always endeavour to make the differences clear. It is difficult enough to approach this topic amidst a variety of definitions without re-appropriating other terms to diversify the meanings further. So let us embrace the fuzzy set, let us watch closely for shifts in the core of that set should it move away from *The Lord of the Rings*, and most

[36] 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).

importantly let us accept that fantasy will always change and will never be definitively pinned down.

The question then becomes where under the umbrella, where in the fuzzy set of fantasy scholarship, does this thesis fit? The main aim is to address the role that magic plays in contemporary fantasy literature, with an emphasis on identity. I will show how magic functions as a force of shaping and as a force of change, both creating and changing identities on the cultural, societal, and individual levels. With my focus on contemporary fantasy, the texts that I will be looking at, while necessarily not a comprehensive sweep, have been specifically chosen for the different ways in which they discuss related but separate facets of identity.

I will note now that I will not be referring to any liminal fantasy, where the existence of magic may or may not be real as 'the magic hovers in the corner of our eye'.[37] The question of magic's role in the fantasy is very different when its existence is not definite as in those cases it performs additional functions.

For much the same reason, I will not be exploring any "low fantasy" where the magic is marginalised as my intent is to make explicit the roles of magic rather than uncover the implicit. It is worth noting that an understanding of magic as a focussing lens for exploring issues of reality will apply to all contemporary fantasy as the techniques in approaching magic in this way can be applied to whichever impossible construction the fantasy world is concerned with.

Before proceeding any further a clear understanding of the term magic is required. On the one hand it can be very simply defined: it is an example of the impossible, an element of fantasy; that being said this becomes complicated once one begins to explore the variety of ways in which magic has manifested across different fantasy worlds. Again Attebery's fuzzy set concept makes itself useful.

[37] Mendlesohn, p. xiv.

I propose that the core of this new set be traditional wizardry, spells learned from books with effort and cast with incantations and an implement, often with elemental, light, or dark associations. From a contemporary standpoint this is probably the most recognisable and undeniable representation of magic. From this we can extend out to the contemporary, Chicago-based wizard Harry Dresden—in Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files*—the elemental furycrafting of the Aleran people—in Butcher's *The Codex Alera*—or the instinctive Allomancy of Sanderson's *Mistborn*. Suffice to say that when I use the term magic I am referring to an ability, power, technique, or skill, that may be learned or innate, and, from the reader's perspective, would be considered impossible by the standards of consensus reality, to borrow Hume's term.

While this definition lets us identify the magic in each novel, it does not tell us what the magic does. Magic in fantasy literature acts as two forces: a force of shaping, and a force of change. It both establishes and alters; and depending on the literary structure more emphasis will be placed on one force or the other. It both binds and divides, both mends and ruptures, and one action will inevitably lead to the other. Something has to be broken in order for something to be healed. Change always leads to a new establishment, a new shaping of the world, just as a sustained force of establishment—which manifests as stagnation—will bring on an impetus for change. In contemporary fantasy it is the play between these opposing forces of magic that focuses the reader towards key ideas or points of conflict and, ultimately, is what enables the reader to achieve a level of self-reflection, to question their socially imbued norms.

What makes magic such a powerful tool is that it illuminates the social forces which construct us in such a way that they can be better understood. To take, for example, economics as a counterpoint; whilst economics may not be *the*

defining factor in every individual's life, it will, due to the nature of our world, have some form of impact upon that person's social construction. Magic, as a fundamental part of the fantasy world, performs a similar function, only in the hyper-exaggerated mode of fantasy it is by nature more immediately visible. In this way we can turn to the magic of the world and, in using it as a focusing lens, we are made more aware of the how and the why of people and societies being structured by less immediately visible power flows such as economics or political ideologies. In the subsequent chapters I will be exploring the mechanisms of magic, the ways that it affects identity and highlights elements of the text.

Following this introductory chapter, the first chapter—"Magic and Culture"—will apply contemporary anthropological theories concerning cultural difference and the construction of cultural identity, in order to discuss the role that magic plays in such a creation. It will place a particular emphasis on ideas of open-systems, identity being defined primarily through cross-cultural interaction and, more to the point, that the magic, as well as constructing cultural identity in these worlds, also creates spaces and opportunities for change to be realised.

The second chapter—"Magic, Identity, Agency, and Perception"—will explore the idea that identity can be performatively affected by perception and that through this we can view the act of attaining magic as a process of altering one's perception of oneself and of the world around them.

The third and final chapter—"Magic and Gender"—will discuss the role that magic plays in constructing and altering gender identities and, through fantasy's inherently subversive nature, calls into question the problems of binary gender. This will be achieved in some cases by presenting an extreme example of the negatives of such binary thinking, and in other cases by embracing a queer perspective that subverts and challenges the binary structure itself.

Chapter 2 - Magic and Culture

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the role that magic plays in contemporary fantasy in creating, sustaining, and changing cultural identities; it will accomplish this through the use of current anthropological theory in order to draw connections between fantasy worlds and our contemporary, globalised, reality. In recognising contemporary fantasy's mode as that of a hyper-exaggeration, of existing beyond the boundaries of the normative, we can locate magic as an intentionally more visible social force, an overt example of social construction and in this way address ways of thinking about cultural difference that can apply to the reader's own social context, external to the text.

Connecting Magic to the Fantasy World

In this section then, I first want to delve into the questions of magic on a large scale: how worlds are formed, what role magic plays in the creation and maintenance of societal and cultural order. In my introduction I stated that magic acts as both a force of shaping and as a force of change; another way to look at this is that magic both binds and divides identities on both the large and small scales. It is binding in the way that societal and cultural values form around it, and it is divisive in the way that it excludes those without magic or those with a different type of magic. However magic can also be the force that bridges the boundaries that it apparently maintains; just as it can be the force that demolishes societal or individual cohesion.

The roles that magic plays, though polar opposites, are nevertheless deeply intertwined. This makes it difficult to talk about one force without the other,

particularly with immersive fantasy where an overall understanding of the wider, intersectional context is a key element of the literary structure.

Before more deeply exploring the relationship between magic and the world, some terminology must be clarified. The first is world, or worlds. In using this term I am referring to Tolkien's concept of the secondary world, a world not our own, a world in which its 'peculiar qualit[ies] […] (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it.'[1] Or, as John Clute puts it in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 'the rules by which [the secondary world's] reality is defined can be learned by living them and are not arbitrary.'[2] While we may often only see a facet or portion of a secondary world, in many cases, such as in the works of Brandon Sanderson, the secondary world is an entire planet in a functional solar system and universe. This context is extremely important as without the reality to connect back to then the fantasy text would be reduced to simple flights of fantasy, mere escapism; it is the reality surrounding and underpinning the text that enables fantasy to meaningfully explore new perspectives; new perspectives that are enabled by the extreme context of the fantasy world, contrasting the familiar by, on the surface, distancing the secondary world from reality.

I note this distinction between fantasy and reality because not all contemporary fantasy takes place on a secondary world. Butcher's series *The Dresden Files* for example takes place in twenty-first century Chicago; this case is essentially an alternate reality, a world that is just one step less removed than a secondary world.

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[1] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 64.

[2] John Clute, 'Secondary World', in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), p. 847.

The term immersive relates intimately with the secondary world. Mendlesohn coined the term in her 2008 book *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, as one of four literary structures within fantasy. Mendlesohn begins her discussion of this by exploring the mimetic nature of literature, where the goal is to mirror life to such an extent that the mediation of words is forgotten. She regards immersive fantasy as an irony of mimesis.

> Irony of mimesis does not necessarily mean that we are assumed to be in the world, but that we must share the assumptions of the world as much as a contemporary reader of Jane Austen shared the assumptions she presented in *Pride and Prejudice*.[3]

It is ironic mimesis because the reader must forget about the mediation of words and accept a world that is not real, but nonetheless a world that is fully formed, with its own rules, culture, social structures, and societal norms.

Mendlesohn depicts a concentric model of reality, wherein circles represent differing levels of reality. With the immersive, the reader must hold themselves between the created world and any outside influence that would undermine an acceptance of that world. In this isolated position between worlds, the reader initially lacks any knowledge of, or connection to, the fantasy world. To overcome this lack the reader can rely only upon their own observations of the fully formed world. In real life, before having a conversation about cars, people do not explain why petrol is necessary, or the environmental issues surrounding it. To a greater or lesser extent these are things that, as social inhabitants of our world, we already know. Therefore, equally, a character existing in an immersive fantasy will simply have a conversation about Atium scarcity, leaving it up to the reader to fit all of the pieces together. ‘The reversal of the information flow is

[3] Mendlesohn, p. 59.

crucial to the immersive fantasy: an issue is first taken for granted and only later, in another context, explained.'[4]

In a sense the reader has to become a member of the society presented, leaving behind familiar ways of viewing our world, of viewing others, and acquiring a new perspective. It is precisely this acquisition of a new perspective that sheds new light on old issues once the reader exits out the other side of the fantasy. The act of being immersed, in the way that it requires the reader to situate themselves between the fantasy world and reality, that is to separate themselves from reality, in this sense distances the reader from their own context during the immersion. This separation in turn forces the reader to inhabit and take up a perspective entirely unlike anything they could experience in reality; then upon exiting the fantasy world, upon returning to reality, those experiences, that new perspective that questions potentially unnoticed assumptions in the reader, will inform the reader's own social context.

The distancing effect of fantasy, achieved through extreme difference, an exaggeration of context and ideas, grants a powerful level of self-reflection to the reader. In discussing fairy tales, Bruno Bettelheim suggests that,

> [t]he fairy tale, after having made us tremble by taking us to the edge of the abyss, after having forced us to face evil and all the darkness which also resides within us, after having acquainted us with what we rather wish to avoid, serenely rescues us. In the course of the story we gain the ability to live a richer more meaningful life on a much higher plane than the one in which we found ourselves at the story's beginning, where the hero, who is

[4] Mendlesohn, p. 75.

> our mirror image, was forced to embark on his perilous voyage of self-discovery.[5]

With his focus here on fairy tales, Bettelheim's theory is clearly more intimately related with the eucatastrophic tale that Tolkien was interested in; however, his description of the hero as our "mirror image" embarking upon a "voyage of self-discovery" embodies the power of the immersive structure. For if the hero is our mirror, and he himself goes on a journey in which exposure to new and different perspectives changes the ways in which he perceives and defines himself, so too must that change be "mirrored" in us, the reader. It suggests the immersive's tendency towards enacting and exploring a powerful ideological shift.

One of the things that makes immersive fantasy such a useful genre is that the worlds it constructs are intersectional in nature, that is to say they are constructed in full awareness of the fact that each facet of the world is constructed and impinged upon by multiple other facets. The term intersectionality was initially coined by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991 to address the fact that black women's issues did not find a perfect voice in either the civil rights or the suffrage movements. Crenshaw argues that as people are defined by more than one characteristic, discussions of individual issues need to take into account how all of the variables intersect, rather than focusing on one aspect as definitive—black or white, for example.[6] Since its inception, intersectionality has moved beyond being associated solely with issues concerning race and has evolved into a methodology utilised across a wide range of studies.

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[5] Bruno Bettelheim, 'Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing', in *Fairy Tales as Ways of Knowing: Essays on Märchen in Psychology, Society and Literature*, ed. by Michael M. Metzger and Katharina Mommsen (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981), pp. 11-20 (p. 12).

[6] Ahir Gopaldas, 'Intersectionality 101', in *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 23 (2013), 90 -4 (p. 91).

In 2008 Kathy Davis elegantly described modern intersectionality as a study of the 'interaction between […] certain categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.'[7] It is the nature of immersive fantasy that the world of the narrative be fully formed; therefore, as a part of its inbuilt function, the world must demonstrate all of those "categories of difference"—not only individually but also interdependently. Only if the fantasy world functions as a real world does, where each element has a bearing on all the others, can the fantasy be deemed immersive. It is in this way that we can treat fantasy as a social testing ground through which we can place and explore contemporary issues; this also suggests a reason as to why we can use magic as a focusing lens to discuss these issues of identity: the magic is, due to the nature of the world, inextricably, intersectionally connected to the rest of the world at all levels just as any other socially constructing force, such as ideology or economics.

The immersive is a fantasy novel characterised by a fully-formed, internally consistent world of which the reader has no prior knowledge due to its extreme difference to reality. It is a literary form that uses its structure to introduce the uninitiated reader to one set of ideas and systematically change those ideas through a reverse flow of information. In this context I may refer to simply "the immersive" as the literary structure, or to "the immersive world" which may be taken as synonymous with the secondary world.

The best way to establish the deep connection in contemporary fantasy between magic and the immersive world is to look at the intricate way in which Brandon Sanderson has constructed his cosmere, 'the shared universe of [his] epic

[7] Kathy Davis, 'Intersectionality as a Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful', *Feminist Theory*, 9.1 (2008), 67-85 (p. 68).

fantasies'[8] in which the majority of his books take place. The stories that he tells, at least those in separate series, occur on different worlds, at different times, but all are connected by one of his universe's three realms. Realmatic theory, as described by Shai in *The Emperor's Soul*, states that there are three realms, or planes, of existence: the physical, the spiritual, and the cognitive.

> The Physical is what we feel, what is before us. The Cognitive is how an object is viewed and how it views itself. The Spiritual Realm contains an objects soul—its essence—as well as the ways that it is connected to the things and people around it.[9]

This way of viewing and understanding the universe is one that attempts to be all encompassing and it is in this view that a direct connection between natural order of the world and magic is found: the tripartite structure of the universe is mirrored in the requirements of magic in Sanderson's worlds. In each instance of magic there must be a physical focus, a spiritual source, and a cognitive intent that shapes the energy into effect. What this demonstrates is the way in contemporary fantasy that magic and existence are deeply intertwined; one cannot be without the other. The simplest example of this is AonDor, the magic system utilised by Elantrians in Sanderson's *Elantris*[10].

AonDor is a symbol-based magic system that channels the spiritual energy of the Dor. To do this an Elantrian will draw in the air, with their finger, a symbol, or Aon. The Dor is everywhere, always trying to push in and affect the world; the Aons create a space for the Dor to enter the world but only in a specific amount and

AON
First, Language
(AonDor, Aonic)

[8] Thea James, 'The Rithmatist: A Chat with Brandon Sanderson' <http://thebooksmugglers.com/2013/05/the-rithmatist-a-chat-with-brandon-sanderson.html> [accessed 25 January 2015].
[9] Brandon Sanderson, *The Emperor's Soul* (San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2012), p. 53.
[10] Brandon Sanderson, *Elantris* (London: Gollancz, 2011).

way determined by the symbol. Returning to the tripartite structure for a moment there is a physical focus in the symbol; a spiritual source in the Dor; and cognitive intent that lies in the Elantrian's decision and focus to draw the symbol in the air. It is the intent that makes their finger leave a glowing line in the air so that an entire symbol might be traced. Without the cognitive intent the symbol would not form and the Dor would not be channelled into the world. AonDor is a particularly useful example for demonstrating the symmetry between the fundamentals of the universe and magic due to the literal, physical relationship that the magic system has with the world around it. Aons originate with the ancient Aonic people, and are used in language; the city of Elantris derives its name from Aon Ela which means centre.

ELA
Focus, Center
(Elantris, Elao)

Elantris opens on a world where the city of gods has become a prison for filthy un-dying wretches. Ten years prior something happened and the silver-skinned Elantrians were reduced to blotchy lepers growing steadily insane and so were locked away in their own city. This horrible turn of events came about due to a massive earthquake that created the Chasm. The Aon system used by Elantrians was powerful in its symbolic representation because the Aons themselves were representational of the physical geography of the world of Sel. So when the Chasm appeared, the significant change to the geography invalidated the representational power of the Aons and AonDor ceased to function. Elantris, and its four outlier cities, were laid out in an Aon Rao, which means power, so that the Dor was channelled both into the city and its people. The problem lay in that in many ways an incomplete, or incorrect, Aon was worse than no Aon at all and so the Elantrians were stricken low.

The relationship between world and magic is further deepened by the fact that there are multiple magic systems upon Sel, all of them tied to an area. That is to say, the further one travels from Elantris the less effective AonDor will be. Or, to put it another way, a man from Jindo cannot use AonDor. He can however use ChayShan, a martial art not unlike T'ai Chi, where the Dor is channelled through representational body movements, and extreme mental focus, to enhance the body. The mere presence of magic shapes the world around it. The Elantrian ability to produce food and water from air revolutionises economies, and instantaneous communication and instantaneous travel essentially shrink the world. The Elantrians were worshipped as gods before they fell, before the magic disappeared, and in the vacuum the Arelenes had to rebuild a government from the ground up, lost without the shining light of Elantris to guide them. But as the very fall of Elantris demonstrates, not only does the magic shape the world, but the world shapes the magic in turn; you cannot truly conceive of one without the other.

It is here then, for the purposes of this thesis, that we must address a functional understanding of culture. Philippe Descola describes anthropology's historical view of culture as a

> system of mediation with Nature invented by humanity, a distinctive attribute of Homo sapiens which includes technical ability, language, symbolic activity and the capacity to assemble in collectivities that are partly freed from biological legacies.[11]

However, Descola insists that the view of culture as an opposite of nature can only be limiting; he calls for all such traditional binaries to be abandoned as they connote closed and separate systems. In reality, cultures, and nature for that matter, are open systems that are constantly changing and growing, constantly

[11] Philippe Descola, *The Ecology of Others*, trans. by Geneviève Godbout and Benjamin P. Luley (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2013), p. 35.

altered by interaction with everyone and everything in the world, constantly created for and by each individual. So care must be taken in discussing culture, very clear from the outset that while we may discuss groups of individuals who identify with a shared sense of 'technical ability, language, [and] symbolic activity' [12] we must then consider that group within the wider context of everything that is having, and has had, an influence upon that group and its individuals with the intention of steering clear of any intimations of closed systems or binary judgements. As Maurice Godlier notes,

> [w]e must also bear in mind that groups or individuals always define themselves by reference to others of the same or opposite sex, or of the same or another religion and so forth. It is in this more fundamental sense that no identity, whatever one thinks or wishes, is closed in on itself, and closed to the outside world.[13]

This denial of binary thinking, of closed and separate systems, is a large factor in a shift towards adopting a more global perspective, as thinking on a global scale is simply not possible if the only options are binary.

Arjun Appadurai proposes that 'the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics.'[14] In order to better examine and discuss these disjunctures, or imbalances, in global interactions, Appadurai defines different flows of power in five categories: '*ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes,* and *ideoscapes.'* [15] What these categories allow is more open discussion and understanding about how, say, the powerful external projection of media and

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[12] Descola, p. 35.
[13] Maurice Godelier, *In and Out of the West: Reconstructing Anthropology*, trans. by Nora Scott (London: Verso, 2009), p. 12.
[14] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 33.
[15] Appadurai, p. 33.

ideas from the United States might impact upon the ideals of communities in other countries, creating a false view that success can be found in America, which can lead to increased migration to America, which in turn affects the ethnoscape of both the destination and original country. What is significant about this perspective is that it recognises that not everything is perceived and received in the same way in every context; Appadurai states that

> the suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes […] [and] also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, influenced by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors.[16]

To view the world in binary terms such as east/west, or even self/other, is to deny the complex state of reality and functionally limit any form of understanding. As I turn to *The Codex Alera* in the next section for examples of these theories in action, it will become clear that we can usefully come to understand magic then as if it were a "magiscape"; as, in the fantasy world, it plays as large a role in social construction as Appadurai's five original "-scapes" with the exception that the magiscape is designed to be more easily recognised in its constructive role. Specifically we can turn to Appadurai's statement that these socially constructive flows are "deeply perspectival" and recognise that magic, as a generally understood entity, performs these types of social functions and yet manifests differently in different cultural groups, and even within those groups, due to the directions of the power flow, and impacts upon those lives differently due to their own unique "situatedness".

[16] Appadurai, p. 33.

Appadurai also offers an interesting approach to ensuring that discussion remains inclusive by creating a distinction between culture and cultural. He states that

> [i]f culture as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, cultural the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that are more helpful.[17]

I believe that when he speaks of a "substance" the negative implication can be taken to be associated with the concept of a closed system, of an unchanging thing in opposition with nature. Using "cultural" to talk about differences leaves systems open but recognises that there are aspects of one system or group that may not be present in another system, or may be approached or utilised in entirely different ways. This allows us to discuss those "shared senses" to which groups may identify and how they are viewed from internal and external perspectives.

Tim Ingold supports this perspective in describing the rethinking of classic western anthropology towards a more contemporary understanding:

> What we do *not* find are neatly bounded and mutually exclusive bodies of thought and custom, perfectly shared by all who subscribe to them, and in which their lives and works are fully encapsulated. […] The isolated culture has been revealed as a figment of the Western anthropological imagination. It might be more realistic, then, to say that people *live culturally* rather than that they *live in cultures*.[18]

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[17] Appadurai, p. 12.

[18] Tim Ingold, 'Introduction to Culture', in *Companion Encylopedia of Anthropology*, ed. by Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 329–49 (p. 330).

Combining these two perspectives, Appadurai's emphasis on the cultural and cultural difference, and Ingold's suggestion of people living culturally and non-isolationary, suggests that people are living not only according to their own value systems, but also in relation to the different value systems of others. In making specific examinations of cultural groups later in this chapter, it will become clear not only how the existing value systems have been shaped by encounters with cultural difference, but within those encounters also lies the potential for change in those value systems.

Discussing Culture in the Fantasy World

These conceptual differences between historical and contemporary perspectives that Descola and Appadurai highlight, can be explored through the lens of Jim Butcher's *Codex Alera* series. In *The Codex Alera* there are four races. The Canim are a sort of wolf-man hybrid in appearance who live on the western continent of Canea. Note that they have evolved separately rather than being cross-bred into existence. The easternmost continent is Maratea and is the current homeland (rather than the ancestral homeland) of the Marat, a human race with a tribal culture. The central continent, Alera, is where the majority of the narrative takes place, and in the icy north one would find the Icemen, another tribal culture but with key differences to the Marat. In the centre of these three races are the Alerans, humans descended from ancient Romans.

The Codex Alera charts the changes that all four societies go through as they clash, at first with each other, and then allying together to fight a greater foe, the Vord. The Alerans are the linchpin upon which all of the conflicts hang, with each contrast and conflict being drawn between one of the surrounding societies

and the Alerans. This creates a space, through the contrasting cultural systems, in which the text can join a contemporary discussion surrounding transcultural interactions and how such interactions shape and change cultural identities.

As the reader enters *The Codex Alera* they are introduced to an "Aleran-centric" worldview, where everyone else is the outsider. Their society is Roman in regards to their class system, their government—with a combination of a senate and a system of High Lords and Ladies, as well as a First Lord—and also their legion-style military. Despite these remnants of their Roman heritage, much has changed over time through the emergence of furycrafting, a magic system of elemental manipulation in which every Aleran individual has some level of capability. The history of Alera tells us that it was the combination of the strict regimen of a Roman legion, and the raw power of furycrafting, that enabled them to

> overcome the Icemen, the Children of the Sun and their stronghold in the Feverthorn Jungle, [they] had repelled the Marat and the Canim over the centuries to claim the land of Alera as their own. They controlled the seas around their home, had walled out the Icemen in the north, overcome the Marat through sheer savage fighting. With their furies and their furycrafting, the Alerans dominated the world, and no other race or peoples could claim mastery over them.[19]

This excerpt of history shows how the magic system of the Alerans allowed them to shape the world, to determine the course and shape of relationships; through the magic here we can see a flow of power, much like a financescape or ethnoscape, acting within the world. In my introduction I stated that magic acts in two

[19] Jim Butcher, *Furies of Calderon* (London, Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, pp. 300-1.

opposing forces, a force of shaping, and a force of change. The current status of Aleran society clearly demonstrates how much the introduction of furycrafting has changed them from their Roman origins, flight, through applied windcrafting for example, changes economies in communications and transportation. The continued, and accepted, presence of magic demonstrates the force of shaping, for it creates the boundaries within which the Alerans define themselves. They are the people who furycraft, whilst everyone else is an unenlightened savage; the map of Alera, present at the beginning of each novel, is titled 'THE REALM OF ALERA *and the barbarian lands*'[sic].[20] Note the capitalisation of Alera and the lowercase of "the barbarian lands", even the font in the novel shrinks in size as if the Aleran cartographer knows they have to mention the lands outside Alera but they also know that those places do not really matter.

Earlier in this chapter I noted that magic can act as both a binding and a divisive force. The above excerpt of Aleran history shows how the Alerans bind together through their magic, under the shared cultural identity of furycrafting, something that is both a shared 'technical ability [and a] symbolic activity';[21] this however also creates divisions between Alerans and the rest of the world.

The Alerans can be viewed as the perfect example of the dangers of a closed-system world view of the type generated by binary thinking, the "us against them" perspective. In Butcher's novels they have been the dominant power, but they have also been stagnant as a society for hundreds of years; and their cultural aspects are relatively unchanging as they are unwilling to consider other world-views or to realise that other cultural groups can and are influencing them.

[20] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, np.
[21] Descola, p. 35.

To speak of cultural groups as in fact being open-systems, the idea that cross-cultural interactions are constantly occurring and affecting each group involved, this is to speak of transculture, that is 'a liminal zone, or "impassioned margin" where diverse cultures converge without merging.'[22] The Aleran closed-system perspective of superiority has led to a refusal to acknowledge the influence of other cultural groups upon themselves. This means that Alerans are only ever affected by their conflict with other cultural groups. Each time they fight others on their borders and win they performatively reinforce not only that they are superior but that any external perspectives are of no value to them. In this way the Alerans only allow negative reinforcement, repetition of war and death, that prolongs their stagnation but denies any positive growth from their interactions.

Unsurprisingly, the Aleran cultural stagnation has caused unrest. Many High Lords and Ladies believe that the current Gaius (the equivalent of a Caesar) no longer deserves to be in power, and a civil war is brewing. In many ways the Aleran stance on life is that "might makes right". One does not have rights without attaining the rank of Citizen; however one can literally duel one's way into the ranks of the Citizenry. The High Lords and Ladies, the most powerful furycrafters after Gaius himself, are required by law to marry other powerful individuals so that the lines might stay powerful.

Theoretically those with the most power should be beholden to those beneath them, and this is a view that is represented and explored in the novels, but many powerful furycrafters believe that it is their right to take and do what they want, so long as they preserve a public facade of compliance. It is not difficult to imagine how the Aleran perspective was arrived at as there is an undeniable difference between them and the rest of the world in the power that their magic

[22] Gustavo Perez-Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 25.

system grants them; the short excerpt of their history detailed above shows that they have conquered all other cultural groups to stand proudly above them. When an ability like furycrafting makes you literally more capable than other people, and when that cultural difference is and has been so readily apparent for hundreds of years, it is very easy to assume a superior worldview as in that one sense you are superior. The Alerans wrongly believe that their culture, their way of life, is a closed system and so they seem doomed to collapse under the weight of unacknowledged external pressure, unless perhaps that system is opened. Exhibited in the dominant yet stagnant Aleran society are exactly the problems with binary and closed system thinking that Descola identifies.

It is the Aleran view that the other races of Carna are inferior that maintains their perspective that might makes right, as they are the ones in unchallenged power, and as such their unwillingness to accept the perspective of those "beneath them" has led to a deeply fissured society. From an internal perspective we can see that there are cracks reaching deep into the bedrock of their society. For while it was the combination of their Roman legion and furycrafting that placed them in their position of power, the majority seem set on denying their "Romanic" heritage.

Butcher's protagonist Tavi spent time at Alera's Academy where he discovered that many professors outright deny that any level of civilisation could have been attained by a Romanic society (pre-furycrafting) and so they must have always had furycraft. From their perspective, one in which everything of import is accomplished by furycraft, their ancestral Romans must have had furycraft otherwise the ruins of the great city of Appia would not exist. They argue that stone construction is impossible without earthcrafting. These issues emerge in this discussion, between Tavi and one of his "Maestros" at the academy:

> ‘Yes, yes, you would have us all believe that men without any furycraft carved marble blocks with their bare hands, I suppose. And that next, again without fury-born strength , they proceeded to lift these massive blocks—some of which weighed as much as six or seven tons—with nothing but their backs and arms, as well!’
>
> ‘Like Maestro Magnus—’Larus made a rude, scoffing sound.
>
> ‘—and others before him,’ Tavi continued, ‘I believe that the capabilities of men using tools and heavy equipment, combined with coordinated effort, have been vastly underestimated. ’
>
> ‘You do sound a great deal like Magnus, toward the end,’ Larus replied. ‘If such methods were indeed as feasible as you claim, then why do workmen not still employ them?’
>
> Tavi took a calming breath, and said, ‘Because the advent of furycrafting made such methods unnecessary, costly, and dangerous.’
>
> ‘Or perhaps such useless methods never existed at all.’
>
> ‘Not useless,’ Tavi said. ‘Only different.’[23]

Maestro Larus, deeply steeped in Aleran culture, making an active study of it in fact, is so blinded by his closed system that he scoffs at his own history. The majority perspective of Alera cannot see, as Tavi can, that different does not mean “useless”.

Looking at magic in regards to manual labour here is a simple but ultimately telling example of the issues that Aleran society represents. In a might makes right world, where the magical strength of the individual and their ability to accomplish something is what is important, the concept of “coordinated effort”

[23] Jim Butcher, *Academ’s Fury* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, chap. 34.

is alien and foolish. When merit as individual prowess is the core of your cultural value system, then reliance on others must necessarily be viewed as weakness and the Alerans' own history shows that they are not weak. Not only do Alerans view their society as a closed system, but they strive for they themselves to be closed, believing that they cannot and should not be influenced by outsiders. By defining their society by furycrafting, Alerans bind themselves together; not only does this create stagnant closed systems that divide the Alerans away from experiencing the rich cultural differences existing around them, this also creates divisions within the bound and shaped society.

Tavi, a young boy in the first novel, is the only person in Alera who cannot furycraft. Whilst furycrafting acts as a cultural adhesive, binding Aleran society together, such a definition leaves Tavi an outcast within. Born an Aleran, he feels those ties, but lacking that key trait he feels not truly a part of his own people. He is more of an outcast, more of a 'furyless freak',[24] than a Marat or a Canim. *The Codex Alera* presents us with our main character as a child and takes us on his journey into adulthood, his transformation from the small person affecting history to the great man shaping nature. Tavi is repeatedly described as very small for his age. Underestimated by all those bigger than him, it seems that he can do nothing, that the world is against him. From Tavi's perspective it feels like the whole world is just barely holding in a sigh, not really surprised anymore whenever he fails to do something, just waiting for even his caring uncle to 'admit what a useless little freak he is.'[25]

It is easy for the reader to empathise with Tavi; the way that he looks out for others, the way he carries on in the face of adversity and social ostracism, and the fact that he is first introduced as a young boy are factors that come together to

[24] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 144.
[25] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 32.

make him compelling. But we must consider it from an adult, Aleran perspective. Theirs is a society in which success is arrived at through prowess and strength; the adults have lived their entire lives gaining their positions through their furycrafting. Tavi's uncle Bernard is the leader of his steadhold (a farming community) not simply because he is a good leader, but because he is a powerful crafter; as soon as he is injured and cannot bring his strength to bear, the other steadholders begin to fracture and rush to fill the power vacuum. This is simply how Alera functions.

With that in mind, it is not hard to see why Tavi is undervalued; he is small, weak, and most importantly he cannot furycraft. If this were a children's fantasy, such as the early Harry Potter books, as the novel progressed we would see Tavi coming into his own strength in such a way that he no longer needs the approval of the adults. But this is not a children's fantasy, nor is it just one novel. The epic scope of an immersive series like the Codex requires a change and a progression beyond the individual. *The Codex Alera* is Tavi's coming of age story, the tale of his transition from small frightened boy to the First Lord of Alera; but, significantly, it is his tale of changing how the world sees itself and him. Tavi never changes who he is, he succeeds by embracing his identity, by defining himself on his own terms, essentially, by challenging the established boundaries of his society and forcing them to change.

In a way Tavi is always that small furyless boy, not in the literal sense, but rather in the way that he is always the outsider. Even once acquiring furycraft, something that should finally earn him a place in Aleran society, he suddenly becomes the Princeps, and then the First Lord. Tavi never gets what he really wants, to be normal; he is always on the outside of society, either below or above the rest of Alera. His anguish at the start suggests that Tavi's outsider status is a

thing to be mourned, but it is because of his positioning that he can be an instigator of change. The way that Tavi lives, the way that he occupies 'a liminal zone, or "impassioned margin",[26] embodies a cultural view of open systems, of transculture. Being denied that formative symbol of Aleran unity, the furycrafting that they allow to lock themselves into a perceived, closed-system, Tavi instead is shaped by the people he encounters, embodying the principle of culture created by the individual. Through the Marat and his bond with Kitai he comes to terms with his own capabilities. His relationship with the Canim Varg teaches him of honour and obligation in a way that the Aleran drive for individual success can never understand; and the conflict with the Vord allows Tavi to see the cracks in Aleran society, to see how broken their system truly is, and more importantly how disadvantaged and stagnated they are due to their self-imposed isolation, their Aleran-centric view point.

Descola's theories state that it is in part due to the modern perspective's assumption of the existence of universal truths discovered through science that modern practices constructed in this sense lose their symbolic meaning and their reflexivity. Perhaps literature, fantasy, offers a renewed symbolic relationship through which modern human relationships and practices can be explored. Fantasy accomplishes this by giving us the distance we need to explore ourselves, our contemporary reality. This is necessary because a separation, or distance, 'is more difficult to maintain when the observer and observed share the same received ideas and premises, even if their social origins, practical competences, and lifestyles may differ completely.'[27] What one needs instead is '[a] decentered point of view from where he could turn back upon himself, making him a stranger to himself, and invite him to question more vigorously the foundations of his own

[26] Perez-Firmat, p. 25.
[27] Descola, p. 62.

position in the world.'[28] The simultaneously, externally closed yet internally divided nature of Aleran society that casts Tavi as an outsider shunts him into precisely that: a decentred position that enables questioning and subsequently, change. In this way, embodied in Tavi is another key trait of immersive fantasy, that 'the characters with whom we ride are *antagonists* within their world';[29] which is to say that they are at odds with the status quo. This position allows a questioning of the world without breaking the immersion of the reader; 'the characters themselves ironize the world around them.'[30]

Magic and Social Responsibility

In this section I wish to suggest my own theory of magic, akin to Sanderson's. It is my theory, which I name magic as social responsibility, that the more diffused a magic system is amongst a populace, the less obligation is felt by the magic user as a part of that populace to be altruistic with that magic. Therefore, adopting a view of magic as social responsibility postulates that in an Aleran society, where the magic resides in everyone, the responsibility is so diffused that the High Lords and Ladies are only bound by their own conscience and social convention; for whilst they are typically more powerful than other Alerans, there is not the same level of unique power that might drive say a superhero to fight for justice. It is this highly magically charged yet magically diffused environment, where the need for individual altruism is less felt, that gives the strong the ability to take what they want; that they are never challenged deems their actions morally and justifiably right. But where does that leave Tavi? Our one furyless Aleran should

[28] Descola, p. 62.
[29] Mendlesohn, p. 66.
[30] Mendlesohn, p. 67.

theoretically be the least obligated to others as by their standards he is the least capable. However, Tavi repeatedly goes out of his way to help the people around him and in doing so he is acting out my theory, albeit in an unexpected fashion; as the only person without magic, he is in one sense, the most unique. Everyone has furycraft, but only Tavi has the ability of no furycraft. His perspective is contained entirely within himself, it is not diffused to any extent and so the way the power flows as a magiscape makes the social responsibility all his.

Consider that Aleran society, whilst very magical, is essentially blinded by its capabilities. They are unable to view other cultural groups as threats because those cultural groups cannot furycraft; they refuse to believe in their Romanic ancestry, as walls cannot be built without furycrafting. Even Tavi demonstrates the blinding affect that furycrafting can have; upon gaining furycraft, despite having already come to terms with his non-magical capabilities, he once more begins to doubt that he will ever be a strong leader because he cannot manifest a physical fury. In realising his magic he suddenly fits in to the Aleran mould that he has longed for all of his childhood. In finding himself "a part of the group" he immediately redefines himself by their standards and he is crippled by them.

By giving everyone magic, everyone in a way becomes non-magical, as no one is special or different. Tavi's status as the "furyless freak" is what lets him see the world in a different way. This is what decentres him, lets him be the agent of change and thereby realising magic as social responsibility.

The character of Tavi, by questioning and challenging the Aleran-centric context that he inhabits, provides a poignant commentary on discriminatory contemporary world-views and the difficulties that lie in adopting, for example, a Eurocentric, modern perspective in reality that consistently fails to be self-reflexive. The contrasts drawn between Tavi's outlook and the perspective of

Aleran society give a voice to the discussion surrounding the issues of addressing cultural differences.

The reader's vantage point inside Tavi's head shows the efficacy and benefit of accepting a transcultural view, while the Aleran society to which they are exposed displays the pitfalls of a closed-system view while also achieving a sense of realism by locating understandable reasons for adopting such a perspective. *The Codex Alera* steps back from reality and presents a world in which the reader, having been removed from their direct perspective, having been decentred, can encompass the complexities of this issue and question their own world-view be it Eurocentric or not.

Anthropology and Imagined Societies – The Third Space and Contact Zones

In order to gain full efficacy from treating fantasy as a social testing ground we must first understand the ways in which these worlds, these identities are socially constructed. The process of globalisation has brought to light the fallacy of the isolated nation, of the binary distinction between the West and the East, between modern and primitive, between self and other. In his 1994 book, *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states that

> [t]he pact of interpretation [between cultural groups] is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language

> and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot "in itself" be conscious.[31]

The Third Space is the site of the relationship rather than that of the agents or participants themselves. It is the "space" of discussion in which a distancing from the "I and the You" is achieved so that said discussion can performatively affect those agents involved in a way that without each other could not occur, as the agents cannot "be conscious" of themselves, cannot be self-reflexive without accepting and adopting that external perspective. Adopting this concept reinforces our ability to discuss the cultural rather than a culture, as Appadurai would put it, for it is the space in which the cultural can be examined as a 'heuristic device we can use to talk about difference.'[32] It is very much a concept that embraces Descola's goals for the reduction of the inhibiting binary while also allowing for the circumvention of the problems surrounding modernity's lack of self-reflexivity.

Taking the Third Space as a "space" of discussion, Mary Louise Pratt suggests that there exist contact zones, physical Third Spaces in which the "production of meaning" that Bhabha speaks about can be actualised. Contact zones are the sites or nodes at which a large proportion of interactions take place, the '"impassioned margin" where diverse cultures converge without merging';[33] essentially the sites of transculture. Pratt states that 'autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression—these are some of the

[31] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 37.
[32] Appadurai, p. 13.
[33] Perez-Firmat, p. 25.

literate arts of the contact zone.'[34] While 'miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread master pieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning […] are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone.'[35]

The transcultural interactions that can take place in a contact zone can be of great benefit in our attempt to re-assess our understanding of each other and ourselves in a globalised world, so long as one is aware of the potential pitfalls. Pratt uses the example of the 'transnationalized metropolis of the United States'[36] to talk about contact zones and Appadurai's discussion of globalisation also addresses the multitude of diasporic spaces within the United States. Using this contemporary structure as a basis it is easy to conceptualise the kinds of cultural interaction and modification that occur in even quotidian contact zones such as the person born and raised American having his or her world altered around them as they step into a taxi in Chicago as 'Pakistani cabdrivers [...] listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in mosques in Pakistan or Iran'.[37]

By looking at the contact zones presented in contemporary fantasy literature, and focusing on the conflicts through the lens of the magic systems, we can glean more about the cultural dynamics of each society as well as the transcultural dynamics taking place within the open space of the contact zone. Due to the Aleran-centric nature of *The Codex Alera* not many interactions between the other three races of Carna are explored, but the glimpses given intimate that transculturation is going on exclusive of, as well as inclusive of, the Alerans. As such, much of what is shown in the series explores the relationships

[34] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', in *Profession*, ed. by Phyllis Franklin (Modern Language Association of America, 1991), pp. 33-40 < http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469>, p. 37[accessed 18 June 2014].
[35] Pratt, p. 37.
[36] Pratt, p. 37.
[37] Appadurai, p. 4.

between the Alerans and each other race, with a definite slant in each case towards areas of friction between world-views.

The novels ultimately arrive at a point where these diverse groups can grow and live together once Tavi is able to fully open the closed Aleran system; so in the course of the novels what can be explored is the nature of the contact zones in which the seeds of change are planted. The contact zones present in *The Codex Alera* demonstrate fully how magic can act as a force of shaping that is externally divisive; the conflict and cultural interchange that take place in each contact zone highlights the ways in which the Aleran insular self-definition by furycraft separates societies and sustains barriers between them.

The Contact Zones of *The Codex Alera*

This next section will explore the contact zones presented in *The Codex Alera* to examine what they say about the cultural groups involved, to consider the role that physical Third Spaces play in transcultural interactions, as well as how these imagined societies can comment back upon our own reality. Each contact zone to be examined here is functionally a border between the Aleran people and one of the three other cultural groups on Carna. In each case the contact zone, in a literary sense, represents the relationship between the two cultural groups and, in a physical sense, shapes that relationship. It is in these places that meaning is realised as relationships are defined.

This discussion of contact zones will also serve to demonstrate the key role that magic is playing in the interactions, and illustrate its function as a more clearly visible social force, as a "magiscape". In each contact zone an understanding of the magic involved will aid in understanding the conflicts being

represented as, when conceived of as a flow of social power, the magiscape demonstrates how the literal power of the magic flows through a society to enforce value systems. Then, as different power flows from different cultural groups clash, that clash must then affect the direction or the implementation of those power flows.

The Alerans and The Canim

The relevant contact zone for inter-cultural interaction between the Canim people and the Aleran people is the leviathan-filled sea to the west; but to best understand the significance of this location we must first understand the conflicting cultural values at play within it. The Canim are a people whose society has a caste system consisting largely of "makers", the lowest, and most numerous, level of society; they are the craftsmen and farmers. The other two castes are the warriors and the ritualists who have differing levels of authority over each other depending on individual rank and situation.

There is a large sense of shared—and individual—responsibility and obligation in Canim society, with each caste performing a specific role. The best example of this comes in exploring the Canish magic system which is a type of blood magic. The ritualists use blood to bring about various effects such as blessing blood lines, increasing fertility, improving crops and altering the weather, to say nothing of the war magics they can also bring to bear. They can only provide these blessings through the use of blood and so when a Cane grows old they 'are willing to make a gift of their blood upon death,' Varg growled. 'Though there are times when a particularly powerful ritualist forgets that his

power should be used to serve his people. Not the other way around.'[38] The individual perspective of ritualists like Sarl, the Cane to whom Varg is referring here, who are willing to sacrifice their fellows for personal gain, shows that not every Cane is alike in their sense of societal obligation; however, the consensus view of such Canes, those who place individual success above supporting their people (a very Aleran worldview), is that they are disgraceful. By denying their obligation to others they destroy any obligation that others would have towards them. This societal system that relies on the ritualist's magic to continue to thrive reinforces the societal sense of obligation; the existence of magic in this way shapes how Canes view the world and their place in it.

Their perspective of mutual obligation on a basic societal level clashes in particular with the Aleran slavery institution; an institution that is sustained because of the top-down power hierarchy created by the system in which citizenship is based upon furycrafting ability. Varg cannot believe that not only does Alera enforce a policy by which people are made to sacrifice for no return, but that Alera would hunt down escaped slaves for pursuing basic self-determination, this is unthinkable to the Cane. The Canes are so appalled by this that even though they have arrived in Alera intending to be conquerors, they free the Aleran slaves that they come across, arming them and giving them a chance to live as they so choose. Nothing is more objectionable to the Canes than externally enforced sacrifice, for it belittles all that their own honour and obligation stands for.

It is worth noting that not all Alerans feel that slavery is an acceptable practice; in fact the Dianic League—whom I will be talking about in greater depth

[38] Jim Butcher, *Captain's Fury* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, p. 370.

in a later chapter—the political representation of women's rights in Alera, actively pursue the abolition of slavery.

The cultural dynamic between the Alerans and the Canes is hostile; neither side has any desire to learn from, or accept, the other. The Alerans, in their insulated bubble of furycraft-forged superiority, view the Canes as savages, often referring to them as 'Bastard dogs',[39] conjuring images of mangy strays, feral but no real threat; though they do hold a grudging respect for their physical strength. The Canes on the other hand, from their external position, can see the flaws in a system that favours individual might at the expense of the rest of society and so despise the Alerans for their inability, and lack of desire, to change or accept that their worldview could be altered to gain without losing. By focusing on the magic of each society it becomes clear why this relationship is so antagonistic.

The Aleran system favours the individual, and in their view that furycrafting might-makes-right, the magic pushes them to use others for personal gain. Furycrafting, when viewed this way, is a magic system which marginalises the weakest members of society, relegating them to positions almost outside of society. Aleran society places no value upon these marginalised individuals. This contrasts heavily with the Canish way of living in which everyone plays their part and all parts are valued for contributing. The Canish blood magic is deeply rooted in a sense of mutual obligation, in a system via which the ritualists improve the lives of the makers and in return the makers gift their blood to the ritualists upon death. Their magic system pushes for success through co-operation, insisting that mutual effort means mutual gain.

The contact zone through which most of the historical learning about each cultural group takes place is the western coast of Alera, and more significantly the

[39] Jim Butcher, *Cursor's Fury* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, p. 396.

leviathan-filled sea. It is here that these two societies meet and quite literally clash again and again. Their conflict here, between Canish raiding parties and Aleran legions defending their homes, gives insight into the unchanging nature of their relationship; like the tides of this sea, throughout history the Canim raiders have washed up to the shore, only to roll away again and again. The consensus reality of each of these peoples is embodied in the ways that these peoples interact with this oceanic contact zone.

The Canes are a more capable sea-faring race, they cross the ocean divide between continents in a massive fleet so that losing some ships to the leviathans is an acceptable sacrifice; it is the price that they are willing to pay for the greater, communal success. The Alerans on the other hand, have to rely on watercrafting to hide their passage from the leviathans or all of their ships would perish. Neither approach is safe or reliable. It is then significant that the most successful crossing ever undertaken is when the Alerans and the Canim return to Alera united in common purpose. The Canim sea-faring skills are combined with the Aleran furycrafting as great half-mile-wide ships are constructed out of icebergs to ferry the remnants of the now near-extinct Canim back across the sea.

In the following exchange we see an example of one Cane who cannot reconcile co-operating with the Alerans. His personal, closed-system perspective pushes him to needless sacrifice just to maintain his perceived superiority.

> The ritualist's eyes narrowed. 'We might lose a vessel here and there,' Khral acknowledged. 'But we would not owe our lives to the charity of the demons. A week, then we can begin to rebuild on our own.'
>
> 'Leave the ice ships,' Varg said. 'The same ships that are carrying more than half of our surviving people.'

> ‘Sacrifices must be made if we are to remain true to ourselves,’ Khral declared, ‘if our spirits, our pride, and our strength are to remain pure.’
>
> ‘I have noticed that those who speak as you do are rarely willing to include themselves among those sacrificed.’[40]

We see here that whilst change is difficult, it is clear that the co-operation between these two peoples is the only recourse for survival and future growth as for the Canes to attempt this crossing by themselves is to leave their families and society behind to die on the ice ships; in response to these objections, the Canim warmaster Varg states ‘I find it remarkable how often amateurs confuse courage with idiocy.’[41] He is very clearly aware that a naive attempt to preserve some form of isolationist purity simply because one refuses to accept other worldviews is only damaging; particularly in the face of undeniable proof that the co-operation is saving your species.

The violent ocean is a physical space that demonstrates the dangers of navigating transcultural conflict, both in the sense of physical danger and also, as we can see in the concern expressed above, in the fear of some form of cultural loss or homogeneity; through open communication it becomes a space that can be best navigated together. The worldview of the Canes that puts value on mutual effort, once recognised by the Alerans, enables them to put aside their individual drives and, by combining their furycrafting ability with the seafaring talents of the Canim, they accomplish something otherwise impossible where no ships are lost in crossing the leviathan sea. The interactions within this contact zone change the nature of both cultural groups as well as that of the zone itself as both become easier to traverse.

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[40] Jim Butcher, *First Lord’s Fury* (London: Hachette Digital, 2010), Kindle ebook, pp. 13-4.
[41] Butcher, *First Lord’s Fury*, p. 13.

Alerans and Marat

The relationship between the Aleran and Marat peoples is similar to the Aleran-Canim relationship in that it is antagonistic; however, in this case there is far more specific tension between the groups than a general history of warfare. In the more immediate history, before *Furies of Calderon* begins, Gaius Sextus' son, Septimus, was stationed with a legion in the supposedly safe, out of the way, Calderon Valley—the land bridge between the continents of Alera and Maratea. A Marat raiding party caught the legion by surprise and the heir, who was much loved by the people, was slaughtered. While ultimately it is revealed that the attack was orchestrated by rival Aleran lords, the attack changed the landscape of the Calderon Valley and solidified the nature of Aleran-Marat inter-cultural relationships for the foreseeable future.

Physically the Calderon Valley is an interesting location; lush and green, it is primarily farm land, the agrarian social structure revolving around a number of steadholds who owe fealty to High Lord Riva. The steadholds offer interesting insight into the cultural values of Aleran society in that those who live there are called freemen; from an outside perspective this seems like a favourable signifier, however it seems to exist solely as a better way of saying "not-slave", for freemen are not Citizens and do not have rights. To become a Citizen, an Aleran must duel an existing Citizen with furycraft. The Steadholder, the man who leads a steadhold (and for whom the steadhold is named) holds the rights of a Citizen but only upon the land that he oversees.

On the surface level, the lives of Aleran steadholders in the Calderon Valley seem free and easy, but the Aleran social structure and value system subtly underpins everything; while they are seemingly free, they are actually trapped on

the fringes of society, looked down upon by their own people. Even though there are many powerful magic users who are steadholders, after they serve their mandatory time in the legions their abilities are discounted as obviously less than that of Citizens because, as far as the upper class Alerans are concerned, if they could be Citizens then they would be Citizens. This is essentially an image of the magiscape as a flow of power that moves downwards from the privileged top of society to marginalise the relevance and agency of the bottom of society.

The valley is a powerful contact zone in that, as I mentioned above, it establishes the relationship between these two cultural groups, as well as being the only physical connection between them. It also offers great insight into Aleran society from within and without. While the strange in-between status of the steadholds comments upon the difficulties inherent in the Aleran cultural value system, it is the view that the Marat have formed of the Alerans that is truly telling.

As with the Canim and the Alerans, the magic system of the Marat mirrors and shapes the core cultural values of this group. Marat cultural values starkly contrast the individualistic, pseudo-meritocratic nature of Alera in that one could easily describe the Marat as a fundamentally group-oriented, open minded people. As a young Marat comes of age, he or she forms a magical bond with an animal, referred to as a *chala* or totem. This animal will accompany them their entire life. The relationship that forms between bonded partners is one of mutual benefit, with increased abilities such as strength or speed for the Marat, and increased levels of sentience for the animal. However, this bonding is not done for personal gain; it is fundamentally concerned with learning another way of living life, of viewing the world.

Those people who bond a particular animal come together to form a tribe with others sharing similar bonds and as such, over time, old tribes fade away, and new tribes are formed. Marat share an oral tradition, so as each generation grows old they pass on the things that they have learned from their *chala* to the next, with each experience shared given great weight and importance. The Marat are almost a direct opposite to the Alerans, in that their way of life, embodied in and shaped by this magic system, not only functions as a transcultural open-system, but more significantly it is an intentionally *active* open-system in which participants seek out the new and the different to transform what they currently know; full in the knowledge that they can never be finished learning, finished growing. Rather than the top-down, discriminatory power flow of Aleran furycrafting, the magiscape of the Marat *chala* can be envisioned as a circle. It flows evenly through their society in a decidedly non-hierarchical manner, advocating and supporting acceptance of others rather than a marginalisation of difference.

A Marat's life is lived in harmony with her *chala* and it is this—the Marat magic system of animal companions—that leads to the negative view that they have of Alerans. Fidelias describes the Marat perspective:

> Look, Aldrick. The Marat don't have the same notion of individuality that we do. Their whole culture is based around totems. Their tribes are built upon commonality of totem animals. If a man has a powerful totem, then he is a formidable man. But if the man has to hide behind his totem, instead of fighting beside it, then it makes him somewhat contemptible. They've called us the Dead Tribe. They regard armor and weaponry as our totem—dead

> earth. We hide behind our dead totems rather than going into battle beside them. Do you see?'[42]

This view exposes a key flaw in the Aleran perspective. Alerans, consumed in their pursuit of individual success, claim the prowess and ability granted by their weapons, and by their furies, as their own. It is not unlike a High Lord's armies claiming victory, where it is the High Lord who is praised rather than the lower classes who bled for him. In the Marat tribes, when a dispute needs to be settled, the Clan-chiefs do not call their tribes to war, instead they 'hold trial before The One, and discover who is correct',[43] which amounts to single combat under the judgement of the sun with the victor judged righteous and the matter settled. While at first glance this seems a brutal way to resolve disputes, it is at least immediately accountable, and it is not that different to the Aleran fight for Citizenship considering that to lose that fight is to not be awarded human rights.

These two clearly opposed perspectives bring to the foreground a discussion concerning the emphasis that contemporary western society places upon individualism and the flaws in a system that is spoken about as if it rewards an individual's own merit, but in fact is set up to disproportionately continue to further reward those in privileged positions rather than benefit for the good of everyone; false meritocracies can only increase marginalisation as the opportunities for success are narrowed by the narrow, top-down focus of the system.

The more communal nature of the Marat people actively seeks new insights to add to the shared knowledge pool and each individual is accountable for not only their own actions, but for the people who live alongside them also; the Marat clearly represent an actively open system and embrace an understanding

[42] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 127.
[43] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 226.

of the interwoven meshwork of life—a term of Ingold's that will be further discussed in the next chapter. For, much as the magic of the Marat is a bond, a sort of symbiosis, that embraces other perspectives and in this way shapes the foundations of a barrier between the Marat and the Alerans—one rooted in the Marat disgust for the Aleran closed-system, judgemental perspective—fundamentally the nature of the magic is an externally accepting bond. Change is realised, as it inevitably must be after a sustained force of shaping—a sustained stagnation of relations—as a new bond is forged through the interactions forced by the contact zone.

The Calderon Valley then becomes a very fluid contact zone. Historically representing a massacre between peoples, it becomes the site in which Tavi, an individual pursuing open-system change, brings about resolution to a schism within the Marat people, and in turn leads to a forging of Aleran-Marat alliances. As the relationship between two peoples is located in this site, as the nature of the contact zone changes from the place of a massacre to a place of aid, that change must necessarily radiate outwards to affect the both the cultural relationship and the cultural groups as whole entities.

The climax of *Furies of Calderon* involves a large battle at Garrison, the last fortified location on Alera's eastern border, between the steadholders of the valley and a rogue Marat tribe that has been coerced by one Aleran High Lord's illegal militia in an attempt to murder an Aleran Citizen, Amara, who has proof of High Lord Aquitaine's treason. What begins as a reaffirmation of historical relations turns into a reunification as Tavi brings the rest of the Marat tribes to fight alongside the steadholders. A reunification that is able to be realised because Tavi brings together two perspectives. He becomes *chala* for a young Marat girl named Kitai and in this way becomes a part of the Marat community, a part of

their magic system. This, coupled with his lack of Aleran furycrafting that could blind him to external perspectives, allows him to be the vehicle for change and transcultural interaction. For even though resentment runs deep in the Calderon Valley, 'What if I say we're not your enemy?',[44] what if one small boy is bold enough to open his mind to a reality different to the one he has been fed his entire life? What if 'in that dire moment of uncertainty, that person's decision, good or bad, right or wrong, big or small, can unwittingly change the world.'?[45]

Alerans and Icemen

The thoughts of the character Isana bring to light the impact, on both the Alerans and the Icemen, of a domineering contact zone in the form of Alera's Shieldwall to the north:

> Did the Icemen still tell stories of the empty hills that were suddenly rived by the great Wall? She had been told that the engineers that built it had raised the Wall in sections about half a mile long […] Isana could hardly imagine how many artisans and Citizens had been required to complete its construction. If it seemed that way to her, what must it seem like to one of the enemy? Something out of a nightmare, perhaps, a fortress wall that spanned the length of a continent. A wall that resisted any efforts to break it down, a wall that was always watchful, always guarded, always sure to spill forth Aleran legionares, no matter how stealthily or carefully the Icemen approached. Alerans saw the Shieldwall as a massive defensive construction. How might

[44] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 226.
[45] Butcher, *Furies of Calderon*, p. 2.

> the Icemen view it? As a massive prison wall? As the first of what might be many such barriers, each encroaching upon more of their territory? […] Impossible to say, since no one had asked. Or at least, no one of whom Isana was aware.[46]

The wall functions both as a barrier to the Icemen, but also as a pedestal from which the Alerans can look down upon the Icemen, with their perception of superiority only enforced by their continued success in holding the wall. The Shieldwall is easily as dangerous as the leviathan-filled sea to the west, and just as steeped in bloody history as the Calderon Valley to the East; much as in the other contact zones, we can see again that the conflict can be rooted in the magic.

Each element of furycrafting—fire, water, earth, wind, wood, metal—has multiple levels of usage. On a simple physical level there is the elemental manipulation: creating fireballs, flight, moving water. However, there are more complex and subtle uses of craft, and in the case of fire and water, they relate significantly to emotions. One of the most explored facets of this magic system, through the perspective of Isana, is a watercrafter's sensitivity to the emotions of others. Watercrafters are healers, and it seems that the connection with others that healing requires has a side effect: the stronger the watercrafter the more one can literally feel the emotions of others, sometimes to the point of being overwhelmed. In a political landscape this is obviously very useful for lying and catching lies, but for Isana, a woman who has no metalcraft for strength to resist the pressure of external emotions, the watercrafting makes her honest. It makes her consider the experience of others because it is undeniably different.

While water is the element of controlling and experiencing emotion, fire is the element that stokes emotions. On a number of occasions throughout the series

[46] Jim Butcher, *Princeps' Fury* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, pp. 243-4.

we see politicians using firecraft to stir the passions of the crowd they are speaking to, and High Lords summoning great fear into the opposing armies. At the Shieldwall these two forces of magic come together in an unexpected way to shape and maintain the hostile relationship between the Alerans and the Icemen. The Icemen 'are already watercrafting, whether they realize it or not';[47] their magic system is one that permeates their society more than Canish sacrificial blood magic, Marat *chala*, and even Aleran furycrafting. For the Icemen, their magic system is their way of being, so fundamentally tied to their existence that it becomes a part of their communication. Using a seemingly instinctive form of watercrafting, the Icemen have the ability to manipulate ice and snow unlike any Aleran crafter; but what is more relevant here is that they, similar to Isana, embrace the emotional openness of watercrafting. When tentative peace talks are opened, Isana witnesses a level of communication unlike anything she has ever seen:

> Big Shoulders, apparently the leader of the group, narrowed his eyes to slits, staring at Doroga. Then he simply looked around the circle of Icemen. Isana felt a sudden surge of emotion, a mixture of feelings so complex and tangled that she could not possibly have given it a name. There was no source to the feeling—just the sensation itself, as loud and as clear and as pure as the emotions of an infant suddenly finding itself hungry or uncomfortable. Had it been a physical sound, it would have left her ears ringing. Even so, the sensation was overwhelming. She shuddered and swayed in place. The Icemen, meanwhile, moved as a group, careful to come no closer to the Alerans as they all gathered behind Big

[47] Butcher, *First Lord's Fury*, p. 686.

> Shoulders, watching the Alerans from beneath heavy, shaggy brows. None of them spoke. None of them spoke.[48]

Much as actions speak louder than words for the Canes, emotions are seen as the best indicator of intent for the Icemen. This is where the firecrafting comes into it. Every Aleran Legionare on the Shieldwall is taught a basic firecrafting to warm themselves from the inside upon the cold northern wall. The unintended side-effect of this firecrafting is that to the Icemen it feels like hostility and that emotional reception overrides any other indicator that could conceivably come from the Alerans; while at the same time on the other side, the firecrafting, resonating against the emotional communication of the Icemen, stokes the hatred and resentment that the Alerans feel for the Icemen. It is a harsh, unintended cycle that has persisted for three hundred years, all of the Icemen feeling hatred and judgement from on high as the Shieldwall pens them in; all of the Alerans fuelling their hatred and judgement with every death, every battle. The firecrafting closes them off from even noticing the Icemen perspective, and it takes Isana, a person who cannot help but live as an open-system, to take on their perspective and let it change her opinion on the situation.

Much as in other cases where the Aleran furycrafting capabilities have blinded them to those less capable, the Shieldwall colours any and all interaction between these two peoples. Pratt describes 'miscomprehension, [and] incomprehension'[49] as 'some of the perils of writing in the contact zone'[50] but that by working within the contact zone these issues can become 'more widely visible, more pressing and […] more decipherable to those who once would have ignored

[48] Butcher, *Princeps' Fury*, pp. 248-9.
[49] Pratt, p. 37.
[50] Pratt, p. 37.

them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality.'[51] Thus the Shieldwall is complicated in that its situation causes conflict, however because of that conflict it forces these kinds of transcultural interactions to take place which create more opportunities for changes in perspective than would take place without the Shieldwall.

Another way of conceptualising this conflict is that the magic system, the clash between the firecrafting and the watercrafting, shapes the antagonistic, closed-off relationship between the Alerans and the Icemen; but just as the magic shapes the relationship, so too must it create the possibility for change; a possibility which lies in the emotional openness of watercrafting, which in turn represents a willingness to communicate, to accept other, external perspectives. Clearly the cultural differences and difficulties being explored here have no direct connections to those in the real world, and this is intentional in contemporary fantasy's distancing from straight allegory; however what exposure to the Aleran worldview and, perhaps more significantly, to their interactions with other cultural groups, demonstrates is the dangers of denying Third Space exploration, of stagnating in a closed system, while the progression of the novels, in contrast, lauds the efficacy of such exploration.

Contact Zones and Tavi

I believe we can effectively apply the thinking surrounding contact zones to certain characters, in this case the protagonist Tavi, to examine how, within the literature, people can act as mobile contact zones. Tavi is an interesting protagonist in that his unique circumstances beneath, and then above Aleran

[51] Pratt, p. 37.

society, both furyless and then powerful furycrafter, has created in him a perpetually open world-view, affecting and being affected by everyone that he meets. He in this sense acts as a mobile contact zone between all of the cultural groups.

An important facet of Tavi's journey, and his fringe status, is that he begins as a literal child and, in relation to others he deals with, remains in a like position. In his discussion of children's fantasy, John H. Timmerman describes that '[i]n Dickens' depiction, the child moves among men as an outcast, yet touches individual lives with transforming power.'[52] Timmerman goes on to set out four things that the child embodies in Dickens' novels: they have an innate ability to see through sham; they are able to maintain purity and innocence; they are able to hold on to their imagination; and they seek freedom.[53] This is an insightful approach and relevant to looking at the role that Tavi plays in the codex. The image of the child as an "outcast" who "transforms lives" is the perfect way to describe Tavi. He is always the outcast, even when loved and accepted. His personal history, and his association with cultures outside his own, mean that Tavi is the one who can seek freedom, can imagine a better future, can see the Aleran ideal of might making right for the "sham" that it is.

So while Tavi capitalises upon his furycraft to finally defeat the Vord queen and save Alera from destruction, the sense given at the end of the last novel is that the great acts of heroism are not what the history books will remember Tavi for. The writings of the various First Lords presented in each novel provide excellent insight into how lasting change is achieved. Ultimately it is not

[52] John H. Timmerman, *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1983), p. 37.
[53] Timmerman, pp. 37-8.

furycrafting strength that defines the family of Gaius, it is their ability to see further ahead than anyone else.

In *Furies of Calderon* the writings of Gaius the First tell us that it is often the smallest actions, the unseen individuals, who shape history; while Gaius Sextus speaks strongly of the tough decisions and sacrifice that authority requires. Tavi's own writings, in his role as Gaius at the end of the series, speak less of grand deeds and more of worries as to how to ensure the survival of not only Aleran cultural aspects, but also of the Canim, Marat, and Icemen in the days to come. What the progression of novels suggest is that Aleran society has only ever been looking backwards and inwards, defining itself by the past success of its legions and furycrafting. Those two things *are* Alera in the eyes of consensus society. It is Tavi who is able to look forwards and outwards, to realise that to live as a closed system is to willingly condemn themselves to extinction through stagnation.

One of the dangers of the contact zone is one of its greatest strengths: it forces increased cross-cultural interactions. That is to say, the interactions in these places, at the Shieldwall or in the Calderon Valley, are going to happen regardless of either group's intentions. So in this way the negative associations, the war and the death, performatively perpetuate the closed-system perspectives:

> 'My people usually skip straight to the killing. So do theirs.'
>
> 'You think this wrong?'
>
> 'I think . . .' Tavi said, frowning. 'I think that it's been going on for so long, neither of us can consider the possibility of stopping it. There's too much history. Too much blood.'
>
> 'In your place, they would not bleed for you.'

‘Doesn’t matter,’ Tavi said. ‘It isn’t about being fair and equal. It’s about the difference between right and wrong.’[54]

The contemporary globalised world of reality obviously faces much more complicated issues of cultural difference than that of *The Codex Alera*; with many more cultural groups than the four exhibited in this narrative, and each of them interacting on increasing levels, the issues faced in approaching cross-cultural clashes are far more complex. However, the exploration of the contact zones, and the positive change that is realised through open-system interaction, through that Third Space discussion in Alera, all suggests that the first step to achieving positive change and open acceptance lies in adopting an external perspective such that a level of self-reflexivity can be achieved. The stagnation caused by the Aleran-centric perspective, rooted in its magical prowess, and the flow-on effects of marginalisation, both externally and internally, clearly demonstrates to the reader the flaws in a system that fails to both recognise the relevance of other perspectives and fails to be fully self-aware of its own flows of social power.

[54] Butcher, *Cursor’s Fury*, pp. 642-3.

Chapter 3 - Magic, Identity, Agency, and Perception

John Clute states that 'in an immersive fantasy, what is storyable is not the discovery of the world (in which we are immersed) but its loss. From within the river flows away.'[1] While this is true I feel that loss is often misleading. It is the slowly unfolding narrative structure of the immersive, where full clarity and understanding is achieved in post-conclusion hindsight, that allows for a dramatic change in the initial world to which the reader was introduced. This is often, especially in the case of Sanderson's work, used to depict at first a breaking down, but ultimately, a rebuilding of society to heal fissures or overcome stagnation. In this way, while there is a loss of the established world, it should have positive connotations rather than the negative connotations that the word "loss" can bring.

Suffice then to say that the nature of immersive fantasy is to explore a deep and abiding change in the world; not only functionally but also in perception. This idea of a shift in perception derived from the nature of the literary structure, in a sense derived from the magic itself, is what this chapter will be discussing. For as the magic shapes identity, as it establishes the boundaries of the self and of society—which in turn constructs the self—so too must it shape perception; which is to say that already embraced or already existing magic shapes identity, so therefore discovering magic, having it enter your life, must change how you perceive yourself and the world around you. In this way the shift in perception of a character gaining magic mirrors the shift in perception that a fantasy novel can achieve in the reader.

[1] John Clute, cited in Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) p. 61.

Through the previous chapter's discussion of contact zones within *The Codex Alera* we have been able to turn to magic as an example of the invisible social forces that clash when transcultural interactions take place. In order to better understand the significance of magic within this genre of literature we need to more deeply assess how and why it is able to generate such powerful effects as to play large roles in the creation, sustaining, and potential change of large and small scale identities. The aim of this chapter is to establish the agency of magic itself and how it is able to realise change and affect identities through its connection to perception. Ultimately the act of gaining, discovering, and using magic can be viewed as metaphorically representative of a change in perspective as well as, in the context of the narrative, literally providing an impetus to change how one perceives the world.

Adopting a New Materialisms perspective (defined below) allows us to recognise the agency of magic itself and by introducing Ingold's concept of the meshwork we can better realise the nature of all things as intertwined; and that magic, as an agent, must therefore also be interwoven into the smaller meshworks of individuals, as well as the larger meshworks of reality. Fundamentally it is by adopting an understanding of the interwoven meshwork of all things that one must grasp the connection of relevance between the fantasy world, the imagined societies, and the concerns of reality.

A globalised push towards the reduction of binary thinking requires a change in the way that we think about the things, the objects, the material that surrounds us and makes up our world. The traditional view of material states has been that 'material objects are identifiably discrete; they move only upon an

encounter with an external force or agent.'[2] However this diminishes the impact and relevance that material has on diverse aspects of life. Consider the simple example of a chair. When you place a chair in a room it immediately alters your perspective of that room, changes the shape, the feel of it. Sitting in the chair affects your spine, affects your mood, and state of mind. "To chair" is just as valid a verb as "to be", it is in fact just a specific way of being, a way of acting. The chair in the room has agency over its environment, over its existence, just as people do over their environments and existences. It is important to note here, as Ingold does, that

> [w]e are not required to believe that the wind is a being that blows, or that thunder is a being that claps. Rather the wind *is* blowing, and the thunder *is* clapping, just as organisms and persons are living in the ways peculiar to each.[3]

The chair is a very simple example that comments little upon the ways in which material can impact cultural values, religions, politics, and movements through the global economy. If we accept first that our interactions with a material object inform that object's identity, and then also accept that, like the chair example above, our interactions with that material also in turn inform our own state, our own identity, then we must in this way accept the agency of material.

Consider instead a more intimate example of a family heirloom. This is an object that literally moves through the world, being passed from person to person. Each time it retains the meaning ascribed to it from the previous owner, from its history and experiences, and in intertwining its life, its identity with a new owner

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[2] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, 'Introducing the New Materialisms', in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-5 (p. 7).

[3] Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 73.

it takes on new meaning and alters the lives of those with whom it intertwines. While the movement of material may be more limited on its own it nonetheless has an agency that is located in its ability to interact with and transform other agents. What if, in an attempt to eliminate an aspect of a closed system perspective, we opened our understanding of reality to embrace the impact of objects, the agency of material? What if we 'took more seriously the idea that technological and natural materialities were themselves actors alongside and within us'?[4] Most significantly, what if we applied this way of thinking to magic?

A representation of the agency of magic can be found in *The Codex Alera.* Butcher presents an academic debate concerning what the Alerans refer to as 'Anthropomorphic Theorem.'[5] This offers an exploration of the agency of magic through a lens of personification. Furycrafting, while at its core a form of elemental manipulation, involves the use of a fury directed by the crafter to obtain a result. Most Citizens, those Alerans with rights who generally live in the cities, hold to the 'Imposed Anthropomorphic Theory.'[6] They believe, in their very Aleran-centric way, that the interaction of their thoughts with the furies unintentionally gives the furies a form or shape; these Citizens look down upon those, like most of the steadholders, who believe in the 'Natural Anthropomorphic Theory.'[7] The natural theory states that furies are discrete entities with ties to places, temperaments, and different skills. Steadholders tend to name their furies, an act that Citizens laugh at and will often beat such foolish notions out of their more idealistic children.

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[4] Jane Bennett, 'A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism', in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 48-69 (pp. 47).

[5] Butcher, *Academ's Fury*, chap. 18.

[6] Butcher, *Academ's Fury*, chap. 18.

[7] Butcher, *Academ's Fury*, chap. 18.

As the novels progress, both perspectives are explored and it seems that there is some truth to both views. The reader is introduced to Citizens, even High Lords and Ladies who have named their furies; as Tavi comes into his magic he is taught, in the case of windcrafting for example, to gather together multitudes of tiny, nameless furies, almost like molecules, in order to accumulate enough wind to gain lift. The mountain Garados, feared by the steadholders of the Calderon Valley, in the series' climactic battle, rises up in a great rocky figure to defend his territory.

Ultimately Tavi meets Alera, the fury of the country. She is remarkable in the sense that her essence was gathered from all the diverse places in Alera. Her identity, as we are introduced to it, came to be through the process of Aleran unification and she, as an entity, is dispersed when the Vord destroy most of Alera (the country). The progression of the novels suggests that furies do in fact have their own identities; they are defined by their environments, their histories, but these identities are also shaped by their interactions with the Aleran peoples. Nothing so clearly demonstrates that magic is an active agent, a force of shaping and change, in fantasy literature than this presentation of magic's own identity, furycrafting's whole identity, existing as it does due to people as much as its interplay with people changes their lives and identities. We can see in this world, the magic as an '[actor] alongside and within us.'[8]

I use the example of *The Codex Alera* to establish the agency of magic because it demonstrates that agency can be perceived in the interaction between agents. Identity is established and changed when it encounters other identities; therefore if people are changed by magic, and magic changes people, it must have its own agency. We can more firmly ground this idea by placing it in the context

[8] Bennett, p. 47.

of Ingold's idea of the meshwork which states that 'the world we inhabit [is][…] not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines [in which][…] Action, then, emerges from the interplay of forces along the lines of the meshwork.'[9]

Ingold's ideas have been heavily influenced by the work on perception by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Ingold states that 'life is lived along *lines*';[10] his perspective is that everything is in a constant state of becoming, referencing himself Merleau-Ponty's statement that one's perspective is 'not of things in a world, but of things becoming things, and of the world becoming a world.'[11] Ingold's theory suggests that all things, all agents, are defined by each and every interaction between other agents, and the origins of this theory in Merleau-Ponty's ideas about perspective suggest that identity in this way is something that is constantly being created and changed. In this way an object or an agent, such as magic, is not something understood in totality, 'it is rather a totality open to the horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a certain style, a style which defines the object in question.'[12]

What is key here is the way that Merleau-Ponty describes that an agent is not only defined by the ways in which it is perceived, but that the "horizon" or the borderlines of its definition are described as being open. This view of perception aligns with a transcultural perspective in which definition is achieved through the

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[9] Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 63-4.
[10] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 4.
[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and mind', trans. C. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by J.M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp.159 -90, in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* by Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 69.
[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences', in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. by Leonard Lawlor and Ted Toadvine (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 89-118 (p. 92).

interaction between open cultural systems, as well as a meshwork perspective that growth and change are achieved in the intertwining of meshworks, of agencies. What this then suggests is that if the way an agent is being perceived can be changed, then the identity of that agent must change along with it.

This concept is acted out in Sanderson's novella, *The Emperor's Soul.* In this novella, Sanderson describes the core functionality of his universe, the character Shai states that

> [t]he Cognitive [realm] is how an object is viewed and how it views itself. The Spiritual Realm contains an object's soul—its essence—as well as the ways that it is connected to the things and people around it.[13]

This base structure of the universe, the makeup of things and people, argues that there is identity shaped by self-perception and the perception of others—viewing and being viewed—and that the "soul" of an agent is connected to "the things and people around it"; the way that Sanderson's world functions, demonstrates to the reader the ways in which acts of perception, due to the intertwined meshwork of the immersive world, can change identity. It makes this clear by bringing about change through the magic system.

Realmatic Theory organises each of Sanderson's worlds into their physical, spiritual, and cognitive elements and allows us to break down the magic systems to look at the impact of each element. This approach is usually applied in the analysis of a text, however with *The Emperor's Soul* the magic of Forgery relies entirely upon an understanding of this universal structure by the characters, in that, without an understanding of this structure, of how identity is shaped and changed, a practitioner of the magic could not utilise the system. In the simplest sense

[13] Sanderson, *The Emperor's Soul*, p. 53.

Forgery is an art by which you transform an object, or person, by means of a seal inscribed with the subject's history inclusive of any new changes desired. The more closely related to the actual history of the subject, and the more plausible the changes, then the more effective and permanent the changes will be. Shai, *The Emperor's Soul*'s protagonist, states that a Forger is 'an artist who paint[s] with human perception.'[14] In this one short quote we can already see the connection being drawn between, first, all change as being connected to a change in perception and, second, between that perceptual, and then literal change, being brought about via the application of magic.

A Forger studies, or reasons out, an object's history, where it came from, how it came to be here in this state, and then can make alterations in line with an object's identity. For example, Shai Forges a cracked, broken window into a beautiful stained glass window:

> Attempts to Forge the window to a better version of itself had repeatedly failed; each time, after five minutes or so, the window had reverted to its cracked, gap-sided self. Then Shai had found a bit of colored glass rammed into one side of the frame. The window, she realized, had once been a stained glass piece, like many in the palace. It had been broken, and whatever had shattered the window had also bent the frame, producing those gaps that let in the frigid breeze. Rather than repairing it as it had been meant to be, someone had put ordinary glass into the window and left it to crack. A stamp from Shai in the bottom right corner had restored the window, rewriting its history so that a caring craftsman had discovered the fallen window and remade it.

[14] Sanderson, *The Emperor's Soul* , p. 83

> That seal had taken immediately. Even after all this time, the window had seen itself as something beautiful.[15]

What this passage demonstrates is how Forging is reliant upon both the Spiritual and the Cognitive to generate results. Everything has a unique Spiritual identity, but that identity can be shaped by a Cognitive intention, by an interaction with another agent. *The Emperor's Soul* however is not just a meditation upon art, it is deeply invested in the way that the agency of people, and of objects, intertwine and affect each other.

What these ideas build to is a visualisation of the "meshwork", the idea that agents within the world exist as a meshwork of interwoven lines. This is very specifically not a point-to-point network; Ingold holds that true meaning lies in the movement itself, in the lines of the meshwork not the points or supposed destinations that a "network" image might suggest. Instead interaction between individual's meshworks are envisioned as "knots" where lines of meaning interact and form new parts of a larger meshwork.

This perspective, I feel, has an important place alongside our discussion of the Third Space, contact zones, and the agency of objects in that it very much embraces a globalised perspective of open systems that are constantly interacting and changing. We can see this in how Ingold views an agent 'not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space.'[16] Applying this way of thinking to *The Emperor's Soul* highlights a mirroring of ideas; Ingold states that 'things are their relations',[17] and that 'the properties of materials, in short, are not attributes, but histories.'[18] When Shai goes to Forge an object she has to consider what the item has been in order to see

[15] Sanderson, *The Emperor's Soul*, pp. 65-6.
[16] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 64.
[17] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 70.
[18] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 32.

what it is becoming; the Forgery, the magic, is then merely an instigator of inevitable change, a stepping stone towards further fulfilling the agent's potential, a force that continues the agent's becoming.

The meshwork, when approached from the early stages in the life of an agent, is a simple enough concept to grasp; however as life progresses along these "lines of becoming" it rapidly spreads, creating more and more knots as agent meets agent, as agent moves through its environment. Each instance of interaction adds or changes lines in the agent's meshwork: 'Action [or change], then, emerges from the interplay of forces conducted along the lines of the meshwork.'[19]

What the magic in *The Emperor's Soul* offers us is a tangible example, a material example, of these forces at play, of how one agent's perspective, essentially their meshwork, upon interacting with another can bring drastic change. Forgery, then, is a magic system in which the reader is shown perhaps the most immediately visible representation of social forces—in this case perception—acting upon an agent in order to change its identity that was heretofore shaped by its history, by its context; through this change brought about by magic, the agent has now undergone a new shaping, a new establishment of its identity—the window as stained glass, as more of itself—that will ultimately change again, and continue to change, with each intertwining of each agent it encounters.

Perception, when envisioned as a "force conducted along the lines of the meshwork", is a key concept in understanding the role that magic plays as being socially constructive as, once an agent gains the ability to use magic, once they are introduced to this force, their perspective shifts, and in that shift of their

[19] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 64.

perception is located the potential for realising change. Whilst as first glance it may seem that perception is passive, what Merleau-Ponty's work suggests is that perception is a performative act in which both the 'seer and the thing'[20] are constructed. He describes how one cannot touch an object without also at the same time being touched by that object. In this way the act of perception is mutually constructive; just as Aleran society is shaped by the magic of furycrafting, so too can we see the magic of furycrafting – personified in the fury of the country Alera itself – being shaped by Aleran society.

Merleau-Ponty states that:

> [i]t is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the things of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.[21]

Which is to say that the "flesh", or the relationship, or the meshwork intertwining the "seer" and the "things" tells you as much about the identity of the object as it does the person; it is in this way that perception is mutually constitutive. The "flesh" that he describes here is essentially an image of the meshwork, of a Third Space discussion or interaction through which agencies intertwine and modify each other.

The passage above demonstrates how, in *The Emperor's* Soul, Shai uses the Forgery to "communicate" with objects, to suggest to them different ways of being perceived such that the way they are seen can be changed. It is thus that the broken window becomes a beautiful stained glass one; much as a child, being told they are smart and confident, grows in these ways, so the act of perceiving an agent performatively modifies the meshwork of their identity such that they

[20] *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p. 397.
[21] *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p. 397.

change and in that change come to be perceived in a new light which only reinforces that change. 'Suddenly the story she tells herself in her own head changes. She transforms. She isn't *seen as beautiful*. She is *beautiful, seen*.'[22] I have noted here the idea that perception is performative and I say this in the context of performativity being an identity forming and altering speech act which constitutes an agent 'through repeated behavioural acts, and through the juxtaposition of those acts with the norms of the society in which they occur.'[23]

Turn now to this extract from the second novel – *Words of Radiance* – in Sanderson's *Stormlight Archive*, in which the characters Shallan and Pattern, trapped on a ship in the Physical Realm with assassins, enter into the Cognitive Realm in an attempt to use the magic of Soulcasting to sink the ship.

> Trees, like growing crystal, clustered here and there. The limbs were spiky and glassy, without leaves. Nearby, little lights hung in the air, flames without their candles. *People*, she realized. *Those are each a person's mind, reflected here in the Cognitive Realm.* Smaller ones were scattered about her feet, dozens upon dozens, but so small she almost couldn't make them out. *The minds of fish?*
>
> […]
>
> "Go," he said. "Choose."
>
> "Choose what?" she said, Stormlight escaping her lips.
>
> "Your ship."

[22] Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind* (London: Gollancz, 2007), p. 658.
[23] Matthew Wagner, 'Performativity and Cultural Studies', in *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Michael Ryan (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011) <http://search.credoreference.com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/content/title/wileylitcul> [accessed 2 Feb 2015].

> He did not have eyes, but she thought she could follow his gaze toward one of the little spheres on the glassy ground. She snatched it, and suddenly was given the impression of a ship.
>
> The *Wind's Pleasure*. A ship that had been cared for, loved. It had carried its passengers well for years and years, owned by Tozbek and his father before him. An old ship, but not ancient, still reliable. A proud ship. It manifested here as a sphere.
>
> It could actually think. The ship could think. Or…well, it reflected the thoughts of the people who served on it, knew it, thought about it.[24]

The first facet of this scene worth noting is the way in which the ship, an object, has its own agency, its own identity; it has a purpose as a ship, as that which cares for its crew. Much as the minds of people are reflected in this realm so too is the "mind" of the ship, a representation of its identity and existence. It "reflected the thoughts of the people who served on it, knew it, thought about it." The sailor's interactions with the ship define the ship, but equally so the ship's caring for them defines their lives; without a ship they are not sailors, without a strong ship they might be dead at sea. Each time a sailor carefully polishes the wood, and thinks fondly of the ship, names the ship, the *Wind's Pleasure*'s identity is reinforced through that repetition. The act of perceiving it in this way imprints and sustains that identity through that space of interaction between agents.

> "I need you to change," Shallan whispered to it […]
>
> "No," the reply came, […] "No, I cannot. I must serve. I am happy."
>
> […]
>
> "I have stormlight. Lots of it. I will give it to you."

[24] Sanderson, *Words of Radiance*, pp. 119-20.

> "No!" the reply seemed angry. "I serve."
>
> It really wanted to stay a ship. She could feel it, the pride it took, the reinforcement of years of service.
>
> "They are dying," she whispered.
>
> "No!"
>
> "You can feel them dying. Their blood on your deck. One by one, the people you serve will be cut down."
>
> She could feel it herself, could see it in the ship. They were being executed. Nearby, one of the floating candles vanished. Three of the eight captives dead, though she did not know which ones.
>
> "There is only one chance to save them," Shallan said. "And that is to change."
>
> "Change," Pattern whispered for the ship.
>
> "If you change, they might escape the evil men who kill," Shallan whispered. "It is uncertain, but they will have a change to swim. To do something. You can do them a last service, *Wind's Pleasure*. Change for them."
>
> Silence.
>
> "I…"
>
> Another light vanished.
>
> "I will change."[25]

Shallan is trying to use the magic to enact a sudden and dramatic change. This is the perfect example of the hyper-exaggeration of fantasy; not only is the magic being utilised a more visible constructive force that is affecting identity, the

[25] Sanderson, *Words of Radiance*, pp. 119-20.

identity of agents in this scene is depicted as something which can literally be held, something which on some level of existence is graspable in its entirety.

Unlike the Forgery of *The Emperor's Soul*, which helps make an object more of what it is, and continues its "becoming"; Shallan is asking of the ship a dramatic change in state, shape, and nature. In order to achieve this, there are two key elements to the process. The first being that she aligns the justification for the change with the ship's identity, with its nature to protect its sailors; "There is only one chance to save them, Shallan said. "And that is to change." The second is the all-important repetition of the performative speech act. It is not on the first attempt to persuade that change is realised, but on the sixth that her perception, her vision of the ship as falling apart to save the crew from assassins, is assimilated into the ship's own meshwork. It is also worth noting, to refer back to the definition of the performative above, that Shallan "juxtaposes" her desired change against the "norms" of the ship.

Connecting together these theories in an exploration of contemporary fantasy, it can be suggested that, as magic can be seen to be a force enacting change through performative perception, so the process of gaining magic is representative of that change in perspective. We have already seen this in the case of the Aleran society in *The Codex Alera* as the trajectory of their entire cultural group changed once they discovered furycrafting, their perspective shifted to one of superiority reinforced by their magical capabilities. In Sanderson's *Mistborn* series, we can see a more intimate example of this, by exploring the impact upon an individual of gaining magic.

In the *Mistborn* series, Vin embodies the immersive antagonist fully: she is of her world, a product of her surroundings, but also rebels against that world, finding something more. Raised by her brother to believe unquestioningly that

'anyone would betray you, if they had the right chance and a good enough motive',[26] Vin is shy and flighty, certain that it is better to get beaten than to be seen as a threat. If you do not get noticed you do not get killed. Every aspect of Vin speaks to her non-identity as a skaa (the peasant and slave race of this world): already small, she hunches to appear weaker and never makes eye contact. Although her internal dialogue reveals glimpses of intelligence and strength, when she speaks to others in her world the phrases are short and clipped, trying not to give away more than is necessary. She is totally unaware of her own capabilities, so it is the self-assured Kelsier who offers her a way out of her abusive life.

It is Kelsier's perception of Vin, not as the useless urchin, but as the powerful Mistborn, that begins the change in Vin, a change that is performatively reinforced through her discovery and use of her own magic. Kelsier does not free Vin, he merely shows her the way—through the world of Allomancy. Allomancy grants Vin the power to ingest specific metals and "burn" them to create various effects. In the physical sense it is a magic system where small things inside are amplified to great ends. Symbolically, it represents Vin learning to bring forward those hints of inner strength, confidence, and self-awareness that could be seen in her earlier. The Allomancy gives her the strength to wrest her life away from the control of other people; it is this freedom that starts the process of changing the way she views herself, the world, and her place in it.

Vin leaves the capital to train in Allomancy, and in imitating the courtly behaviour of the nobles. Upon her return to Luthadel—the capital—her outlook begins to change:

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[26] Brandon Sanderson, *Mistborn: The Final Empire* (London: Gollancz, 2009), p. 275.

> […] she walked with a slouch, eyes down, sticking near to the side of the street. The skaa she passed had similar airs of dejection. No one looked up; no one walked with a straight back or an optimistic smile. […] She'd almost forgotten how oppressive Luthadel could be. Her weeks in Fellise had accustomed her to trees and washed stone. Here, there was nothing white – no creeping aspens, no whitewashed granite. All was black.[27]

Her time in Fellise, spent learning about herself, frees her of the grimy oppression of Luthadel. She still has the skaa side of herself: she knows how to avoid attention, to appear as nothing, but she knows that there is something better in life, knows that she is something better. Rather than living the meekness she affects the meekness, choosing to walk with a slouch so as not to draw attention rather than existing that way to survive. She now sees the oppression and stagnation of Luthadel as a corrupt fallacy of life, something enforced and sustained by the perception of the people that this is normal, but ultimately something that can be changed. This passage also demonstrates the intersectional nature of the narrative—a change in one aspect of Vin's life affects her as a whole.

Vin's process of changing the way she views herself and the world is not an easy one, and again this can be demonstrated through her Allomancy. One of the last things that Kelsier teaches her about Allomancy is the effect of burning gold:

> She was in two places at once. […] One of her was a strange woman, changed and transformed from the girl she had always been. That girl had been careful and cautious – a girl who would never burn an unfamiliar metal based solely on the word of one man. This woman

[27] Sanderson, *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, p. 185.

> was foolish; she had forgotten many of the things that had let her survive so long. She drank from cups prepared by others. She fraternized with strangers. She didn't keep track of the people around her. […] The other her was something she had always loathed. A child, really. Thin to the point of scrawniness, she was lonely, hateful, and untrusting. She loved no one, and no one loved her. She always told herself, quietly, that she didn't care. Was there something worth living for? There had to be. Life couldn't be as pathetic as it seemed. Yet, it had to be. There wasn't anything else. Vin was both. She stood in two places, moving both bodies, being both girl and woman. She reached out with hesitant, uncertain hands – one each – and touched herself on the faces, one each. Vin gasped, and it was gone. She felt a sudden rush of emotions, a sense of worthlessness and confusion.[28]

Through this moment of clarity Sanderson highlights the difficulty of accepting change: that it cannot be immediately realised, it must be performatively, repeatedly demonstrated. This scene presents a final realisation of how much the little subversions of Vin's life have changed her; being welcomed to dinner each night by friends instead of cowering alone in a thieves' den fearing rape and theft, has slowly, with each instance of invitation, shown Vin that she can trust others and that she is worthy of that trust because she has worth to the world.

Each time Vin reaches inside of herself to burn a metal, to become not just stronger but more of who she is, her meshwork in a way intertwines with that metal, with that magic, and her identity becomes more strongly cemented in her own choices. The magic gives Vin the opportunity to leave behind the oppression

[28] Sanderson, *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, pp. 451-2.

of the criminal underworld, and of the Lord Ruler; it reaffirms her agency as something unable to be marginalised by others. This scene demonstrates how the newfound magic in Vin's life has allowed her to leave behind a version of herself that she hates in order to become something more, something better, even if it seems foolish to a core part of her.

For Vin, to be shown, and more than that, to accept a disparity in herself and use that to step forwards, starts a small flame of hope that everything can change for the better. Ultimately Allomancy functions within *Mistborn* not only as symbolic inner strength, but also as representative of the arcs of change and learning, as representative of how magic changes perception which in turn enables agency and change in identity.

The interplay between perception—both of the self and of external social pressures on the self—and change highlighted through the magic is representative of the change in perception that the reader of the immersive fantasy undergoes. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, the act of perception, of interacting, is constructive of both the 'seer and the thing'[29] and so in this way the act of reading the fantasy novel, of perceiving the fantasy world, must in turn affect the perception that the reader has of themselves. We can then understand how it is that the fantasy genre achieves a level of self-reflexivity in the reader through its distancing. So whilst all literature obviously exhibits a distancing effect from the quotidian lives of its readers, fantasy, in its extreme exaggeration of context and circumstance, greatly increases that distancing effect and so can more readily enable a perspectival shift.

[29] *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p. 397.

Chapter 4 – Magic and Gender

‘What is a woman’s place in this modern world? Jasnah Kohlin’s words read. I rebel against this question, though so many of my peers ask it. The inherent bias in the inquiry seems invisible to so many of them. They consider themselves progressive because they are willing to challenge many of the assumptions of the past.

They ignore the greater assumption—that a “place” for women must be defined and set forward to begin with. Half of the population must somehow be reduced to the role arrived at by a single conversation. No matter how broad that role is, it will be—by nature—a reduction from the infinite variety that is womanhood.

I say that there is no role for women—there is, instead, a role for each woman, and she must make it for herself. For some, it will be the role of scholar; for others, it will be the role of wife. For others, it will be both. For yet others, it will be neither.

Do not mistake me in assuming I value one woman’s role above another. My point is not to stratify our society—we have done that far too well already—my point is to diversify our discourse.

A woman’s strength should not be in her role, whatever she chooses it to be, but in the power to choose that role. It is amazing to me that I even have to make this point, as I see it as the very foundation of our conversation.’[1]

- *Words of Radiance,* Brandon Sanderson

[1] Brandon Sanderson, *Words of Radiance* (London: Gollancz, 2014), p. 772.

I wanted to begin with this quote as, alongside being usefully from a contemporary fantasy novel, it serves to highlight the thrust of this chapter. One of the common pitfalls in discussing gender lies in assuming a binary nature of gender as determined by sex. What Jasnah Kohlin addresses in this quote, is the fundamental flaw in following a chain of binary logic that insists upon different roles for men and women as determined by their gender; as well as the subsequent false assumption that in order to deal with the problems of this enforced binary opposition we need to determine elements such as "a woman's place in this modern world." Really what needs to be undertaken in an examination of the root cause of the problem: the binary itself; for, as Bennett and Royle note,

> what is most important about literary representations of gender is not merely that a particular text can be shown to be sexist or phallocentric, or even feminist. Rather it is that literary texts call into question many of our essentialist ideas about gender.[2]

The quote from Jasnah Kohlin's writings in Sanderson's *Words of Radiance* is an excellent example of "calling into question essentialist ideas about gender"; the passage above is an excerpt from one of Jasnah's own books within the fantasy text being read by another character, Shallan. I noted in the chapter on culture Mary Louise Pratt's comment that one of the advantages of operating within a contact zone is 'autoethnography',[3] and it is precisely this that Jasnah's writings are achieving here in order to critique widely held gendered perspectives.

An autoethnographic text is 'a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them'[4]

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[2] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'Sexual Difference', in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 4th edn (London: Pearson Education, 2009), pp. 179-87 (pp. 182-3).

[3] Pratt, p. 37.

[4] Pratt, p. 35.

which is to say that they 'involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror […] to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding.'[5] Jasnah, a noble woman and a scholar, one who actively defies the socially constructed norms of her highly gendered society, writes this text in full awareness of how she is being perceived. She appropriates the general consensus perspective for understanding women in order to present herself as contrary to that light; not only challenging the male privilege perspective of this world that relegates women to separate spheres of success and mobility, but also questioning the perspective of other women who embody their roles with no thought for how their positions performatively sustain a society of male privilege.

The limitations, and deliberate focus, of this thesis mean that it would be impossible to comprehensively cover such vast topics as contemporary feminist issues, queer theory, and gender identity; as Henrietta L. Moore notes, 'the difficulty with investigating gender inequality is that one has to analyse not only the political and economic contexts in which gender relations are operative, but also the cultural and symbolic meanings accorded to gender differences.'[6] With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a new window, offer new insights, into these contentious issues through the lens of fantasy; how it is that the magic of the world enables a "calling into question" of our perhaps unquestioned assumptions.

This discussion is realised through fantasy's nature as an intersectional, social testing ground and more specifically through the lens of magic in its role as a more immediately visible social force; for, as Judith Butler notes in her discussion of gender roles, 'that power continues to act in illegible ways is one

[5] Pratt, p. 35.
[6] Moore, p. 822.

source of its relative invulnerability.'[7] With this in mind, one can see how, by being a "legible" form of power, magic offers the potential for realising change by in a sense creating "vulnerabilities" in a gendering power system.

In order to explore fantasy's discussion of problematic gender binaries, this chapter will focus specifically on the women in three fantasy worlds: Jim Butcher's *The Codex Alera*, Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, and Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle*. This is done, to quote Bhavnani, Foran, Kurian, and Munshi,

> not to exclude men, but because women are a foundation from which we can illuminate the circumstances of *all* people's lives, including men's lives. To focus on women within development in this way offers prospects for seeing the lives of people as more tangled and therefore as richer than has hitherto been suggested.[8]

This decision has been made also because in the novels to be discussed, for the most part, women are the "oppressed minority", whose movement and agency is marginalised and it is from this perspective, where the 'cognitive minority are more aware of the majority than the other way around',[9] that we can gain greater insight into the flaws of the majority perspective.

It is important to note that the novels in question here are all written by male authors. This choice was not made to exclude female authors, nor were these chosen to deliberately focus on male authors; these novels were chosen because the worlds that they present offer three distinct and useful examples of gender biases in fantasy worlds. All three authors create strong and varied female

[7] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 134.

[8] Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Krista Bywater, 'Dancing on the Edge: Women, Culture, and a Passion for Change', in *On the Edges of Development: Cultural Interventions* ed. by Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Joh Foran, Priya A. Kurian, and Debashish Munshi (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 52-66 (p. 62).

[9] Attebery, p. 174.

characters whose experiences enable the reader to see the constructive play of magic and its impact as a social force.

This chapter will begin by discussing what binary gender is, how it arose, and why it is a problem. Following this I will explore three fantasy worlds in which the issues of prescribed gender roles are explored. Overall this chapter aims to discuss how, through adopting a queer perspective, and questioning some of the norms of reality, fantasy both critiques gender and offers possibilities for social change.

In 'The Fantasy of Gender/Sex: Angela Carter and Mythmaking', Darlene Juschka brings together a discussion of socially defined gender roles, the binary nature of myth, and explores her perspective through the writings of Angela Carter. These ideas are of relevance to the discussion of contemporary fantasy by means of Attebery's statement that 'fantasy provides new contexts, and thus inevitably new meanings, for myth.'[10] However, unlike the strict binary nature of myth that Juschka notes, Attebery suggests that 'Fantasy is fundamentally playful—which does not mean that it is not serious. Its way of playing with symbols encourages the reader to see meaning as something unstable and elusive, rather than single and self-evident.'[11] It is this attempt to raise awareness of the multiplicity of meaning, and the drive to explore unfixed definitions, that makes fantasy a useful genre for debunking the myth of binary gender.

Juschka's explanation of binary gender is usefully succinct. She notes that root binaries, opposing and connected states or forces, such as male/female, make no value statements on their own but rather exist to connote each other in their difference. It is the 'secondary binaries, tertiary binaries and so forth [that] introduce a valuative component so that, for example, female/male is related to

[10] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 3.
[11] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 2.

weak/strong, hot/cold.' [12] This then suggests that the root binaries exist in language out of a need to express or describe difference, but it is in the social and cultural context that the 'metonymical' [13] relationships, the female/male, are ascribed 'metaphorical'[14] relationships that are problematic in their function as value statements.

Juschka describes the construction of gender roles in order to demonstrate how Angela Carter's writings 'demythologize gender ideology […] to reveal or bring to consciousness the binarism that continues to fuel the ways in which we understand gender.';[15] a similar mode is found in contemporary fantasy in its function as a social testing ground. However, as Juschka highlights, 'this does not fully reveal just what is at stake in gender ideology';[16] one must address the questions of subjectivity, agency, and power in order not only to grasp the complexity of socially defined gender roles, but also to recognise that addressing these facets of identity and mobility is crucial if one is to in any way suggest a mode or method for change. What contemporary fantasy is able to do, that more traditional myth built on binary logic is unable to do, is step outside of established structures to subvert those structures. In this way, unlike classical myth, fantasy denies the dialectic and embraces queer theory.

Gender from a western perspective has been historically viewed as the binary distinction between male and female as based upon an individual's biological sex. This essentialist perspective claims the biological argument that people are born into their gender; that gender is determined by their sex and as

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[12]Darlene Juschka, 'The Fantasy of Gender/Sex: Angela Carter and Mythmaking', in *The Influence of Imagination: Essays on Science Fiction and Fantasy as Agents of Social Change*, ed. by Lee Easton and Randy Schroeder (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), pp. 160-73 (p. 161).

[13] Juschka, p. 162.

[14] Juschka, p. 162.

[15] Juschka, p. 163.

[16] Juschka, p. 163.

such has normalised characteristics in the same way that a group of people will have a bell curve of heights with the majority creating a natural trend of normativity. However, 'if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way.'[17]

The flaws in this model become abundantly clear once one takes a global perspective and recognises the multiplicity of modes of gender amongst different cultural groups. Firstly biological sex is clearly not binary, and is in fact itself socially constructed. Moore, referring to Shelly Errington's work, raises Errington's example of 'the Olympic athletes who classified themselves as women, but were reclassified as men when they turned out not to have perfect chromosomes (1990:19– 20).'[18] That said ruling that may or may not result in their ability to compete in male events shows that their biology, that which is "supposed" to determine the individual male or female, can in effect leave an individual lost somewhere in between either sides; a position which can mean only further marginalisation, but the existence of which immediately invalidates an essentialist perspective of binary sex, and binary gender, as normalised fact. As Moore states,

> [i]t is evident from recent ethnographies that many societies have more than one way of conceptualizing and classifying gender, and that this fact has been obscured by the reliance of the social sciences on a model of gender which stresses the fixed and binary nature of sexual difference.[19]

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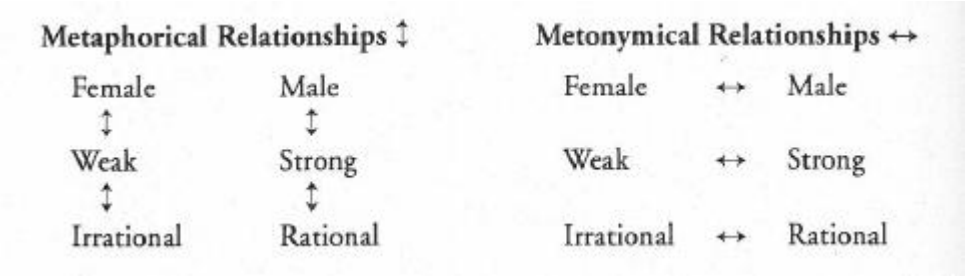
[17] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 6.

[18] S. Errington, 'Recasting sex, gender and power: a theoretical and regional overview', in *Power and Difference: Gender in Island South East Asia*, ed. By J. Atkinson and S. Errington (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 19-20, in 'Understanding Sex and Gender' by Henrietta L. Moore, in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. by Tim Ingold (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 813-30 (p. 817).

[19] Moore, p. 820.

All of this is to say nothing of transgender individuals, or to even touch on the topic of non-heterosexual sexual identifications which challenge the deeply embedded heterosexual success criteria of "normal" males.

What is key here is the distinction between a category – sex – that one is born with, and the category of gender which is socially constructed. Much like other forms of identification, such as cultural or religious, gender is a category that is socially constructed; that is to say that in the eyes of consensus society, majority society, there are sets of traits or characteristics that are metaphorically associated with each half of the male/female gender binary (seen in the diagram below).[20]



I previously discussed Ingold's perspective that agents are their movement and are defined by, and changed by, their intertwining, their knotting with other lines of movement, other agents, as they move through and inhabit the world. What transculturation teaches us is that meaning and definition are constructed and arrived at through the interaction between groups, in that Third Space of discussion and action. Therefore, gender, as a social construct, must also be defined via the interaction between gender groups both within a cultural group, and between cultural groups. What these theories make clear is that the ability to be open to other perspectives, and to recognise them, creates larger and more complicated meshworks of understanding through which old assumptions can be

[20] Juschka, p. 162.

challenged and new, perhaps more accepting perspectives can be achieved in that Third Space of discussion.

The problem with a binary gender system is that it severely limits the spheres through which women, and other marginalised individuals, can move. If people are their movement as Ingold suggests, if they grow and succeed by intertwining with other lines of movement, and that ability to move through the world is limited, is marginalised, then opportunities to grow and succeed shrink by simple measure of lack of other lines with which to intertwine. Maintaining a status quo in which movement through the world is inhibited—something which I believe Ingold would argue is akin to not really living—that works to the detriment of everybody; although obviously the greater burden is on the marginalised.

So, in returning to the original question of why these gender roles exist, it is perhaps a far easier task to recognise the existence of binary gender roles, and even to acknowledge their problems, than it is to grasp the forces that initiated, and continue to sustain, these gender roles. This is, I feel, exactly where contemporary fantasy fiction can step in to offer an examination of these forces, in its mode of exaggeration of context, by using the magic of the world, in its role as a force of social construction, to highlight how gender roles are being influenced by social forces.

Identity categories such as gender are socially determined and constructed, much like cultural values; however, the exact forces which enable said construction are often either unclear or unquestioned – a fact in part due to the ever more complex nature of our globalised world in which individuals are often only exposed to a small section and as such are less likely, and perhaps less inclined, to think in a more global, inclusive manner. In a fantasy world the magic

is an integral part of its intersectional construction and as such it functions as a tool of social construction, shaping and changing the world and its inhabitants. The magic functions as a more easily visible force to which we can turn to examine how social roles and categories are constructed, sustained, and potentially deconstructed.

This chapter will now explore three different fantasy worlds to examine how social forces impact gender roles on different levels. *The Codex Alera* examines gender roles in the context of a wide cultural system; Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* looks at how a sudden change in the world can dramatically shift historically instilled norms; while Peter V. Brett's *Demon Cycle* explores the impact on an individual level of larger external social forces.

Magic, Gender, and *The Codex Alera*

In Butcher's *The Codex Alera*, furycrafting – the magic system of Alera – can be seen to play a large role in the establishment of, and the change in, many facets of Aleran society from the technological to the socio-economic. This section will discuss first the origins of, and the forces which sustain, the gender roles in Aleran society represented through the symbolic, elemental split of furycrafting and the influence of the Legions; and will then go on to discuss how the series offers potential for change through the Dianic League and more significantly how characters such as Kitai challenge the norms of society.

Gender roles in Aleran society are easily comparable, as both are problematic due to a pervasive inequality, to those of a western binary tradition in which the social forces and cultural norms dictate that men are those who dominate and succeed whilst the women are relegated to primarily supporting

roles. This can be seen in the normative distribution of furycrafting ability. Whilst every Aleran has access to some level of furycrafting, not every Aleran can manipulate all of the elements, that strength is exhibited only in the most powerful furycrafters: the high lords and ladies. It is common for an individual to be strongly aligned with one element in particular with maybe one or two lesser abilities to back it up.

What is significant is the distribution of particular elements amongst the populace with fire and metal being generally associated with men, and water with women. The other elements, air, earth, and wood seem to be more evenly split. This distribution of the magic creates secondary, metaphorical binaries that make value statements on the root binary of men/women. To take fire and water as an example, fire becomes associated with men and aggression, whilst water connotes women and passivity; metal makes you strong and emotionally closed off, whilst water makes you weak and emotionally open to the point where, without the strength of metal, you can be overwhelmed.

Consider the comparative example of earthcrafting; earthcrafters are enormously strong, able to wield huge weapons and call up stone from deep beneath the surface of the earth. Earthcrafting is also associated with deep, primal emotions and a skilled earthcrafter can stir those emotions in others. So whilst male earthcrafters fight on the front lines of the Legions—an act with profound connections to success in Aleran society—for the female earthcrafters

> [i]t was a given that any dancer with earthcrafting would use it to hone the appetites of the men watching. Often, several danced at once, and such an environment was geared to fleece the pockets of the Legionares who succumbed to their urges.[21]

[21] Butcher, *Cursor's Fury*, pp. 163-4.

Examining the nature of furycrafting in Aleran society demonstrates that there is a distinction made between men and women, and that their magic constructs the role that society places them in. To understand why and how such a socially engineered distinction arose, we must look to their history.

The Aleran society was born out of the myth of the lost Roman Legion.[22] In the canon of this world, the lost Legion wandered into the heart of a violent storm and out into this fantasy world. Disconnected from their home, lost in a strange land, they had to fight for survival. Their prowess as a fighting unit, as a Legion, was all that they had to rely on to survive, and so martial success and physical strength became core values in their society. With these things being revered as the highest aspirations for an Aleran, and being metaphorically associated with men, it becomes clear why this world is gendered in favour of male domination.

In the previous chapter I referred to the Alerans' bloody history of conquest. They wiped out entire nations in order to survive, and as their connection to this land grew, they unlocked furycrafting; an ability which only increased the efficacy of their Legions and further enabled their dominance of this continent. What this led to is a society based upon Roman tradition, with their Legions, their Senate, and their Caesar (named Gaius in this world); but a Roman society that has become more secular, and even more warlike, through their furycraft.

Keeping in mind the historical, and contemporary, core of Aleran society being the Legions and their magical prowess, let us consider the role that women play in Aleran society. It is true that women can often be found in the Legions, but as camp followers or healers not as Legionares. Women in the Legion fulfil

[22] For a comprehensive exploration of debates surrounding the lost legion, see Tony Clunn, *Quest for the Lost Roman Legion* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2008).

traditional support roles that garner them no wide acclaim, success, or recognition. In considering the combination of these factors, as we turn to examine the role the magic is playing here, the most highly prized versions of furycraft are the elite metalcrafting swordsmen, and the extremely offensive firecrafters who can disrupt and entirely destroy the enemy front lines. Despite the fact that without the healing abilities of watercraft many of these highly prized troops would be dead, the consensus is that the Legionares are the heroes, the ones succeeding, as it is they who established this society in the first place, it is they who sustain it, and so it is they who, in the eyes of Alera, deserve recognition for their actions.

In this context women's abilities are placed into a separate category for success so that they cannot be recognised in the arena that catapults men to the top of society. There are in the series a few highly capable watercrafting men depicted but, in an overbearing display of the spread of male dominance, they tend to fill the positions of Tribune Medica, the person in command of the medics; and so even here, in the sphere of success to which women are relegated, men are often the ones getting the recognition. In the previous chapter I discussed how the Aleran perspective of superiority was historically explained, despite being socially damning, and in the case of gender roles it is again easy to grasp their formation. Alera exhibits male privilege because, in their eyes, their society would not even exist without the men of the Legions.

One of the things that makes the Aleran society so comparable to issues in today's society is that, unlike the Ancient Rome of reality, the gender gap is not something actively enforced in that there is no explicit law that says women cannot do 'X' or 'Y', or that 'Z' is only for men. The inequality is instead insidious in its unquestioned acceptance. As Butler states, 'juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not "show"

once the juridical structure of politics has been established.'[23] The flows of power, the social forces that shape and sustain the majority perspective are largely invisible in part because, for the majority, they are not actively pursued with an intent to marginalise or discriminate, but rather are rooted in a historical tradition of cultural values that create a normative practice and that normative practice is merely repeated. Those who have been raised within that normative practice, with those values instilled in them, are exhibiting what I have termed an apathetic bias. That is, a passive bias towards the maintenance of the status quo; an unquestioned acceptance that things are normal even when they should feel wrong. Consider this passage from Sanderson's *Elantris*:

> It hadn't taken Raoden long to adjust to walking on Elantris' uneven, slime-covered streets […] He was actually beginning to regard the dun-colored walls and grime as normal, which bothered him much more than the city's dirtiness ever had.[24]

This demonstrates the power that lies in a performative repetition, in the idea that if something is treated as normal for long enough it will *be* normal. As Raoden identifies, it is perhaps more dangerous not that there are problems in society, not that it is covered in grime, but that people accept it as it is, that, in their apathy, they cannot conceive of, and therefore cannot desire, anything different. For the men in Aleran society, particularly those at the top of the social hierarchy, unless they are explicitly exposed to the marginalising effect of these normative practices, they have no impetus to actively pursue change. The performative nature of politics, through 'exclusionary practice,'[25] establishes and then maintains the gendering structures of Aleran society.

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[23] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 2.
[24] Sanderson, *Elantris*, p. 126.
[25] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 2.

Much as the Aleran perspective of superiority can be understood culturally, so too can the *male* Aleran perspective make justifiable sense to those immersed in it; and just as the Aleran perspective of cultural superiority is problematic in the way that it sustains a closed system that effectively stifles and stagnates any kind of cultural growth, so too does the male perspective sustain a closed system that marginalises and inhibits. It is the magic, the furycrafting in this case, that amplifies the nature of Aleran society; it both sustains and enhances their cultural values—of fighting, conquering, dominating, essentially the normative male fields of prowess and success. However, the magic also creates the space in which change is possible.

In the real Ancient Roman society '[w]omen [were] barred from all civil and public functions. They may not be judges or jurors, or hold magistracies, or appear in court or intercede for others, or be agents. (The jurist Ulpian, c. AD 200).'[26] In *The Codex Alera* there exists what is called the Dianic League, a political party of female Aleran Citizens whose purpose is to raise the status of women in Aleran society. In the quote above we can see that such a group could not exist within Roman society, so it raises the question: what has differentiated the Alerans from their Roman origins in this way? The answer: Furycrafting.

Much as the furycrafting ability creates an undeniable martial superiority that sustains their closed-system, cultural perspective, so too it also forces Aleran society to be confronted with the literal strength of women in the form of the High Ladies of Alera. One of the laws of the Citizenry is that they must seek a partner with equal or greater furycrafting ability in order to continue lineages of strength. The High Lords of each city cannot produce strong successors, strong future military leaders, without strong wives; and so, in the upper classes of Alera, a

[26] Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

group of women exist who must be recognised for their martial prowess for they are undeniably as strong, as powerful as their husbands. This is another example of magic acting as a more visible social force.

What we see in Alera's normative pressures is an ideoscape that defines success by strength. By examining this ideology, this flow of power sustained and directed by furycrafting, this social norm flows from the top of Aleran society to the bottom, marginalising non-Citizens, women, and sanctioning the slavery industry. However what this flow, this "-scape" also leads to is an opportunity for subversion. This cultural flow of power dictates that the strong rule and get to make decisions—historically the men have fulfilled this role—but in the face of undeniably strong women, this flow is capitalised upon by the Dianic League in order to redirect that marginalising, top-down flow of power in a more egalitarian, more open-system direction. The women of Alera in this way contrast the established norms in that their politics, rather than embracing the 'exclusionary practice'[27] of the established society, embrace an inclusionary practice; it is no coincidence that one of the main political platforms of the Dianic League is the abolition of slavery.

Consider again the quote from jurist Ulpian. Roman society demanded that women be "barred" from agency, but in Alera the magic creates the space for ostensibly marginalised women to participate, and in adopting the perspective that fantasy so strongly champions—that magic is its own agent—then so too must the agency of Aleran women be recognised through their intertwined nature. To reduce the agency of Aleran women is to marginalise the importance of magic, and as the central defining characteristic of Aleran society is furycrafting, the

[27] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 2.

magic inevitably creates the possibility that their system of male dominance will change.

This facet of the narrative of *The Codex Alera* offers the contemporary reader an insight into the possibilities of change. One of the criticisms of feminist thought is that a pursuit of gender equality is a pursuit of agency within a problematic structure that by nature inhibits agency, and that acting within such a structure can only reinforce it; instead, it is suggested, what should be desired is a subversion of the structure itself. What the Dianic League adopts is not just an equal rights position, but instead a position rooted in an understanding of intersectionality, a position that is pursued in an open-system manner that is able to recognise that in order to fully realise a change in the flows of power, that change must be realised throughout Aleran society not just within it.

The intersectional nature of this literature essentially asks that we, as readers, actively consider the meshwork of identities, that we consider how each meshwork impacts each other meshwork. As Tavi can see, in interacting with other cultural groups, it is not enough to merely stop aggressions; to stop processes of marginalisation, we must recognise and accept the influence of other perspectives in order to truly embrace change; otherwise, as hundreds of years of Aleran history suggest, you are doomed to stagnate in your marginalised state.

The character of Kitai provides an effective example of disparate meshworks, disparate identities interacting and bringing change. She is a Marat, Tavi's partner, and he her *chala*. When Tavi must go to the Legions, Kitai follows as she will not leave him; their bond is too strong. Their time in the Legions shows how perception affects action, and how action affects change. As a female non-Aleran, Kitai, by the normative standards of Aleran society, should be shunned entirely as an outsider. Any and all of her merits are discounted by virtue

of the Aleran closed-system perception of superiority and their prescriptive, gendered perspective.

In the discussion of new materialisms and meshwork in the previous chapter, *The Emperor's Soul* showed us that perception affects self and external identity. If one changes how an agent is perceived, one can change the identity of that agent. By shaping the interaction between meshworks one can shape the change that results from that interaction. Tavi, both aware of the Aleran tendency to marginalise and himself striving for open-system relations, takes deliberate, performative steps to ensure that Kitai is not only welcomed into the male dominated Legions, but that the presence of a Marat woman in combat is perceived as normative.

> He brought Kitai with him whenever he visited—in fact, he brought her nearly everywhere he went, including staff meetings. He introduced her as Ambassador Kitai, and offered no other explanation whatsoever for her presence, his entire manner suggesting that she belonged there and that anyone with questions or comments about her had best keep them to himself. He wanted the men to get used to seeing her, to speaking to her, until they got the idea that she was not a threat.[28]

In his capacity as mobile contact zone, he brings essentially the Marat presence into the heart of Alera, and forces them to intertwine their meshworks, to reshape their identities such that they are now connected on a quotidian level. For the Legionares, their repeated and peaceful encounters with a Marat reinforce that this type of interaction and co-operation is normal. Once connected in this way, once Kitai is accepted as a normative part of the Legions, the definition of that Legion

[28] Butcher, *Cursor's Fury*, pp. 667-8.

changes, allowing more Marat, and more Marat women to be brought in and celebrated for their strength and abilities. This is a key element to achieving change on a large societal level. The Legion resides at the heart of Alera's self-definition alongside furycrafting; by incorporating Kitai in to the Legions there is a shift in the core ideology that must follow the existing flow of the ideoscape to ripple outwards and effect change in the closed-system by allowing in "outsiders". What this progression suggests for the contemporary reader is that the possibility for change, for escaping a closed-stagnant-system, exists in the influence of external meshworks that impact the core ideology—the normative practices—of another meshwork; in essence the possibility for change exists in transculturation where meaning is produced through the discussion in Third Space interaction, through the co-operation.

Magic, Gender, and *The Wheel of Time*

This next section will discuss how a sudden change in the world can drastically shift ideologies and culturally instilled norms through the lens of Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*. In order to fully discuss the impact of a world-changing event, one must first have a basic understanding of that world. In *The Wheel of Time*

> [t]ime is a wheel with seven spokes, each spoke an Age. As the Wheel turns, the Ages come and go, each leaving memories that fade to legend, then to myth, and are forgotten by the time that Age comes again. The Pattern of an Age is slightly different each time an Age comes, and each time it is subject to greater change.[29]

[29] Robert Jordan, *The Eye of the World* (London: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle ebook, p. 737.

The narrative of *The Wheel of Time* takes place around 1000 years after the "Age of Legends". In the Age of Legends great advancements in society and capability were realised through the magic system of the world: channelling. Channelling involves tapping the True Source which is

> [t]he driving force of the universe, which turns the Wheel of Time. It is divided into a male half (*saidin*) and a female half (*saidar*), which work at the same time with and against each other. Only a man can draw on *saidin*, only a woman on *saidar*.[30]

In the Age of Legends a person who channelled the True Source was called an Aes Sedai, although in the time of the narrative this title is reserved for women only. The Dark One's prison was accidentally opened in the Age of Legends, which resulted in a great war against him and his agents. Ultimately good triumphed over evil but at great cost. The Dragon (a title of a male position not a literal dragon) could not get the support of the female Aes Sedai, and so led a contingent of male channellers to the Dark One's lair. There they managed to re-seal the prison, but in retaliation the Dark One was able to reach out and taint *saidin*, the male half of the True Source, such that men who channel pull that taint into themselves and steadily grow insane. This led to the Breaking of the World, the turn of an age.

> In their madness these men, who could wield the One Power to a degree now unknown, changed the face of the earth. They caused great earthquakes, levelled mountain ranges, raised new mountains, lifted dry land where seas had been, made the ocean rush in where

[30] Jordan, p. 735.

> dry land had been. Many parts of the world were completely depopulated, and the survivors were scattered like dust on the wind.[31]

The world that the reader steps into upon opening *The Eye of the World* (the first *Wheel of Time* novel) picks up around 1000 years after the Breaking of the World (an event which itself lasted for almost 100 years). It is important to first acknowledge the strong gender bias present throughout *The Wheel of Time*, which can be easily, and perhaps best, seen in the magic system itself. In order to access the female half of the True Source—*saidar*—women must surrender to it, or "embrace" it; whereas for men to access *saidin* they must always fight it, wrestle it under their control lest they die. In this way it could be interpreted as suggesting a natural, in-built part of the world's nature that women submit whilst men conquer.

In the context of book reviewers and the like, much has been said in critique of Jordan's work, decrying it as deeply gendered and sexist, which it is. The point here is that Jordan is writing in a world that was literally broken. *The Wheel of Time* is not presenting to the reader a desirable world, or in any way suggesting that the gender relations are as they should be. Rather, Jordan offers the reader a world that broke, a world where genders are divided and valued differently and, most significantly, the state of the world as such is countered against its history, the Age of Legends, in which the gender bias did not exist. This status quo of gender biases is then sustained by the "natural" split of magic between a male half and a female half. So whilst Jordan writes of gender binary bias, his work draws attention to its flaws, it does not support them. It is, as I have said, the hyper-exaggeration mode of fantasy at play here; to the extent where the least gendered characters in the series, those who do not exhibit gender bias in

[31] Jordan, p. 726.

any way, are the Forsaken, the agents of the Dark One who are irrefutably evil. When the "evil" characters of the world, those who seek to dominate, control, destroy, and marginalise are most devoid of judging others by their gender, clearly a statement is being made about how broken the rest of the gendered world truly is.

What this series does offer is a profound shift in instilled values and norms that is worth more closely discussing. *The Wheel of Time* is a multi-viewpoint series, with successive chapters switching perspective between characters. This allows the reader to experience many differing worldviews, cultural values, multiple biases, and gender identities. One of the recurring themes of this series is the satirically used distrust of the opposite gender by both men and women. I refer to the distrust between genders as being used satirically, because from both male and female characters come repeated, and clearly conflicting, expressions of doubt in the capability of the opposite gender, and levels of fear of control from the opposite gender. What is more significant is that these perspectives can be traced back to the Breaking of the World.

Beginning from the female perspective, men literally broke the world, killed countless people, and had to be stopped. This has instilled in women, particularly Aes Sedai, a fear of men as at any time, any man could begin to channel; so great is this fear that one of the core principles of the Aes Sedai is to hunt down any man who might be a channelling and ensure that they are "gentled"—a process that severs them from the True Source, an act which usually leads those gentled to suicide. They even "bond" willing men as Warders, lifelong bodyguards.

From the male perspective, women, particularly Aes Sedai, might at any time hunt them down or in other ways control their lives. So deep is the fear of

Aes Sedai from men that the order of Aes Sedai must take magically binding oaths to tell no lies. Even these oaths though have led to a widely held perspective that Aes Sedai cannot be trusted because they will find a way with half-truths or misdirection to conceal or manipulate you. There are different degrees of this bias in the varying cultural groups, some decreeing Aes Sedai practices illegal, others welcoming Aes Sedai advisers to their royalty; but overall the gender divide persists. In discussing the role of censorship in the context of socially performative acts, Butler notes that

> censorship is not primarily about speech, [rather] it is exercised in the service of other kinds of social aims […] [as] in the codification of memory […] or in the insistence that certain kinds of historical events only be narrated one way.[32]

This is a key factor in the gendering of Jordan's world. The rhetoric regarding the "breaking of the world" is "codified" by a focus on one fact: that it was the fault of men. The insanity of male magic users—which did bring about the breaking of the world—was the result of an altruistic and suicidal endeavour that successfully saved the world, and yet the knowledge of this side of the events is less widespread, is less discussed that the fact that the world was broken. Whilst the breaking was clearly disastrous, it would ultimately have been worse had the Dark One never been stopped as he would have ended all existence.

The consensus perspective paints the breaking of the world as the worst thing possible; it was so formative to this world that there are an entire group of women whose lives are dedicated to hunting down men so that this could never happen again. The social "historical narrative" of this age is not gratitude for the sacrifice of men and regret that some must be hunted down for the continued

[32] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 134.

safety of the world, but rather the narrative of this history is deeply gendered and biased, seemingly concerned only with maintaining the status quo in which the female magic users are the ones in power; where men fear women because the Aes Sedai would 'hunt down every man who even dreamed of wielding the One Power.'[33]

What is most significant about this, is that such a stark gender divide was not present before the Breaking of the World. Despite the problematic nature of the magic system that Jordan created, in the Age of Legends such gender biases were simply not exhibited. It has been called the Age of Legends because of all of the marvels achieved, where everything short of death could be healed, distances crossed in an instant, even flight was attainable; and 'the greatest [works of magic] were always done so, [by] joining saidin and saidar, as the True Source is joined.'[34] This quote, delivered from the Green Man, an individual alive since before the Breaking of the World, indicates the profound difference in worldview between then and now. The description alone of the True Source as being "joined", rather than "divided" into male and female halves, speaks to a world less defined by binaries. The very things that named an entire age, the legends, were achieved only through men and women coming together.

What this difference in the conceptualisation of magic between the ages demonstrates is how magic functions as both a force of shaping and as a force of change. In the Age of Legends, the existence and usage of magic gave rise to marvels and wonders, and shaped a world without gender biases or prescribed gender roles. But the magic, always exhibiting the possibility of change, brought about the Breaking of the World, and in that drastic change, shaped a new world in which the normative states of gender roles have drastically shifted.

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[33] Jordan, p. 171.
[34] Jordan, p. 686.

This discrepancy between historical gender roles and those in the time of the narrative is exhibited not only in historical knowledge of the current series of events, but the reader is shown first-hand accounts of this contrasting way of thinking about people and the world they inhabit through the characters of the Forsaken. The Forsaken were the thirteen strongest of the Aes Sedai who converted to the side of the Dark One. In the final assault that sealed away the Dark One, and tainted saidin, these thirteen were at a meeting and were somewhat sealed away with the Dark One. During the events of The Wheel of Time they emerge from their stasis to enact the Dark One's will.

What we are presented with in these characters is the preserved worldview from the Age of Legends. Much as the men and women in the time of the narrative are influenced by the events of the Breaking of the World, these men and women of the Forsaken are influenced by their lives spent during the Age of Legends and exhibited between them is no gender bias. This creates a poignant contrast when the main antagonists, those undeniably evil, are less problematically gendered than our heroes or the rest of the world.

While this shift in gender roles from the age of legends to the time of the narrative is clearly a negative one, it is significant in the way that it demonstrates how gender roles can change. *The Codex Alera* suggested that the potential for change lies in the interaction of open systems, by creating definitions in that Third Space of discussion and interchange; *The Wheel of Time* supports this suggestion and then adds to it. The fact that the shift is seen in both men and women, in all cultural groups, albeit with different but analogous effects, shows that it is the interaction between men and women during the Breaking of the World that has defined the roles of men and women since that event. The series suggests that in order to fully realise change—a change, the consequences of which are

represented 1000 years after the inciting incident— not only does interaction have to take place, but it has to involve everyone, or at least the majority of the population. *The Wheel of Time* offers that a dramatic world-changing event that affects everyone must create a space in which identity defining interaction takes place.

Magic, Gender, and The *Demon Cycle*

This next section will explore Peter V. Brett's the *Demon Cycle*, and the ways in which it discusses the impact of large social forces on an individual level, and critiques binary gender through the possibility of subversion via queer theory. The *Demon Cycle* takes place in the world of Thesa. In the beginning there were a small number of humans and every night the demons would rise from the ground to kill humans. The numbers of the demons were few and so humans persisted. They slowly grew, in numbers and capabilities, developing writing and, through that, discovering wards. In the *Demon Cycle* the magic stems from the demons who inhabit the core of the world. The magic *system* of the world is called warding, and involves writing or carving "wards"—symbols—onto something such as a wall. These wards, depending upon which ones are used, absorb the natural magic of the demons and use it to repel the demons. In this way, humanity wards their homes and their cities, shutting out the nightly terrors.

With the discovery of wards, humans were able to fight off the demons night after night until the demons stopped coming. No longer being culled by demons every night, humans continued to grow in numbers and capabilities; eventually advancing in science, and leaving the wards behind, as without demons they were no longer needed. The world of Thesa arrived ultimately at a

comparable point to our own contemporary reality. This was when the demons returned. While humans prospered, so too did the demons, growing in numbers and strength beneath the earth. Upon their return, people quickly realised that their science had no effect on the demons and so began a rush to find the ancient wards.

As their society grew and relied upon science, warding books became relics of the past and many were lost to age. All that people could find were defensive wards. With no way to harm the demons, all that the humans could do was ward their houses, try and ward their cities, huddle together every night as the demons rose, and hope they lived to see the dawn. The narrative of Brett's series begins 319 years after the return of the demons. In this time the world has changed drastically. Unable to fight back, the population has dwindled. There are five of what are referred to as the "free cities" with populations in the tens of thousands, whilst the rest of the world consists of hamlets and villages of varying sizes.

This external force of the magic—the demons—creates small, insular, isolated communities as the warding of larger places becomes more difficult to maintain; and if the wards fail, then the demons get in and people die. Death, for the small communities of this world, is common enough that a loss is often experienced every other week.

The human magic system of warding—as opposed to the natural magic presented in the demons—is interesting in that it falls into the camp of both being widely available, and being a skill, unlike the innate furycrafting ability exhibited in the *Codex Alera*. Warding, being the human adoption of demon magic, mirrors human nature in that it is, much like people, endlessly flexible—with the right wards you can repel demons, or toughen glass, or turn flame into a breeze—but it

is also fallible—wrongly placed wards will not protect you from demons, incorrectly drawn wards can be physically overpowered, if a mind demon is more intelligent than the warder it might determine a way to subvert those wards or even suborn them.

The character Leesha's adopting of the position as Herb Gatherer first introduces her to the power involved in increasing one's knowledge and skills, so, once given the opportunity to truly study warding it is perhaps not surprising that we see her strengthening. Through warding Leesha becomes one of the most capable people in the world—inventing new ways to defend people from demons, discovering new cures and ways to save lives. In comparison to the magic systems of *The Codex Alera* and *The Wheel of Time*, it is interesting to note that warding, as a magic system, is not gendered either in practice or social expectation.

This magic system of warding is another instance of my theory of magic as social responsibility. In the northern cities and towns of Thesa in the *Demon Cycle*, warding is so widely available, and normative for even children to learn, that it becomes a trade like smithing, baking, or tree cutting. This diffused magic system creates a diffused altruistic responsibility for warders. The nature of this magical diffusion becomes clearer in contrast. The character Arlen becomes a more unique magic user as he re-discovers fighting wards, and ingests demon flesh, internalising the demon magic. There is no one else with magic like him and so the impetus for altruism rises and he takes on a saviour role. In the Krasian society to the south, where the majority of men must be warriors to fight demons nightly and 'die on alagai [demon] talons',[35] those who have the aptitude and become warders are revered for their skill. Rather than mere tradesmen as they are

[35] Peter V. Brett, *The Desert Spear* (London: HarperCollins, 2010), Kindle ebook, p. 17.

in the north, warders are respected for their sacrifice and dedication to others as the magic system, represented in them, is less widely diffused in their society.

Consider the structure of the magic system in Brett's world, as opposed to the magic naturally occurring in the demons; warding literally creates a closed system. A ward net, in order to function properly, must be a fully complete circle. This shows the magic system creating closed-systems of communities, of homes, every night. The magic system is contributing to the stagnation of their society, and the perpetuation of marginalising norms. This, combined with the external pressure of the magic in the forms of demons, is magic as a force of shaping; it is constructing the context and therefore impacting the lives of the people of Thesa; the context that it constructs serves to highlight the social forces that are dividing men and women into separately valued roles in this society.

Much as there is a mirroring between the innate magic of the demons, as opposed to the magic *system* of warding that must be learned, there is a key difference in hierarchical structures between mankind and the demons. In Brett's world, the established human society is patriarchal; cities are ruled by dukes and the women in this world are societally relegated to subordinate reproductive roles; the patriarchal government is merely indicative of the gendered state of this world. The demons provide a contrast to this. Their society is essentially a hive structure where the demons that rise nightly are nearly mindless drones; there are demon princes who are functionally generals who can lead and control the drones; and then there is the queen who rules them all. Demon society is matriarchal and indeed heavily so if we compare the distribution of power amongst them; there is only one queen, and thousands of lesser demons, that is to say that one female—the only female—holds the majority of the power in demon society. It is she who controls all movement of the demons. The drone demons are in this sense the

marginalised units of their society; forced into particular roles from which they do not have the power to escape as the queen controls all of their potential movement.

The magic of the world—the demons—are in this way utilised as a more tangible, externally visible representation of mankind's internal demons. In this light, the rigid hierarchy of the demon hive serves to demonstrate the flaws in the patriarchal system of the humans of Thesa. The demons represent the dark results of being entirely determined by one's context, demon drones do not think independently, a flame demon can be nothing but a flame demon. Much as the magiscape offers us a more visible socially constructive flow of power, the demons of Thesa highlight the flaws and dangers of a prescriptively gendered society. It is a hyper-exaggeration, in the mode that fantasy adopts, that draws attention to the flaws of the human society; in this case, the contrast between a patriarchy and a matriarchy supports a queer perspective by demonstrating that a strict reversal of power would only support the underlying, problematic structures of the society. A queer perspective is that which calls into question 'the assumptions that—intentionally or otherwise—inhere in the mobilisation of any identity category, including itself.' [36] The magic of Brett's world is ultimately self-defeating and in this way supports this queering of society, this change achieved through subversion of norms as

> the ultimate queer objective is to intervene in both gender and sexuality studies by dissolving all traditional sexology's normative categories, including, in the final instance, the oppositional anticategory of the queer.[37]

[36] Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1996), p. 126.
[37] Bertholde Schoene, 'Queer politics, queer theory, and the future of "identity": spiralling out of culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 283-302 (p. 294).

If, as the narrative progression of the series suggests, mankind takes the battle to the queen, and wipes out the demons with warded spears, then the magic will cease to exist. With no demons to power the wards they are just symbols with no magical affect. The magic then, can be seen to shape the world, with the threat of the demons creating boundaries for growth, identity, and change—which can best be seen in the relegation of women via reproductive impetus. However, then the magic can also be seen to act as a force of change in the world—creating opportunities for women to step out of their socially dictated positions, creating a space in which norms can begin to change via their subversion—to such an extent that the magic changes even itself. In Thesa, the subversive, and self-defeating, nature of the magic was in some ways inevitable as, taking its non-gendered place in a gendered world, it already existed external to, but intertwined with, the social norms.

In turning to discuss the role of women in this society, the character of Leesha presents a subversive agent who moves through the world in a queer mode, questioning and challenging the established, normative structures; and it is the magic that proves to Leesha that she can succeed, can move through the world to grow and change, in her own way.

In Brett's world, where demons attack every night, what this external pressure from the magiscape creates is a pressure on population and with that comes a heightened value placed upon women's reproductive capability and the act of reproduction itself. In *Feminist Futures: Re-Imagining Women, Culture and Development* Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian discuss the need for adopting a "Women, Culture and Development" (WCD) perspective which

> takes as central that production and reproduction cannot be separated in the lives of most women […] [and that] it is evident that the rise of

> capitalism in the nineteenth century forced a sharp split between the spheres of the public and the private, or the domains of production and reproduction, a split that means that reproductive activity is less visible in most discussions of productive activity.[38]

What can be seen in Brett's world, as a result of the return of demons, is a social and historic reversion to a society before the "rise of capitalism" and with this comes a simplifying of economic trends that is tied to the smaller populations, and the decreased availability of goods and services due to the demand forced onto certain facets of society by the external pressure of the demons. With this reversion of any kind of capitalism comes a reduction of that "split between the domains of production and reproduction." In a sense, the children of Thesa are akin to economic capital in that their production is what keeps the world turning, is what keeps humanity alive in the face of external pressures. This demand for children drives up the need for supply and so increases the value of reproduction; which in turn impacts upon the envaluated role of women.

In the social context that Brett creates, it is entirely logical for the characters to adopt a perspective that women need to be bearing children, that this is how a woman succeeds in this society; for if they do not then there will be no society, only demons. This is evident in the character of Elona and her almost ravenous desire for her daughter to have children; insisting that she has 'already wasted [her] best breeding years with [her] nose buried in dusty old books.'[39] From the reader's perspective, Elona is a distasteful woman who seems at first glance to be simultaneously trying to vicariously live through her daughter and

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[38] Kum-Kum Bhavnani, John Foran, and Priya Kurian, 'An Introduction to Women, Culture and Development', in *Feminist Futures: Re-Imagining Women, Culture and Development* (London: Zed Books, 2003), pp. 1-21 (p. 8).

[39] Peter V. Brett, *The Painted Man* (London: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle ebook, p. 283.

then trying to punish her daughter for her own mistakes. However, one must remember that this is an immersive fantasy and as such requires the reader's open acceptance of the status quo, of the established perspective. To Elona's mind, should her daughter not have children then she is useless to the community whereas should she reproduce she would become a person who brings joy and life to a people who live with loss year-round. She would become valued and loved, and through this success could be happy.

In this way, Elona's perspective, although socially constructed and inherently problematic, is rooted in a desire for female success. This perspective is even more explicit in the city of Miln where a woman who gives birth is given the honorific of "Mother" along with which comes great respect and higher social status. It is the Mothers who rule Miln in truth rather than the duke, even if they do not do so openly. The messenger Ragen notes that 'that's just how things are in Miln. People make the world go, and Mothers make people, so they lead the dance.' [40] This is not to say that women should be relegated to a role as reproductive units, I seek to establish the commonly held perspective within this world and show that said perspective has been constructed out of the social context. Moreover, Brett is aware of the world he is creating and he writes not to suggest that the role of women should be relegated outside of men's roles and rooted solely in their sex; rather, Brett positions these surface level binaries such that, once one looks deeper, rather than reinforcing binary thinking, the existence of these binaries creates a space in which a subversion of the established world can take place.

So while initially it may appear as though the sexual violence that takes place in the novels is being used to contrast against the joy found through

[40] Brett, *The Painted Man*, p. 14.

reproduction outside of that sexual violence—a contrast which would support the established binary gender roles—instead a queer perspective is being adopted in which the female characters and the magic of these novels step beyond and outside their expected roles and subvert the status quo. A queer position exhibits behaviour, actions, and choices other to, or outside of gender expectations. Leesha, as a woman in Thesa, is expected to give in, marry Gared, and become a mother. Instead she chooses success outside of the normative female contexts.

She establishes herself as a mother outside of the prescribed mode, much like establishing a sexual identity outside of presumed biological essentialism or any kind of prescribed gender role. In both cases the choosing of the external option draws attention to the marginalising tendencies of the closed system, and by establishing an agency outside of the closed system, proves that the "naturalness", the essentialism of the binary false. Brett is able, in this way, to deny an assumption that women's roles should be relegated to areas deemed normative by their sex, and instead locate female agency outside of any sexual context or binary.

Were we to remain at a surface level reading of Brett's series, we might view Elona's daughter, Leesha, as the contrasting perspective, wherein Elona pushes for Leesha to have children and Leesha defies her. Except that she does not. Leesha does have a desire for children of her own one day; but she also has a desire to fill her life in other ways, to find success elsewhere. The character of Leesha, rather than attempting a synthesis, steps outside of all expectations in order to achieve self-determination.

Butler states that 'censorship is not merely restrictive and privative […] but operates to make certain kinds of citizens possible and others impossible.'[41]

[41] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 132.

Consider, then, this social "censorship" of women's roles in Brett's world. Each time Elona tells Leesha to have children, or as the other women of the town judge her for "sleeping" with Gared even though she did not, there is a performative act taking place that is a censorship of Leesha's voice—as it is denied its truth—a censorship of Leesha's identity, and of her agency. The performative act, which is born from and supported by the consensus social perspective, pushes against an individual's attempts or opportunities to make decisions or moves outside of the established framework; the ideoscape of Thesa, the flow of ideological power that insists that women should be relegated to reproductive roles, pushes to make it "impossible" for any "kinds of [female] citizens" other than mothers.

An example of a social subversion can be located by comparing Leesha's journey with the discussion that Juschka presents concerning the character of Marianne in Carter's *Heroes and Villains*; a character arc that Juschka highlights for its strengths in '[interposing] a feminist view that complicates the situation'[42] but also for the limitations inherent in so strongly embracing a dialectical attempt at a solution. The character arc of Marianne that Juschka outlines describes Marianne's role in the narrative as acting out the dialectic in the way that she 'rejects the myth of female subjectivity as commodity, as the virgin and the whore […] and instead creates a new mythic role, the tiger lady.'[43] Marianne is depicted as moving from civilized known world, to the unknown barbarian world and existing in a marginalised position in both until she embraces a more active role within 'masculine hegemony, [by grasping] the scepter (phallus) and [ruling] with an iron hand.';[44] by being 'not the object of the gaze, but the objectifying gazer.'[45] As Juschka, and Carter herself in her later writings, identifies, the role that

[42] Juschka, p. 165.
[43] Juschka, p. 165.
[44] Juschka, p. 164.
[45] Juschka, p. 164.

Marianne plays only subsumes culturally instilled values, and by operating within the established structure, fails to alter that structure.

What Brett presents in the character of Leesha is a similar attempt to utilise a female character who moves between cultural groups, experiencing different definitions and expectations of female identity; but rather than challenging them internally by adopting a "strong" warrior position—a position already metaphorically linked with male identity—and so aligning herself with male identity, what Leesha does instead is step outside of the established structures to subvert rather than synthesize the socially enforced gender roles and expectations.

Leesha begins, in Brett's first novel—*The Painted Man*—as the naïve girl, betrothed to the handsome Gared. In the face of private criticism from her overbearing mother, she takes comfort in the escape she will soon have once she "flowers" and can marry Gared. Fully trusting, Leesha's world shatters in a figurative rape: Gared lies and tells the town that they slept together and, knowing of her mother Elona's promiscuous history, none believe Leesha when she denies it. The victim of this act Leesha becomes lost; with her once bright and determined future gone, she feels as though she has nothing left. This removal and reduction of her choices is a rape of her agency, a symbolical foreshadowing of the literal rape she will undergo later in the same novel. We can see in the town's response to her plight that she appears powerless before the consensus perspective.

There is one person in town who believes in Leesha's claims of virginity – the herb gatherer Bruna. Old beyond memory, and wise to the ways of the world, Bruna shows to Leesha that there is another way. She can let herself be crushed, and therefore controlled, by what society says she must be, or she can choose to step outside of their expectations; she can choose her life for herself; and so

Leesha becomes an apprentice Herb Gatherer, and eventually an Herb Gatherer in her own right with Bruna's passing. This process of becoming an Herb Gatherer not only is significant in terms of affirming Leesha's agency, but the knowledge and power that such a role represents, power that ultimately stems from the choice she has made, leads only to further success and power in enabling her study of warding.

This shift is a significant one in that it highlights an agency that is in no way determined by sex or reproduction. There is a success, a respect, and a power to be had in being the town Herb Gatherer and Leesha claims it fully. In adopting this external position—both literally in living outside of the town, and symbolically in living outside of their gendered squabbles—Leesha makes a dramatic shift away from the naïve girl fully determined by her context, and, in acknowledging this new, non-binary context, is able to be informed by her context rather than controlled by it. She is able to choose for herself rather than have her choices made for her.

Leesha's mother is steeped entirely in the instilled value system of female reproductive success. She instinctively fears that Leesha is, to use Juschka's terminology, making herself a female-outsider; an act which only marginalises her further. However what is significant, what Leesha's mother does not realise, is that rather than willingly stepping into a marginalised, or limited side of an envaluated root binary, what Leesha has done is take a step outside of the binary system and in doing so is able to reassess the politics of that system and with her choice change the power dynamic of that system. In her decision lies a dramatic shift from being the desirable girl, whom no-one would believe did not sleep with Gared, 'the object of gaze',[46] to the woman whom everyone in town relies upon.

[46] Juschka, p. 164.

Leesha goes from weeping girl to the keeper of demon fire, healer of wounds, deliverer of children, becoming the world's foremost expert on demon physiology and an accomplished warder in her own right. So while it is the magic that creates the socially limiting boundaries of society, much as in the previous novels discussed, it is also the magic that offers potential for change.

Through Leesha the reader can engage with the queer perspective that Brett's world adopts. In discussing Angela Carter's work, Juschka notes Carter's attempt to deal with problematic gender binaries through application of a dialectic in which a character becomes the synthesis of "tiger-lady" or warrior-woman. This synthesis however, does not defeat the problematic binary of male/female. Definition as a warrior-woman does not further any feminist cause, for whilst it may demonstrate the strength of a woman outside of her socially determined field of success, it fails to remove or reduce the root cause of the problem: the envaluated binary itself. A synthesis, being a combination of a positive and a negative, only supports the binary structure because the pieces of the synthesis are still metaphorically linked to the original value statements; for "warrior-woman" then, warrior still connotes man while woman still connotes weak in the context of this gendered binary system. As a synthesis subsumes the assumptions of the original structure, to attempt re-definition in this way can only support that original structure. The character Leesha, then, embodies less of an opposition or synthesis, and more of a separation.

Butler states that 'without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society.'[47] In this sense, Leesha is the "queer agent" of the narrative. So in considering Leesha, now unable to have children, having separated from her

[47] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 25.

betrothed, and having had her choice in regards to her reproductive role removed from her, the normative social context in which she lives would suggest to the reader that she is lost, that there is no way for her to live fully as a woman in this society. By having Leesha, rather than giving in to social pressures, step outside of the normative context to succeed differently than is socially determined, the existence of non-reproductive success shows to the reader that female identity and female agency cannot be reduced by the demands of the society. Ultimately, the power of her agency resides in her ability to choose for herself. Bertholde Schoene notes that

> [i]t is in this way that individuals—constructed, but never entirely determined by cultural and socio-historical circumstance—are given the opportunity to intervene productively in history, not so much by forging a counterdiscourse against systemic coercion as by subversively, "queerly", modulating discourse itself.[48]

Leesha's undeniable success in becoming a Herb Gatherer and a warder, roles through which she ends up saving and leading her town, rather than capitulating to social pressure, serves to "modulate the discourse" of her town. Butler tells us that

> the subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition […]; "agency," then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition.[49]

These quotes from Schoene and Butler highlight a key point in discussing a queering, or subverting, of social norms—the difference between being socially "determined" and socially "constructed".

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[48] Schoene, p. 300.
[49] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 145.

It is Leesha's subversive choices that unexpectedly draw her and her mother closer together; women fight demons alongside men as the established gender roles begin, slowly, to shift. Once the emphasis on sex and reproduction is diminished, the power of women in this society only grows. As Jasnah Kohlin states, 'For some, it will be the role of scholar; for others, it will be the role of wife. For others, it will be both. For yet others, it will be neither.'[50] When Leesha later becomes pregnant, unlike her post-rape abortion in an earlier novel of the series, it is the result of a choice that she makes for herself. She could have chosen to marry the invading king to secure safety for her people, but that would be a prostitution of her agency. Rather, having somewhat fallen for this man, she chooses to sleep with him for her own reasons and in this way ultimately reaffirms the power in choosing to be a mother by choosing to raise her child alone:

> "You will do nothing." Leesha yanked her arm away, holding the other protectively over her belly. "This child isn't yours, Ahmann! I am not yours! We are human beings and do not belong to anyone. This is where you fail time and again, and why my people will never bow willingly to you. You cannot own people."[51]

"You cannot own people", just as you cannot make decisions for them, or determine their fate; nor can choosing to find success and happiness in expected roles for your own reasons do anything but reaffirm your agency. Through this queer, "modulating of discourse", Leesha finds her agency in a 'variation on that repetition',[52] a variation on motherhood, and in turn the role of women entirely.

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[50] Sanderson, *Words of Radiance*, p. 772.
[51] Peter V. Brett, *The Daylight War* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), Kindle ebook, p. 782.
[52] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 145.

The character of Leesha does not tear down the existing structures, but subverts them, questions them, and in parts supports them. In this case the point is not that reproductive success is wrong, but that being societally relegated to a position where the only choice is reproduction, and therefore is no longer actually a choice, is wrong. Leesha is, in this way, socially constructed in terms of where she places value, but she is not socially determined; no one makes her decisions for her. Consider again the meshwork, if we are limited in our movement and so cannot intertwine with others, then we cannot change and grow. Society stagnates when society marginalises. Through Leesha the mothers of the town are reaffirmed in their choices. Their reproductive success, rather than being lessened as bowing to society's norms, is strengthened through the recognition of choice and by being placed alongside other forms of success that other women, and men, have found.

It is clear that these works derive from a western context in their recognition of the focus that has been historically put on gender roles as being biologically determined; in that a man and a woman are required to make a child and so from this model comes the assumption that there are two different roles into which an individual agent must fall. However, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, even our ideas about biological sex are culturally and societally constructed. What the fantasy offers the reader is a critique of these base assumptions that bring about problematic binary thinking. Brett's work suggests that once the emphasis on reproduction and sex is shifted, then the "normative" gender roles begin to shift also.

An excellent exploration of this point can be found in Patrick Rothfuss' *The Wise Man's Fear*, wherein the Adem society has no concept of male involvement in reproduction, believing instead that a 'woman ripens. It is a

natural thing, and men have no part in it. That is why more women ripen in the fall, like fruit. That is why more women ripen here in Haert, where it is better to have a child.'[53] It is a perfectly logical perspective, without the aid of scientific and microscopic proof, to believe that the act of sex has nothing to do with the childbirth that takes place nine months after the act. Much as the gender dynamic begins to change once the emphasis on female success through reproduction is removed in Brett's world; in the Adem society, with men having no role in reproduction, the gender dynamic is entirely different. Their society, in terms of opportunity and ways to succeed, is egalitarian. They have widely accepted perspectives on the differences between men and women; for example it is commonly agreed among the Adem that, whilst there are of course exceptions, women are in general better fighters than men because men tend to be more impulsive and rash than women.

Though, in Adem society, they may conceive of and discuss differences in gender, they do not let those differences determine one's role in life. This fantasy society suggests that difference between agents does not, or should not, metaphorically connote "lack" but rather should connote a uniqueness of individuality that should be appreciated and cherished. This is perhaps the best suggestion for dealing with identity issues; for in saying that re-definition, change, or growth is realised in the Third Space of interaction, in the inter-twining of meshworks, is not to suggest that the ultimate goal is homogeneity. Instead, what the fantasy reader should take away from these texts is a heightened level of self-awareness achieved through the self-reflexivity granted by acknowledging and accepting an external perspective.

[53] Patrick Rothfuss, *The Wise Man's Fear* (London: Gollancz, 2011), p. 838.

> To envision the end of systemic oppression in terms of an emancipatory self-extrication from power is misleading and delusive. One cannot ever liberate oneself from one's socio-historically determined frame of being and thus accomplish a triumphant jump out of culture. According to Foucault, the best one can hope to achieve is a first tentative step out of a position of remote control into a position of self-conscious unruliness and resistance.[54]

In the context of Brett's *Demon Cycle* Leesha's "self-extrication" from social norms and expectations is not presented as an act which will destroy the social norms and pressures, the "systemic oppression"; but rather, the character seeks to escape being "socio-historically determined" such that the socio-historic context, and all that that includes, can be modulated.

In the fantasy genre, and particularly the immersive fantasy with its antagonistic protagonists, the journey of the reader, then, is one of '[stepping] out of a position of remote control'[55] such that their own discourse, their own perspective and cultural context can begin to be modulated. The reader is never fully "extricated" from their context, just as the novel is never fully un-influenced by the context of its author, and in this way the state of reality can be addressed.

Binary gender is clearly an issue of contemporary reality; it is why, for example, queer theory has risen up to oppose such socially restrictive norms. The three immersive fantasy worlds explored in this chapter all approach the problems of binary gender with different focuses. In each case the magic is the tangible example of fantasy's exaggeration of social forces in an exaggerated context in order to highlight both the flaws in gendered societies and that the possibility for change already exists, it just needs to be enacted. *The Codex Alera* presents a

[54] Schoene, p. 284.
[55] Schoene, p. 284.

context in which the undeniable parity of ability in furycrafting between men and women enables a shift outside of inhibiting binaries. *The Wheel of Time* introduces the reader to a world that was literally broken, and that brokenness is reflected in the harshly gendered state of the world; we can see in Jordan's writing an extreme example of how binary gender, socially determined gender, can damage an entire world. The *Demon Cycle*, through the magic, illuminates both the construction of gender binaries and also their subversion. Due to the intersectional nature of the immersive world, and by focusing through the magic, what becomes clear are the social forces that marginalise individuals and therefore also stagnate society.

Conclusion

Contemporary fantasy is a genre that exists outside the boundaries of what consensus society constructs as socially normative. It may in some ways reproduce specific elements of reality, but on the whole, fantasy seeks the new, the different, and the strange. It takes reality and twists it, refracts it, and showcases it in new and different ways altogether with the aim of asking at every turn the how and why of it all. To speak of the impossible is mere speculation, but to speak of the real from an impossible position is to shed new light. The subversion, or re-appropriation of the facets of reality is being capitalised on in order to put the reader in a position from which they can re-assess their own socially constructed identities, perspectives, and assumptions that, due to the normative social pressures of their world, they may not have had reason to question otherwise. It offers the reader 'a decentered point of view from where he could turn back upon himself, making him a stranger to himself, and invite him to question more vigorously the foundations of his own position in the world.'[1] Fantasy accomplishes these goals through two key, and related, techniques.

Firstly, it exhibits a hyper-exaggeration of context and content; this is the re-appropriation of the facets of reality I mentioned above. It takes the familiar—such as people and their motivations, modes of government, ways of understanding gender—and makes them strange; it pushes these things to their extreme. This can result in say a father (the familiar) fighting a king to the death for his daughter (the strange) in order to highlight the futility of resisting a higher power, or to highlight the flaws in a system that controls its subjects' lives to the extent that it takes daughters from fathers. But in all cases the extreme context is

[1] Descola, p. 62.

being exhibited in order to distance the reader such that a level of self-awareness and self-reflection can be achieved via that distancing. As Attebery writes, '[t]he fundamental premise of fantasy is that the things it tells not only did not happen but could not have happened. In that literal untruth is the freedom to tell many symbolic truths without forcing a choice among them.'[2]

The second mode by which fantasy accomplishes its goals, and the tool which enables the first mode, is through the magic; through that central, intertwined, fundamental facet of the fantasy world. The element of fantasy that shapes and changes the meshworks of identity that make up that world. The magic functions as a tool of social construction; it is, in essence, the hyper-exaggerated form of the socially constructive forces in reality, such as cultural ideologies, perception of identity, and constructed gender roles. I say it is hyper-exaggerated because not only is it more immediately visible, more recognisable in its role, than the often unquestioned, unnoticed social forces of reality, but it is also all of the separately socially constructive forces rolled into one. The progression of this thesis has demonstrated how the magic plays a role in cultural identity, perception, and gender identity.

In discussing cultural difference through the lens of magic, the forces that were constructing cultural groups, both within and without, became clear. The non-existent Alerans and Canim, and their impossible furycrafting and blood magic respectively, proffer for the reader examples of value systems that are pieced together from values existing in reality. By presenting such cultural difference to the reader, the fantasy world is able to enact an extreme distancing effect that is simultaneously connected to facets of reality with which the reader is familiar. This distance then grants the reader a new position and new license to re-

[2] Attebery, p. 4.

assess those familiar values in ways that cannot be achieved in reality where one cannot experience the clash of Canim and Aleran in the contact zone of the Leviathan Sea.

The fact that the reader can utilise the magic of the world as a focusing lens towards the key points of conflict and change, demonstrates the role that magic plays in how the fantasy world is perceived, again, both within and without. For the Alerans, their furycrafting means they can see only themselves as successful—and even then only the strongest of them—and everyone else must be a failure. Their own identity is shaped by the existence of magic, but it also affects how they are viewed externally. The Canim, the Marat, and the Icemen all have deeply negative perceptions of the flawed Aleran society, it is why they fight again and again, but they all also hold grudging respect for the Aleran's furycrafting power. The magic performatively sustains the status quo by constantly affecting the perceptions of everyone involved, including the reader. However, as I noted, the magic effecting that perception, also causes people to fight again and again, to meet and interact, to intertwine agent with agent. In this way magic also holds the power to change.

As an active agent itself, with its own unique identity—Canish blood magic, Aleran furycrafting, and Elantrian AonDor, are all instances of magic and all are completely different—magic has the power to change the perceptions that it has established. Much as a person can change their perception of someone else, the magic, as an active agent in the fantasy world, can change how people perceive themselves and others. The reader, as an immersive participant, is not only witness to multiple, conflicting, and changing perspectives rooted in the power flow of the socially constructive magiscape, but, through their immersion in the world, the magic intertwines with their perception too.

For the contemporary reader of fantasy, and particularly for the western reader—as is likely due to the originating American context of these novels—socially prescribed gender roles are clearly a contemporary issue. One, I would argue, that is sustained because many people do not actively think about it—particularly those whom it privileges—because gender is a socially constructed issue that is not actively enforced, it is only performatively enforced and in these cases 'that power continues to act in illegible ways is one source of its relative invulnerability.'[3] What contemporary fantasy offers, much as it did in examining cultural difference, are more tangible examples and explorations of the ways in which binary gender, or other discriminatory practices, are socially constructed and then performatively sustained. Instead of a relatively invisible performative history that places "normative" female success in a reproductive sphere, in Brett's work the reader is presented with demons who rise every night, culling the population and creating a heightened demand on population and alongside that an increased societal value placed upon women's reproductive abilities.

In the world Brett constructs, children are in a sense an economic capital essential to the survival of humanity. In that social context one can see why a society might establish separate roles for men and women. While this perspective being presented to the reader is clearly problematic, by creating a world in this way, what Brett is able to do is first make more clear how social identities can be established by rooting their causes in the magic of the world, and then, in a world established this way, explore such relationships and perhaps suggest tangible ways of subverting, questioning, or changing established structures that in reality might not be so easy to come to terms with.

[3] Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p.134.

This discussion of magic in contemporary fantasy has shown how it binds groups together, and in that process divides group from group; it builds up the borders, the edges of societies, but as the tool of a genre existing outside the boundaries of the normative, it must therefore also be the force which breaks down those boundaries, the force which tears down the unity that divides, and opens the systems perceived as closed. The magic calls into question the assumptions of the fantasy world, it interrogates itself, and in this way is a call to action for the reader to undergo a similar interrogation: 'Asking questions of the text, we must be willing to let the text ask questions of us.'[4] Attebery suggests that 'in a sense, genre itself becomes a meeting place, a contact zone';[5] I argue that, more specifically the fantasy novel itself, in this way, becomes a contact zone, a site of interaction between worlds, a mediating affair. It is a literary Third Space in which the ideals, norms, and assumptions of the reader collide with those of another world that on the surface appears nothing like their reality, but through a suspension of disbelief, and an act of immersion, the surface differences change as the reader realises that what they represent, what they are in fact talking about, is the reader's own reality. As Pratt notes, by working within the contact zone—in this case the fantasy literature—issues and ideas can become 'more widely visible, more pressing and […] more decipherable to those who once would have ignored them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality.'[6]

To appropriate Schoene's words about queer identity: 'Similar to the way in which every individual reading is always also an act of rewriting, every performative act of cultural repetition is invested with the promise of subjective

[4] Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 9.
[5] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 175.
[6] Pratt, p. 37.

resignification.'[7] Which is to say that the act of reading is then an act of knotting, of intertwining, of agents as the fantasy world intertwines its experiences, its shapes and changes, its meshworks, with those of the reader to create a space in which "subjective resignification" is possible. Ingold notes that 'thus things are not classified like facts, or tabulated like data, but narrated like stories. And every place, as a gathering of things, is a knot of stories.'[8] In this way we can understand that then a knot of stories must be a gathering of things, a gathering of agents and identities with which the reader can interact and change through the experience of difference to their self. 'By telling stories about, around, and upon mythic stories, we put ourselves onto the same stage with the gods and heroes and monsters and thus are forced to confront our godlike, heroic, and monstrous selves.'[9]

What this thesis has demonstrated, by treating contemporary fantasy texts as social testing grounds and capitalising upon the utility of treating the magic within the fantasy text as a tangible tool of social construction, is that these techniques enable a dissection and discussion of fantasy such that real and meaningful conclusions can be drawn from these imagined worlds. While this thesis has begun a discussion of cultural difference, perception and identity, and gender, the techniques used to construct this discussion can be applied to other fantasy worlds and, more significantly, to other facets of our social reality such, as issues of class, race, or religion.

Considering the relative youth of contemporary fantasy, as well as its desire to continue pushing beyond the boundaries, to keep questioning, what this understanding of the genre as a testing ground—and of magic as a key tool in the

[7] Schoene, pp. 300-1.
[8] Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 154.
[9] Attebery, *Stories about Stories*, p. 4.

literary analysis of fantasy—offers is the potential for not only an increased breadth but also depth of literary analysis across an expanding variety of subgenres. Particularly through interdisciplinary approaches, such as with anthropology or gender studies, fantasy creates spaces in which pressing concerns can be addressed in a new way through its mode of hyper-exaggeration.

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