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**(De)Constructed Binaries:  
Dialogue and Monologue in  
Contemporary Popular Fantasy**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores three works of contemporary popular epic fantasy and the way in which binary oppositions are constructed and resolved in these texts. I argue that the three texts studied represent a wider trend in contemporary fantasy which questions the idea of binary opposition, while working within that same structure. I analyse the resolution of these binaries through the terminology provided by Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on dialogue and monologue offers a way of comparing the different oppositions prioritised by each author. The texts studied are Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008), Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* (1995-1997), and N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017).

My work focuses on three binary oppositions that appear in all three primary texts, and so offers a point of comparison between them. The oppositions studied are the good/evil binary, the Self/Other binary, and the achievement of immortality, which is represented as a result of the contact between binary opposites in all three texts. This thesis will make use of a variety of theoretical frameworks in order to analyse the key oppositions in the texts. When discussing Sanderson, 'good' and 'evil' are understood through the work of Simon Baron-Cohen's *The Science of Evil* (2011), which uses the presence of empathy as the determining moral factor. In *The Farseer Trilogy*, the work of Ernest Becker is useful in describing how immortality is represented as the fusion of two opposed elements of humanity, the animal and symbolic. For this I turn to Becker's *The Denial of Death* (1973). Finally, Jemisin's

representation of the Self is understood using the terminology of Dialogical Self Theory, in which the Self is the result of the interaction between Others, both within and outside the Self.

I suggest that each text portrays the interaction between opposites as either dialogical or monological, using the terminology provided by Bakhtin. Ultimately, I show that, rather than simply featuring binary opposition, each of the trilogies studied actively questions the legitimacy of those same oppositions. In this way, these texts resist a common criticism of fantasy literature, which is often seen as 'simplistic' precisely because of its reliance on binary opposites.

## Lay Summary

Popular fantasy is often accused of being 'simplistic' due to its reliance on binary oppositions, such as a conflict between 'good' and 'evil'. While many popular fantasy texts do revolve around straightforward oppositions, this thesis shows that a trend exists in contemporary popular fantasy which calls into question these binaries. This thesis uses Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008), Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* (1995-1997), and N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017) to show that some popular fantasy texts use the structure of binary opposition to question that same structure. I argue that the way opposites are ultimately resolved in each of the texts studied illustrates the limitations of binary oppositions. Therefore, I conclude that these three trilogies cannot be described as 'simplistic' due to their inclusion of binary oppositions. Rather, these texts purposefully question these oppositions in highly complex ways.



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## Introduction

In his chapter, “Structuralism”, from *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012), Brian Attebery notes that “[f]antasy is often criticized for being too obvious in its oppositions”, addressing an extremely common perception of popular fantasy literature as ‘simplistic’ (86). This may be particularly true for the kind of fantasy which Attebery has elsewhere called “formula fantasy”, or that fantasy which closely follows the received “recipe” of fantasy (*Strategies* 9-10). This thesis proposes to analyse the creation and resolution of binary oppositions in contemporary popular epic fantasy, in order to show that some texts offer a more complex understanding of these oppositions than may be expected. Ultimately, I argue that, rather than simply illustrating binary opposition, these texts question and destabilise the concept of binary opposition in the way that they portray the interactions between supposed ‘opposites’.

The accusation of ‘simplistic’ binary oppositions goes back to a central figure within the fantasy canon whose work, Attebery suggests, is the “mental template” of the fantasy genre for readers in English: J.R.R. Tolkien (*Strategies* 14). Tolkien had a lasting influence on contemporary popular fantasy that can still be seen today. In their article, “The Other Side of Redwall” (2021), Christopher Kheong and his co-authors explicitly identify Tolkien as the origin of contemporary fantasy’s tendency towards binaries (245). Binary opposition has also featured heavily in the work of key writers associated with both literary theory and fantasy. In “The Structural

Study of Myth" (1955), Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that "mythical thought always works from the awareness of opposition towards their progressive mediation" (440). In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell argues that "pairs of opposites" are "a motif known throughout the world" in myth (73). In *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Carl Jung writes: "The sad truth is that man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites – day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil" (75). What brings these three theorists together, apart from their concern with opposition, is their importance to fantasy literature. Jung's suggestion, in particular, implies that binary opposition is an essential element of human life. It would make sense, therefore, that binary opposition would be a central concern of fantasy literature, and that this concern is anything but simple. Nevertheless, the perception of popular fantasy as 'simplistic' continues to impact the canonisation of fantasy texts, and limit academic approaches to the genre. This thesis is, in part, a response to this limitation, and provides a more productive understanding of binary opposition in popular fantasy.

The texts studied are Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008), Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* (1995-1997), and N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017). These three trilogies are extremely popular examples of contemporary epic fantasy, each having sold well over a million copies, and been nominated for,

and received, several awards.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there has been little academic work on these texts, with the exception of Jemisin's trilogy. To highlight the impact of the three primary texts in popular fantasy, I turn to the recently published results of the r/Fantasy subreddit's annual "Top Novels" survey. The r/Fantasy subreddit is highly active, with over 3.2 million members at the time of writing. The 2023 survey involved 10,000 votes, with nearly 1200 total entries on the final list (U/fanny\_bertram). While it must be considered an informal poll, it does offer an important insight into the current fan canon. All three of the trilogies studied in this thesis appeared in the top 20, with Sanderson and Hobb's trilogies featuring in the top 10 (U/fanny\_bertram). What is striking about these inclusions is the comparative age of some of the texts. Hobb's trilogy in particular, written in the mid-90s, remains in print and popular to this day, a rare achievement in contemporary fantasy with thousands of new titles published every year. Significantly, J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth texts (grouped together to avoid excessive repetition) were named number 2, with another series by Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive* (2010-present), appearing as number 1 (U/fanny\_bertram). This is not a recent development, as Sanderson's *Stormlight Archive* has been voted as

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<sup>1</sup> Famously, N.K. Jemisin is the first author to win the Hugo award in three consecutive years for *The Broken Earth* trilogy (Cunningham). Sanderson's *The Hero of Ages*, the third book in the *Mistborn* trilogy, was nominated for the David Gemmel award in 2009, and he won a Hugo award for other work in 2013 (sfadb.com, "Brandon Sanderson"). In 2021, Robin Hobb was awarded a Life Achievement award from the World Fantasy Convention (worldfantasy.org), and *Assassin's Apprentice*, *Royal Assassin*, and *Assassin's Quest* were each nominated for the Locus Award in 1996, 1997, and 1998 respectively (sfadb.com, "Robin Hobb").

the number 1 series in every list since 2019 (r/Fantasy). While Tolkien's writing is a central pillar to both the academic and fan canons of fantasy literature, his placement on this list suggests the fan community has been more willing to canonise new texts. While these trilogies have had a huge impact on the fan canon, the same cannot be said of their impact on academic scholarship on fantasy. Although Jemisin's trilogy has received a great deal of critical attention, studies involving Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* and Sanderson's *Mistborn* series are few and far between.<sup>2</sup> Sanderson has been particularly neglected, with very little academic work concerning his writing.

This thesis offers a more productive understanding of binary opposition in popular epic fantasy. Within the primary texts studied, binary oppositions are indeed a central element of the plot and structure of the narrative. However, all three trilogies create a more complex representation of binary opposition than the common accusation of 'simplicity' can account for. By analysing the way in which opposition is created and resolved in each text, this thesis shows how

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<sup>2</sup> Some recent academic publications do discuss these texts or the authors' other works. *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy* (2016), edited by Jude Roberts and Esther MacCallum-Stewart, includes a chapter by Lenise Prater which discusses Hobb's trilogy. Peter Melville also analyses *The Farseer Trilogy* in "Queerness and Homophobia in Robin Hobb's Farseer Trilogy" (2018) and discussed Sanderson's *Mistborn* in "Revolutionary Subjectivity in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* Trilogy" (2016). In terms of book-length discussions Charul Palmer-Patel's *The Shape of Fantasy* (2020) and Matthew Oliver's *Magic Words, Magic Worlds* (2022) both discuss Hobb and Sanderson, while Oliver's study includes a different text by Jemisin than the trilogy studied here. These two represent the few book-length studies of the work of these authors.

contemporary epic fantasy questions the structure of binary opposition while still operating within that same structure.

## Contemporary Popular Epic Fantasy and the Problem of 'Simplicity'

Perceptions of fantasy in academia have changed a great deal since Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), in which he wrote that, despite some notable exceptions, "most literary periodicals seem either unaware of [fantasy literature's] existence or convinced of its unimportance" (vii). Since then, the study of fantasy has become a more accepted field within the academic landscape, but certain limitations remain. In her keynote to the 2022 *International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts*, Farah Mendlesohn discussed the history of canonisation within science fiction studies. She notes that the "academic and fan canons were often very different", due to the "curation of academic histories towards what is suitable for/yields to academic scrutiny" (30-31). She goes on to argue that "[e]ven while more and more academics are emerging with solid fannish credentials alongside their PhDs, there is little evidence of the fan and academic canons converging" (35). Mendlesohn suggests that this disconnect between fan and academic canons is due to the tendency in academia to focus on works which "fit neatly into analytic theories or thematic tropes", rather than reflecting on what is happening in the "wider field" (35). This division is also true in fantasy, and particularly clear when looking at the texts studied in this thesis. As recently as 2018, Jude Roberts and Esther MacCallum-Stewart saw a tendency for fantasy studies to "distinguish

between popular fantasy and the literary fantastic, opting to focus on the latter at the expense of the former” (2). Thus, within the academic canon, fantasy is often split into a hierarchised binary, with popular fan canon texts tending to be ignored.

This tendency to split fantasy literature into two separate categories is a central premise of Daniel Baker’s article, “Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy” (2012). In the article, Baker argues for a distinction between ‘affirmative fantasy’ and ‘progressive fantasy’. He writes that, “in the West, the vast majority of fantasy, those multi-volume mega-series, have been reflections, if not products of conservative politics”, and can therefore be called affirmative fantasy (438). Baker sees affirmative fantasy as symbolically maintaining the status quo through the opposition of the good/evil binary, as “the reader feels no need to change as ‘evil’ has been vicariously defeated by the text’s hero” (440). Baker considers Tolkien as a prime example of this affirmative fantasy, as his writing “turns aside from the deep-rooted structural problems of post-global conflict modernity in favour of the perceived simplicity of pastoral Hobbiton”, which Baker sees as “dangerously naïve” (439). Tolkien’s lasting impact on the genre can be seen, Baker argues, in the continuing presence of affirmative fantasy today.

Baker argues that Tolkien’s work can be understood as affirmative fantasy due to the reliance on a simple opposition between good and evil. However, in her article “The Child and the Shadow” (1975), Ursula K. Le Guin defends Tolkien against this same accusation. She observes that “[c]ritics have been hard on Tolkien for his

'simplisticness,' his division of the inhabitants of Middle Earth into the good people and the evil people" (145). Crucially, rather than defend Tolkien by denying the presence of this opposition, Le Guin accepts that "his good people tend to be entirely good ... while his Orcs and other villains are altogether nasty" (145). Le Guin's answer to the accusation of simplicity is not to deny that binary oppositions exist in fantasy, but rather to offer a more nuanced understanding of those oppositions. She argues that Tolkien's fantasy should not be read "by daylight ethics, by conventional standards of virtue and vice", but rather as a "psychic journey" like the one described in the work of Carl Jung (145). She refers to Jung as the "psychologist whose ideas on art are the most meaningful to artists", and the most appropriate for understanding fantasy (141). Le Guin writes that Jung's work describes a "voyage into the unconscious", and that "most of the great works of fantasy are about that journey" (144). That journey, she argues, contains a moral element: "Most great fantasies contain a very strong, striking moral dialectic, often expressed as a struggle between Darkness and Light" (144). Thus, opposition, according to Le Guin, is at the core of the 'great' fantasies.

For Le Guin, Jung's work sheds light on Tolkien's apparent simplicity and, if read in this manner, *The Lord of the Rings* is revealed to be far more complex than a simple story of 'good' against 'evil':

You see then a group of bright figures, each one with its black shadow.

Against the elves, the orcs. Against Aragorn, the Black Rider. Against

Gandalf, Saruman. And above all, against Frodo, Gollum. Against him – and with him. (145)

According to Le Guin, Tolkien's work is far from escapist or 'simplistic', but rather a "recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul", a fact which only becomes clear when approaching the text from an appropriate critical standpoint (147). This sentiment is mirrored by Attebery, who wrote that "the task of literary theory is to provide a framework capable of accounting for the story's success on its own terms" (*Strategies* 17). Le Guin's defence of Tolkien shows that his work can only be considered simple when judged against 'daylight ethics'. She offers a productive reading of *The Lord of the Rings* by using a more appropriate theoretical framework with which to understand the nature of the binary opposition in question. In essence, Le Guin's defence of Tolkien shows that complexity can often be a matter of perspective, of reading a text on its own terms, rather than in reference to a pre-assigned placement in an arbitrary binary.

However, despite her defence of Tolkien's binary 'simplisticness', in the same article Le Guin observes that "In many fantasy tales of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the tension between good and evil, light and dark, is drawn absolutely clearly, as a battle, the good guys on one side the bad guys on the other", calling these "false fantasies" (145). Interestingly, both Baker and Le Guin categorise fantasy into a hierarchical binary, which revolves around the idea of complexity. This thesis is a response to both Baker and Le Guin's move for a binary categorisation of fantasy and attempts to provide a framework for understanding the primary texts on their own terms. My analysis will show that the common accusation of simplicity which is levelled against popular fantasy ignores the fact that many popular fantasy texts

actively question the structure of binary oppositions, while continuing to work within that same structure.

Before continuing it is important to define the key terms of this thesis. Academics interested in fantasy have traditionally struggled to offer a strict definition of the genre itself. Within the history of fantasy studies, even the word 'fantasy' has been questioned, a complication that goes back to Tzvetan Todorov and his work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973). As pointed out by Attebery, Todorov's study in fact concerns an entirely different genre to the one we refer to in English as fantasy, "a product of diverging meanings for the word *fantastic* in French and English" (*Strategies* 20). Rosemary Jackson builds on this work and refers to the form of fantasy which Todorov is interested in as the literature which "exists between the purely marvellous ... and the purely uncanny" (31). Here, the purely marvellous refers to "fairy tales, romance, and much science fiction" (32). This appears to include a range of texts as varied as the tales of the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen, to Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Philip K. Dick, and Ursula Le Guin. Jackson distinguishes the kind of fantasy she is concerned with by highlighting the way more popular texts "retreat from any profound confrontation with existential dis-ease", rather than more fully embracing fantasy's "impulses towards transgression", once again providing a hierarchised binary of fantasy literature (9). This thesis follows Jackson's attempt to "militate against escapism or a simple pleasure principle" (2) and her interest in uncovering "what might be going on under the cover of this pleasure" (10). However, I do so with the

specific goal of analysing those texts she describes as “that realm of fantasy which is more properly defined as faery, or romance literature” such as “the best-selling fantasies by Kingsley, Lewis, Tolkien, Le Guin or Richard Adams” (9). In many ways my analysis more closely follows the work of Ken Gelder, whose book *New Directions in Popular Literature* (2016), brings “specialist knowledge to bear on popular genres in order, at the very least, to illuminate the way we understand them – and to generate some sympathy for them, if it is not already there” (14). While the immense popularity of fantasy in general, and the three texts this thesis focuses on in particular, would imply that generating sympathy is unnecessary, this thesis does propose to offer new insight into the way these texts are understood.

Fantasy is a genre that includes a huge variety of forms, and there are just as many accepted ‘formulas’ for it. Most of the theorists I have mentioned prefer to think of fantasy as a mode, rather than a genre, which is more useful from a strictly theoretical point of view and when discussing the entire scope of ‘the fantastic’, which refers to the many different manifestations of the non-real in literature. I use the term ‘genre’ consciously as I am talking about a very specific selection of texts, all of which can be grouped together as ‘genre fantasy’, which is often characterised by a close connection to the fantasy ‘formula’ and a high degree of popularity.<sup>3</sup>

While the reliance on a received ‘formula’ may appear to create an inherent

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the distinction between fantasy as genre and mode see the first chapter of Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy*, ‘Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula’.

limitation for fantasy, Attebery argues that “[e]very element of the formula may be present in a tale of sparkling originality. For some writers, narrative constraints seem to act as spurs to the imagination” (*Strategies* 10). This thesis is not an attempt to provide a specific formula for epic fantasy in the style of Attebery’s, somewhat disingenuous, ‘recipe’: “Take a vaguely medieval world. Add a problem. Something more or less ecological, and a prophecy for solving it” (*Strategies* 10). The texts I have chosen could be classified as ‘epic fantasy’, ‘quest fantasy’, or ‘high fantasy’, all somewhat nebulous terms to refer to particular manifestations of one kind of fantasy formula. Attebery suggests that a more useful system of categorisation would involve “fuzzy sets”, in which genres are categorised “not by boundaries but by a centre”, or in terms of relative closeness to a canonical ‘tentpole’ text (*Strategies* 12). Taking this suggestion, I understand the epic fantasy subgenre to be centred around texts such as the works of Tolkien, Robert Jordan, Steven Erikson, Le Guin, and David Eddings.<sup>4</sup>

Tolkien can be seen as a central pillar of the ‘fuzzy set’ of fantasy studied here. Indeed, Attebery designates *The Lord of the Rings* as a “prototypical fantasy”

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out the lack of women authors in this grouping, with the sole exception of Le Guin. A conscious decision was made to study mostly female authors in order to promote their work as pushing the boundaries of the fantasy genre itself, and to highlight their presence at the core of popular epic fantasy written today. While representation within contemporary fantasy has become more diverse, it is important to also readjust what is considered canonical accordingly. I decided to include these particular women authors in this study partly due to their impact on fantasy more generally, providing an argument for their inclusion in the core canon of the genre.

(*Strategies* 17) and suggests that “[o]ne way to characterize the genre of fantasy is the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*” (*Strategies* 14). Rosemary Jackson explicitly links this particular form of fantasy to romance literature. Kelly Searsmith further acknowledges the link between fantasy and romance literature by referring to “that strain of modern fantasy composed of marvelous narratives (in which the impossible is confirmed as existing or occurring within the fictional world) that evoke feelings of awe, whimsy, wonder, or delight – rather than horror” as “romance-tradition fantasy” (73). Because of this link, Northrop Frye’s *The Secular Scripture* (1976) is particularly useful when describing this kind of epic fantasy formula. This follows a suggestion from Attebery, who argues that Frye’s work has been comparatively undervalued in fantasy academia and can offer important insights into the structural foundations of the genre (“Structuralism” 110). Frye’s work is specifically concerned with investigating the structure of romance literature, rather than fantasy per se. However, romance literature is an important historical influence on the development of epic fantasy, and so Frye’s work can be applied to the more contemporary genre. In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye highlights the “vertical perspective” which romance literature encourages, arguing that this perspective “accounts for the curious polarized characterization of romance, its tendency to split into heroes and villains” (35). Furthermore, Frye suggests that the effect of an accepted epic formula or structure is manifested in its “simplifying of moral facts”, or its inclusion of other kinds of polarised oppositions (*Secular* 36). Frye’s work therefore suggests that these oppositions are inherent elements of the genre itself, and a result of the influence of romance literature on contemporary popular fantasy.

Farah Mendlesohn, in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), suggests that a common tactic for fantasy critics attempting to define fantasy is to “pick and choose among the ‘definers’ of the field according to the area of fantasy fiction, or the ideological filter” in which it is most interested (xiii). In this regard, Charul Palmer-Patel is an important ‘definer’, particularly her work in *The Shape of Fantasy* (2020). Palmer-Patel’s definition of heroic epic fantasy is useful in understanding the kind of texts this thesis is concerned with:

the narrative structure of Heroic Epic Fantasy is one where the hero realises a messianic duty via a journey, one which results in a spiritual transcendence for the hero along with the salvation of the world by the act of healing or re-creating it, thereby fulfilling their destiny. (1)

In terms of narrative structure, all three of the texts studied here match this definition, a fact supported by Palmer-Patel’s extended study of Sanderson’s *Mistborn* trilogy, alongside mentions (though brief) of both Hobb and Jemisin’s trilogies. Each of the texts studied fulfil these criteria in slightly different ways. For example, while they all involve a journey, and all are ultimately concerned with salvation, in both Sanderson and Jemisin’s text the world itself is very explicitly at stake. In Hobb’s text, however, it is a single kingdom which requires salvation. Nevertheless, it is heavily implied in the text that, should the kingdom fall, doom will spread to neighbouring regions eventually. Similarly, while Jemisin’s protagonist undergoes a spiritual transcendence, in Sanderson and Hobb’s trilogies the role of the protagonist is to support the transcendence of another. While these are

important differences between the texts, for the purpose of this study they match Palmer-Patel's definition sufficiently to be grouped together. While this study is not specifically concerned with the taxonomy of these texts, their grouping under the 'heroic epic fantasy' subgenre, coupled with their extreme popularity, suggests that this research could be applied to other popular texts that follow a similar structure. Palmer-Patel's study is influential for my work in several other ways. For one, she places the emphasis in her study on moving past issues concerning the "definition" or "value" of fantasy and rather focuses on the structure of the texts (1). This mirrors my own concerns with the genre and, following Palmer-Patel, it is important to note that this study does not intend to offer a finalised definition of contemporary popular heroic epic fantasy. Rather, like Palmer-Patel's book, this study proposes a new way of reading fantasy and "explores how Fantasy fiction exhibits a conscious awareness of its own form" (2). In other words, this research suggests that all the texts studied take the idea of binary opposition and deliberately interrogate this structure, which arises from the historical underpinnings of the genre.

In order to understand the way binary opposition appears in the primary texts, it is necessary to first identify the primary opposition that each text is concerned with. To discuss this, I follow the work of Mieke Bal, who writes, in her book *Narratology* (2017), that all narratives consist of three distinct parts: the text, the story, and the fabula. The text is the physical writing, and includes point of view, specific word choice, and other writing techniques. The text delivers the fabula, which is made up

of both fixed and changeable elements, which Bal calls objects and processes. It is in the interaction between the fabula and the text in which the story exists. My own analysis will incorporate aspects of all three but will focus more closely on the fabula and story, as this is where the deconstruction of oppositions occurs. Bal argues that it is “possible to describe in every fabula at least one type of relation between actors that is of a psychological or ideological nature, or of both simultaneously” (176). These ideological relations are oppositional in nature and Bal further suggests that “not the categories as such, but the categorization; not the differences but the structure of opposition itself is the ideological trap” (177). Bal’s work offers an important insight into the inherent paradox of binary oppositions: “Oppositions are constructions ... As deconstructive criticism has amply demonstrated, they are invariably flawed in their attempted logic” (185). As Bal explains, the danger of a structuralist view of literature is that “[s]tructuring often takes the route of opposition as a handy simplification of complex content”, a dangerous route as “[t]he very ideological structure – binary opposition – that we use for our critical readings is simultaneously the object of those readings, their main target” (185). Bal argues that binary oppositions in a text can be restrictive, and involve three

logical moves, each of which aggravates the damage: reduction, of an infinitely rich but also chaotic field, to two centres; the articulation of those centres into polar opposites; and the hierarchization of these two into a positive and a negative one. (116)

While these logical moves may call into question the operation of my analysis, the damage Bal identifies in binary opposition is a central theme of the texts studied here. All three trilogies use the structure of binary opposition to showcase the inherent flaws in binary thinking within the text itself. It is in this unique approach to the fantasy formula that these texts reveal their poststructuralist leanings.

The deliberate questioning of the binaries at the foundation of epic fantasy could be seen in poststructural terms. Sándor Klapcsik writes, in *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction* (2011), that contemporary literature often expresses inherently postmodern, and poststructuralist, tendencies by “question[ing] the possibility of linear movement, since linear processes can easily indicate the presence of a dualism, correlating with a hierarchized binary opposition” (9). Klapcsik further argues that “[p]oststructuralist theories intend to deconstruct these oppositions, or rather, to reveal the inherently deconstructive nature of these oppositions” (9). Within the texts studied in this thesis, the deconstruction of the specific binary oppositions within the plot reflects a larger concern with binary opposition more broadly. Thus, rather than being limited by these oppositions and the ‘linear movement’ of the fantasy text, the three trilogies studied here create greater complexity in the oppositions they are each concerned with, by questioning how those same oppositions interact and can be resolved. By providing seemingly simplistic binary relationships, only to later destabilise these relationships, this form of fantasy achieves the poststructuralist effects of “transformations, changes, revaluations ... to open up the core [of the genre] and to change our sense of its role as stable truth

and value” (Williams 2-3). Thus, a central argument of this thesis is that these texts work within the established structures of popular fantasy literature while at the same time transforming the possibilities of what those structures can achieve. In this way, these authors can be considered experts in the ‘game’ of fantasy, following an analogy offered by Attebery: “as the rules grow more definitive, the game becomes easier for the novice, and, at the same time, more challenging for the expert, the artist who wishes to redefine the game even as she plays it” (*Strategies* 10). While the ‘formula’ or ‘rules’ of fantasy may appear to be highly restrictive when it comes to popular fantasy, these particular texts highlight the way authors can work within those ‘rules’ while still pushing the genre in new directions. This simultaneously challenges the perception of ‘simplicity’ in contemporary popular fantasy, and also the essential nature of the ‘formula’ that appears to promote this simplicity.

## Binary Oppositions and Bakhtin’s Concept of Dialogue

Each chapter of this thesis is framed around a single theme: the good/evil binary, the achievement of immortality, and the Self/Other binary. Binary opposition is fundamental to the way each text approaches these themes. Because each text studied is primarily concerned with a different binary opposition, it is necessary to make use of a range of different theories to accommodate this variation. I begin each chapter with a short introduction to the primary text and the theoretical standpoint relevant to the binary opposition that is the focus of that chapter.

Following this introduction, I analyse the way the opposition appears in the text, before discussing the way it is resolved. At the end of each chapter, I open the discussion of this opposition to the other two texts studied. This is in order to show that binary oppositions exist on multiple levels within all the texts, and to compare the way each text resolves a particular opposition differently. For example, in chapter one I discuss Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy in relation to the good/evil binary opposition. In order to understand how this opposition manifests in this particular text I use the work of clinical psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, and his study *The Science of Evil* (2011). Baron-Cohen's work allows 'good' and 'evil' to be understood in terms of relative empathy, an important defining trait in *Mistborn*. At the end of the chapter, I turn to the good/evil binary in both *The Farseer Trilogy* and *The Broken Earth*. While each text represents this opposition differently, my analysis shows that all three authors question its simplicity and ultimately illustrate a more complex interaction between the two parts of the binary.

Because each text is concerned with a different binary opposition, my main point of comparison between the texts will be in the way they resolve this opposition. For this I turn to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Gabriele Helms' *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels* (2003) informs my own approach in the way it combines recent developments in narratological theory with Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, "allowing the analysis of formal structures to be combined with a consideration of their ideological implications" (10). Bakhtin's theory of dialogue was largely developed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

(1984), but I will also be referring to other work, including *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1987), and *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). For Bakhtin, dialogue is a specific manner of interaction between two or more distinct voices, and is characterised by the productive contact between alterities, while preserving their subjectivity. Dialogue is opposed to monologue, which is an alternative form of interaction. These two terms will provide a useful way of understanding the different ways the binary oppositions are resolved within the primary texts studied.

Dialogue was central to Bakhtin's work on the novel, and also key to his other contributions to literary criticism. Bakhtin describes dialogue in terms of the interaction between 'voices'. Bakhtin's definition of 'voice' is broad and includes "a person's worldview and fate ... his entire identity" (*Problems* 293). Bakhtin also uses the term 'consciousness' in the place of 'voice' and further defines dialogue as "a special form of interaction among autonomous and equally signifying consciousnesses" (*Problems* 284). Bakhtin identifies the work of Dostoevsky as a "fundamentally new novelistic genre" called the "polyphonic novel", which is the preeminent example of dialogue (*Problems* 7). The polyphonic novel keeps dialogue as a core concern, which can be identified in the representation of character: "What unfolds in [Dostoevsky's] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world ... rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (*Problems* 6). In other words, each character, or voice, in the polyphonic novel is distinct and operates independently of any unified consciousness. Esther Peeren, in

*Intersubjectivities in Popular Culture: Bakhtin and Beyond* (2008), offers a more concrete definition of the special form of interaction which is dialogue. For Peeren, dialogue is “an active social strategy for interacting with alterity that implies neither negation nor assimilation” (100). In other words, dialogue is a form of “sustained difference”, meaning that a central concern of dialogue is maintaining the differences between ‘voices’ (Peeren 100). According to Gary Morson and Caryl Emmerson, prominent Bakhtin academics and translators, dialogue is “multiply enriching: it educates each side about itself and about the other” (55). This is further supported by Leslie Baxter’s work in communication studies, which uses Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue to argue that, in dialogue, difference should be preserved rather than resisted even when it comes to interpersonal conflict (4-5). Crucially, for Bakhtin, true dialogue is unending: the interaction between alterities is a route to greater understanding for each side.

The preservation of individuality and importance of plurality for dialogue creates a contrast to monologue which Bakhtin argues “denies the existence ... of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities” (*Problems* 292).

Monologue, according to Bakhtin, reduces the role of the other to an “*object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness”, whereas dialogue respects the Other as an independent subject (*Problems* 293). Bakhtin considers Hegelian dialectics, for example, as inherently monologising due to its emphasis on the erasure of subjectivities towards a singular synthesis, and thus a “single, monologic view” (Morson 56). This is the greatest distinction between dialogue and

monologue, as monologue is categorised as a “merging ... a dissolution of consciousnesses in one consciousness ... a removal of individuation”, rather than the sustained difference that is characteristic of true dialogue (*Problems* 288). For this study, I understand dialogue as a specific form of interaction between alterities which sees both sides affected by that interaction while maintaining the differences between those alterities. Any movement towards the merging, or dialectical synthesis of alterities will be seen as monological, as will the erasure of plurality.

The above explanation is closely tied to the idea of dialogue as speech act, or the interaction between voices, but Bakhtin’s dialogue goes beyond this. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue has proven extremely influential in a number of disciplines, and academic work on the concept itself is extensive. Helms’ book also illustrates the “methodological leeway” inherent in Bakhtin’s theory, as she notes that “[c]ritics have analyzed dialogic relations in terms of themes, points of view, plots, rhetoric, reader responses, intertextual quotations, structural elements, and genre conventions” (29). Similarly, Peter K. Garrett uses the concept of dialogue to understand the structure of Victorian novels and notes that his study of these texts “will sometimes emphasize plot, sometimes points of view, rhetoric, or theme; but through all these aspects we will repeatedly be brought back to the fundamental tensions that prevent them from resolving into any single stable order or meaning” (10). Thus, the essential element of dialogue, which Garrett defines as “the recognition of radical, unresolvable differences, of oppositions that cannot be reduced to stable, abstract antinomies or subjected to dialectical mediation”, can

be observed in many different aspects of narrative beyond the speech act (9). Thus, while 'voice' and communication are important elements of Bakhtin's original use of dialogue, contemporary criticism applies the concept to many other aspects of narrative. This is an extension of Bakhtin's original use of dialogue, but is not a total distortion, as Helms notes that Bakhtin himself argued that "[d]ialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure" (*Problems* 40). Thus, in this thesis, I identify dialogue as a potential form of interaction between any two alterities, be they character attributes as in 'good' and 'evil', elements of plot such as the magic system, or more conceptual alterities like the Self and the Other.

In this thesis, dialogic relationships are identified within structural elements of the genre of epic fantasy literature. These structural elements are the binary oppositions that are inherent to the genre itself, and which can manifest thematically, within elements of the plot, or between characters. It is not the purpose of this research to identify dialogicality as a mark of quality, nor is it to argue that these texts are examples of the polyphonic novel. Rather, my intention is to use Bakhtin's work to help understand the way in which the primary texts question the idea of binary opposition as represented in the interaction between alterities, which will be shown to range from the monological to dialogical. Bakhtin's dialogue offers a way of discussing all three trilogies together, which would otherwise be challenging due to the range in themes and oppositions. By applying this understanding of dialogue to the interactions between oppositions seen in each

primary text, the specific differences in the way each text problematises these oppositions can be revealed.

## Thesis Structure

In chapter one I discuss Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy and the binary opposition between 'good' and 'evil' represented in the text. This is the most common form of opposition used as evidence for the 'simplicity' of heroic epic fantasy, and so Sanderson's more complex representation offers a suitable entry point for this thesis. In this chapter I introduce the work of clinical psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, whose book *The Science of Evil* makes the case that a lack of empathy is the defining attribute of what can be described as 'evil'. I will show that this is highly pertinent in *Mistborn*, in which the quality of empathy for an oppressed lower class is the main defining factor of 'goodness'. Conversely, the societal oppression and dehumanisation of this lower class is the marker of 'evil' in the text, and the very thing the protagonists fight against. While I do use the work of Baron-Cohen, and other theorists interested in manifestations of 'real world' evil, in this thesis I am specifically interested in the value systems of the primary texts. While these value systems are certainly informed by the authors' experiences of reality, it is important to understand that I make no claims regarding the 'reality' of 'evil'. Rather, I argue that the theorists I refer to provide a useful vocabulary for understanding how 'good' and 'evil' appear in the primary texts. As Sanderson's trilogy progresses the distinction between 'good' and 'evil' is complicated, empathy

becomes less stable, and formerly 'evil' characters are redefined as 'good' despite their dehumanising actions. Ultimately, *Mistborn* offers a relativistic representation of the good/evil binary. Bakhtin's work identifies relativism as a form of monologue, and this can be seen in Sanderson's text as dialogue becomes impossible because 'good' and 'evil' become relative terms. I end this chapter by comparing it to the other two trilogies studied in relation to the good/evil binary. In Hobb's trilogy, rather than empathy, loyalty becomes the defining factor of goodness. Unlike in Sanderson, this attribute remains stable throughout the series, offering a firm foundation for the continued identification of 'good' or 'evil'. Ultimately, I argue that Hobb's text offers a more dialogical representation of the good/evil binary than is seen in Sanderson's. For Jemisin, 'evil' is much more difficult to identify. While societal 'evil' can easily be seen in a similarly dehumanising system to that in *Mistborn*, in discussing *The Broken Earth* I am more interested in the individual understanding of 'evil'. This is primarily seen in the interaction between protagonist Essun and her daughter Nassun, who have starkly opposed understandings of 'evil'. This subjectivity runs the risk of descending into a relativistic representation of the opposition, however, Jemisin's trilogy repeatedly stresses the interaction between opposed points of view, highlighting that while 'good' and 'evil' are purely subjective determinations, the interaction between these subjectivities is possible in a way that is mutually enriching and maintains plurality. This is the most dialogical perspective on the good/evil binary in the texts studied.

In chapter two I introduce Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* and the primary opposition between two magical abilities called the Wit and the Skill. These magics will be related to the work of Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death* (1973), in which human identity is seen as divided between the symbolic and animal selves. Hobb's two magics, though opposed, are both magics of communication, which places dialogue as a central concern of the trilogy. However, the two magics are fundamentally opposed, and this is seen to reflect the opposition between Becker's animal and symbolic selves. In the conclusion of the text, the two magics come together in the achievement of immortality. This final interaction will be shown to be monological in nature, despite the importance of dialogue throughout the rest of the series. While the other two trilogies studied do not share a connection to the work of Ernest Becker, they both represent the achievement of immortality as central to the culmination of their respective plots and relate this achievement to the interaction between binary opposites. I will therefore look into the representation of immortality in each. Where both Sanderson and Hobb represent immortality monologically, Jemisin's representation of immortality is fundamentally related to communication and dialogue.

Finally, in chapter three I discuss the opposition between Self and Other in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy. This is understood through the framework offered by Dialogical Self Theory (DST), a field pioneered by Hubert Hermans, and which offers a direct connection to Bakhtin's work. While the opposition between Self and Other appears to be fundamental, *The Broken Earth* and DST illustrate how

the Self and Other are connected and mutually reliant on each other. The trilogy highlights that the Self cannot be fully understood as a completely isolated consciousness but is, rather, the culmination of the constant interaction with alterities, both within and outside the Self. *The Broken Earth* not only highlights the dialogical nature of the Self within the plot, but also within the narrative perspective of the text. In order to better understand the impact of the trilogy's second-person narration, I turn to the work of Marie-Laure Ryan, James Phelan, and Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik. Using the work of these three theorists I argue that the narrative structure of *The Broken Earth* encourages the reader to participate with the protagonist in a way which illustrates a pluralistic understanding of the Self, in which Self and Other are integrated but independent. Self and Other are also important oppositions in the work of Sanderson and Hobb. Where Hobb's two magics create an integrated view of the Self and Other, this is often represented as a monological merging rather than a productive dialogical contact. In Sanderson's text, the Self and Other are primarily figured in terms of class relations. The dominant class position of the nobility, in the world of *Mistborn*, maintains the notion of the Self through its creation of an Other in the lower-class slaves called the skaa. The maintenance of this opposition is threatened by the presence of the protagonist, Vin. As a half-noble half-skaa rebel, Vin exists on both sides and between this seemingly fundamental divide. This is resolved through the protagonist's acceptance of her pluralistic nature. In accepting and acknowledging her own hybridity, the protagonist of Sanderson's series accepts dialogicality in the construction of her Self.

In the conclusion, I compare all three texts to argue that, while they differ in the way they illustrate the interaction between alterities, they share a concern with the simplification inherent in binary oppositions. Sanderson's text, through its use of both monologue and dialogue, illustrates how the creation of binary opposites fragments a perceived unity. In contrast, both Jemisin and Hobb emphasise the connection between perceived opposites to question the legitimacy of their opposition. Both *The Farseer* and *The Broken Earth* trilogies show that what appear to be entirely antagonistic opposites are, in fact, more connected than they first appear. They differ from Sanderson's trilogy in that they maintain the separation of those alterities, suggesting that, while binary opposition is a simplification, the complete fusion of alterities is either impossible or undesirable. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that these examples of popular fantasy use binary oppositions purposefully, to problematise a structure that is characteristic of the genre.



## Chapter One – The Good/Evil Binary in Brandon Sanderson’s *Mistborn*: Moral Relativism as Monologue

### Introduction

Despite being published between 2006 and 2008, and gaining immense popularity, there have been few extensive studies of Sanderson’s *Mistborn* trilogy. Charul Palmer-Patel dedicates a full chapter to the *Mistborn* series in her 2020 book *The Shape of Fantasy*, but this represents one of the only in-depth analyses of the series to date. Other work on Sanderson focuses on *The Wheel of Time* series (1990-2013), which he completed after the death of the original author, Robert Jordan, but even here studies are remarkably rare for a series of such significance for contemporary fantasy.<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons for the dearth of academic work on *The Wheel of Time* could be due to its extreme length, covering fourteen books totalling over 11,000 pages. Sanderson has also shown a preference for long-form fantasy in his own writing. The *Mistborn* trilogy is part of Sanderson’s extended *Cosmere* universe which includes, at the time of writing, fourteen novels, a graphic novel series, and a handful of short stories and other content. The *Cosmere* is a shared universe, and while each of Sanderson’s series can be read independently from his wider work,

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<sup>5</sup> For more work on *The Wheel of Time* see Louise Simone’s doctoral dissertation *Beyond demons and darkness: A genealogy of evil in American fantasy literature for young adults since 1950* (2015), or her chapter in *Fantasy Literature: Challenging Genres* (2016): “Magic as Privilege in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’s Wheel of Time Epic Fantasy Series”.

characters can occasionally cross over. The most recent entry into Sanderson's *Cosmere* universe at the time of writing is *Tress of the Emerald Sea* (2023), which is set in the same universe, but on a different world than that of *Mistborn*. Sanderson has also added a number of sequel novels to *Mistborn*, all set many years after the events of the original trilogy. He has been very vocal regarding plans to expand this series with several more follow-up trilogies spanning different eras in the *Mistborn* world. As such, *Mistborn* is an early example from Sanderson's prolific career, and he has continued to develop the themes and structures seen in this series throughout his further oeuvre. While the later additions to the series would be of interest, due to limitations in space and the as-yet unfinished state of these later inclusions, they are also not included in the current study.

This chapter will instead focus on the original *Mistborn* trilogy, specifically regarding the binary opposition between 'good' and 'evil'. In *Mistborn* the categories of 'good' and 'evil' are initially presented as clear, but are later disrupted, leading to the relativisation of the binary opposition. In the series, I contend, the distinction between the two categories of 'good' and 'evil' becomes blurred as different characters understand the terms in their own ways. Bakhtin's work will be brought in to illustrate the monological nature of this interaction. By reducing the alterity of the good/evil binary to a relativised view, the text denies the possibility for any true dialogue to take place. I begin my analysis of *Mistborn* by tracing this relativism through the series, highlighting the ways in which the good/evil binary is disrupted through the interactions of key characters. Finally, using Bakhtin's theory of

dialogue, I will show that relativism can be understood as a form of monologue, and that the monological understanding of the good/evil binary follows from a central theme of *Mistborn*: the dialectical synthesis of oppositions.

### *Defining 'Good' and 'Evil' Through Empathy*

Before analysing the way in which the good/evil binary is resolved in *Mistborn* it is necessary to establish a clear definition of the terms as they appear in the text.

'Good' and 'evil' are not just characteristics in *Mistborn*, but they are also important elements of the plot itself. A detailed description of the plot is therefore essential in understanding the way 'good' and 'evil' interact in the trilogy and provides a foundation for a detailed analysis. Below I briefly introduce the general plot of *Mistborn* before discussing the work of Simon Baron-Cohen, which will establish empathy as the defining factor in identifying 'good' and 'evil' in the text.

Sanderson's work is known for detailed world building and hard magic systems, meaning magic with clearly defined and strict rules. A perfect example of this is seen in *Mistborn*, where the rules of magic are intricate and made explicit to the reader, predominantly through the magical education of key characters. Magic in *Mistborn* is inherently tied to the godlike beings that created the world of Scadrial, called Ruin and Preservation. These are two sentient forces, and their powers and goals are closely tied to the concepts they are named for. Ruin is the eventual antagonist of the series, appearing primarily in the third book, and his goal is the

complete destruction of the world, as per his original agreement with Preservation, in exchange for helping in the creation of life. The central conflict of the first book, however, is between the protagonists and the nobility of the current social system, and the reader is not initially made aware of the greater forces at play in the world. The Lord Ruler is the apparently immortal god of the Final Empire, who took power after fulfilling the prophecy of the Hero of Ages. His fulfilment of this prophecy is later discovered to be a lie, and it is revealed he in fact usurped the position of the true Hero. However, his supposed fulfilment of this prophecy is seen to legitimise his position at the head of the Final Empire. He rules over the nobility, who in turn rule over the slaves, called the skaa. The protagonists of *Mistborn* are a crew of skaa thieves, many of whom are half-noble, who plan to overthrow the Lord Ruler in response to the cruelty experienced by the skaa under the current social order. While the crew initially appear to be motivated by their own financial gain, over the course of the first book this develops into a more straightforwardly empathetic motivation to see the skaa free. They are led by Kelsier, but the series primarily revolves around Vin, who joins the crew after discovering that she can use allomancy, one of the three kinds of magic associated with this world, and the kind most commonly seen throughout the trilogy. An allomancer, also called a Misting, gains certain magical powers when they consume a specific metal. Even rarer than Mistings are Mistborn, who have the ability to consume any allomantic metal in order to access all the possible powers. In the series, allomancy is explicitly tied to the nobility and noble bloodlines, with it being described early on as a “hereditary skill” (*Final* 60). As such, any possibility of a skaa possessing this power is considered a threat to the established hierarchy. Both Vin and Kelsier are half-noble skaa

Mistborn, and so they are essential for the success of the crew's plan. In the first book, Kelsier's crew works to incite a rebellion in the skaa population in order to overthrow the brutal government of the Lord Ruler and the noble classes. In the second book, a new government has been formed led by a former noble, Elend, who begins a relationship with Vin. He attempts to set up a democratic system, but finds his efforts are hampered by a besieging army led by his own father, who wishes a return to the former social system. At the same time, Vin begins to believe that she is the Hero of Ages, destined to fulfil the prophecy that the Lord Ruler originally hijacked. However, it is eventually revealed that this prophecy has been manipulated by Ruin, who successfully tricks Vin into releasing him from his prison, setting up the apocalyptic events of the third book. In the third and final book, Elend and Vin work to uncover the Lord Ruler's secret bunkers, hoping to find some way to stop Ruin, or to at least preserve humanity before the world ends.

The above synopsis illustrates how the novel establishes a clear division between the crew of protagonists, who wish to free the skaa slaves, and the ruling class, which wishes to maintain the brutal system they benefit from. 'Good' and 'evil', however, are vague terms in themselves which makes identifying the specific differences between protagonist and antagonist difficult when using this terminology. In order to analyse the breakdown of the good/evil binary within the text, it is necessary to first identify the specific factors which initially differentiate the two sides of the opposition. Louise Pisano Simone's *Beyond Demons and Darkness* (2015) uses the structural position of a character to identify 'evil',

observing that the fantasy hero inevitably faces some kind of battle: “What [the hero] faces in that battle I have demarcated as evil” (128). Following from Simone’s method of identifying ‘evil’, the primary conflict in *Mistborn* is between the protagonists and the Final Empire itself, because of its unjust social system, and more specifically the Lord Ruler who leads that system. Even after the Lord Ruler is killed in the first book, the protagonists still struggle against the legacy of the Final Empire, both politically and morally. One particular difficulty of identifying the way *Mistborn* represents ‘evil’ results from the way in which the text illustrates the relationship between oppositions. As I will ultimately argue, this text relates a relativistic understanding of the good/evil binary in which identifying any character as purely ‘evil’ or ‘good’ becomes impossible. As a result, it is important to first identify the specific qualities which initially indicate ‘evil’ within the text, before discussing the way this clear division between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is later challenged. Many qualities which might be considered ‘evil’ are shared by both the antagonists and protagonists, who must make difficult decisions in order to achieve their ‘good’ goal of freeing the skaa.

One way in which theorists have attempted to explain ‘evil’ is through the act of dehumanisation. David Livingstone Smith, in *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization* (2021), writes that “dehumanization is ... entangled with and implicated in the worst atrocities that human beings have ever perpetrated upon one another” (xiii). Possibly the most famous writer on this subject is Hannah Arendt, who writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) that the “victims in the

death factories” of the holocaust were “no longer human in the eyes of their executioners” (399). Simon Baron-Cohen, in *The Science of Evil* (2011), expands on Arendt’s theory by arguing that what allows human beings to perform these acts on other human beings is a permanent or temporary lack of empathy allowing for the dehumanisation of the Other. Baron-Cohen argues that the term ‘evil’ is often used as a standard way of explaining terrible acts, but that ‘evil’ is “treated as incomprehensible, a topic that cannot be dealt with because the scale of the horror is so great” (5). He further argues that “when we hold up the concept of evil to examine it, it is no explanation at all”, and therefore not useful for understanding how human beings can commit terrible acts (6). The purpose of his study, he writes, is to replace the “unscientific terms ‘evil’ with the scientific term ‘empathy’”, which he argues provides a more concrete explanation for human cruelty (xii). Baron-Cohen’s attempt to provide a more concrete way of understanding ‘evil’ makes his work particularly useful when analysing *Mistborn*, in which ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are ultimately understood to be relative terms.

Baron-Cohen’s work suggests that the lack of empathy is what allows human beings to commit ‘evil’ acts, and he further argues that a lack of empathy results in a person only relating to other people “as if they were just things” (7). He defines empathy as the “*ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion*” (16). He further writes that this definition “suggests there are at least two stages in empathy: recognition and response. Both are needed, since if you have the former

without the latter you haven't empathized at all" (16). In other words, we can understand empathy as requiring two crucial elements, both the understanding of the Other, and the appropriate response to this understanding. This will become a crucial aspect of my discussion of *Mistborn*, in which characters are seen to empathise with the skaa broadly, while simultaneously acting in an unempathic, or dehumanising, way. Baron-Cohen's definition would suggest that this is an example of someone who has not truly empathised with the Other. In analysing *Mistborn*, I argue that this distinction between empathy and dehumanisation is central to the way 'good' and 'evil' are understood within the text.

While Baron-Cohen's work is strictly concerned with a real-world analysis of personality disorders, it is still useful for a literary study of fictional characters. Daniel Candel, who makes use of Baron-Cohen's work, argues that such investigations provide a foundation for understanding 'evil' characters in fiction (152). Focusing on the issue of empathy means characters can be analysed in reference to specific traits with which they are attributed in the text itself. My focus on empathy and dehumanisation, as the central factor in determining a character as either 'good' or 'evil' may be seen as a simplification of the value system of the text. The characters in *Mistborn* are, in general, more complex than the sole quality of empathy. This complexity is a central factor in the way the good/evil binary is resolved, with characters ultimately being understood as too complex for such a simplistic binary to apply. However, the division between 'good' and 'evil' in *Mistborn* is initially presented to the reader clearly and is related to possession of

empathy towards the skaa. Indeed, fantasy readers are already primed to understand the text in these terms owing to the previously noted tendency of fantasy to clarify into a conflict between 'good' and 'evil'. As such, my use of empathy as the determining factor provides a way to approach *Mistborn* in which the issue of complexity versus simplicity is central to the way characters are represented. This issue further justifies my use of Baron-Cohen's work, whose argument revolves around the idea that 'evil' is too vague a term to explain terrible actions. The understanding of dehumanisation as indicative of 'evil', and empathy as 'good' is embedded in the narrative of *Mistborn* itself, as the primary conflict is between the nobility, who are constantly shown to dehumanise their skaa slaves, and the revolutionary protagonists who wish to free the skaa from this cruel treatment. Thus, in the following chapter I understand the act of dehumanising the skaa as resulting from a fundamental lack of empathy. The conflict of the text is therefore between the empathic, and therefore 'good', goal of the protagonists to free the skaa from the dehumanising, and therefore 'evil', system of slavery and oppression.

As already discussed, the difficulty in identifying 'evil' in *Mistborn* stems partly from the fact that the protagonists and antagonists share many qualities. Indeed, and as I will illustrate later in this chapter, the 'good' protagonists perform many similar actions to the 'evil' Lord Ruler in pursuit of freeing the skaa. They are nevertheless identified as 'good' to the reader. Earlier sections of the trilogy align with Baron-Cohen's understanding of empathy, in that both recognition and response are

required for a character to be determined truly as 'good'. However, as the trilogy continues, characters are forced to perform actions similar to those that are determined as 'evil', despite their continued empathy for the skaa. This can be understood as a departure from Baron-Cohen's model, where recognition of the Other is enough to maintain a character's determination as 'good' when their actions may be otherwise seen as 'evil'.

Empathy as the determining factor between 'good' and 'evil' is most clearly seen in the representation of the Lord Ruler. As the primary antagonist, he is the figure Vin must defeat in the climax of the first book, and so occupies the position which Simone suggests defines 'evil' in a fantasy text. While he is killed at the end of the first book, the Lord Ruler's presence is felt throughout the trilogy and many characters continue to define their own actions in relation to him, meaning he is central to the representation of 'good' and 'evil' in the whole *Mistborn* trilogy. The Lord Ruler is primarily determined indirectly, through the perspectives of his enemies or supporters. As a result, the reader does not receive any information about his personal motivations until the third book. This is particularly important because, once his motivations are revealed to be 'good' at the end of the series, the Lord Ruler is actually redetermined retroactively in the text as 'good' himself, despite his previously undisputed 'evil'.

The Lord Ruler is identified as 'evil' through his indirect influence on the protagonists or surmised from the social system of the Final Empire itself. This social

system is primarily defined by the way it treats the skaa, and the text emphasises their cruel treatment and position of dehumanisation. One of the most brutal things the skaa face is the treatment of half-noble children and their skaa mothers. In the social system of the Lord Ruler's Final Empire, it is common for nobles to rape skaa women. The rape itself is not forbidden, but the children that could be born are, and they are hunted down and killed alongside their mothers in case they should manifest allomantic abilities and threaten the established order. Should a noble fail to "clean up [their] messes" they are severely punished themselves (*Final 3*). The language of this quote highlights the way in which these skaa women and their children are dehumanised, seeing them as an unfortunate side effect of a noble's entertainment. One reason for this policy is the inherent threat that half-noble skaa children pose to the social system of the Final Empire. But more than a method of protecting the accepted social order, this policy highlights the dehumanisation of the skaa which allows these executions to occur.

The treatment of half-noble skaa is not the only form of violence experienced by the lower class, however. Vin witnesses the casual violence that is a daily fact of skaa life while she is disguised as a noblewoman and sees a boy caught begging at a ball: "the soldier drew out a dagger and slit the boy's throat ... *They killed him*, she thought. *Right here, just a few paces away from where noblemen wait for their*

*carriages ... Like an animal*" (Final 309).<sup>6</sup> This particular passage highlights the way focalization influences the reader's understanding of the good/evil binary. This event is presented from Vin's perspective and indicates a clear lack of empathy towards the skaa which leads to their dehumanisation. The italics indicate Vin's directly reported thoughts, a technique Sanderson commonly uses for this character. Emphasising Vin's shock at the inhumane treatment of the poor skaa boy, juxtaposed against the opulence of the nobility, encourages the reader to sympathise with her perspective. She specifically identifies that the boy is treated 'like an animal', highlighting that part of the horror of this scene is the guard's ability to treat a child as something other than fully human. This technique is repeated throughout the first book, reinforcing this perspective and the reader's understanding of the Lord Ruler and the treatment of the skaa as 'evil', due to the underlying lack of empathy for, and dehumanisation of, the skaa. Crucially, all of this violence is sanctioned by the state which is headed by the Lord Ruler. While the Lord Ruler is not directly determined through his own focalization, he is indirectly determined through his position as head of the social system of the Final Empire, as viewed through the perspective of the victims of this social system. His 'evil', therefore, is related to the oppressive treatment of the skaa by society in general.

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<sup>6</sup> All three of the trilogies studied use italics to indicate a character's thoughts, or material in epigraphs to supplement worldbuilding. Throughout this thesis, quotations are presented as they appear in the original texts, including italics, unless otherwise stated.

I argue that in *Mistborn*, the good/evil binary is ultimately resolved through relativism. It is revealed that any character has the capacity to see themselves as 'good', no matter what actions they have taken or how they are viewed by others. Furthermore, this self-understanding is seen as valid, with several protagonists endorsing the ultimate redetermination of the Lord Ruler as 'good'. As a result, no true dialogue can take place between these viewpoints because each viewpoint is only ever reliant on its own subjective position. All possibility of argument or agreement between perspectives is denied. An important element of my argument concerning the good/evil binary in *Mistborn* is the understanding of relativism as monological. As has already been established, Bakhtin's work on dialogue places the concept in direct opposition to monologue. According to Bakhtin, monologue is characterised as "finalized and deaf" (*Problems* 293). In contrast, dialogue "insists on the unfinalisability of meaning, which allows for meaning or truth to be present, even if provisional, and allows for this meaning to change and adapt" (Owen 146). Understanding the 'unfinalisability' of dialogue reveals that relativism is in fact a form of monologue, as Bakhtin explicitly states when he connects it with dogmatism, another example of monologue: "both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (*Problems* 69). As such, relativism is just as far removed from dialogue as Hegelian dialectics, and both can be seen as forms of monologue. Gary Morson further explains: "Assuming that all descriptions are equally arbitrary, relativists simply leave us with an infinity of monologizations" (59). This 'infinity of monologizations' results in all perspectives being entirely separated with no possibility of dialogue: "There are not and cannot

be any dialogic relationships among them. They neither argue nor agree" (*Problems* 70). My analysis below will show that the good/evil binary in *Mistborn* results in just such a relativisation.

As suggested earlier, from the beginning of the series there are several similarities between the 'good' and 'evil' characters, complicating their designation in the good/evil binary, and foreshadowing the later collapse of the binary altogether. The first part of my analysis highlights these similarities, showing that on several occasions throughout the trilogy 'good' characters engage in 'evil' actions, similar to those of their enemies, in pursuit of their own goals. As Baron-Cohen notes, "the single-minded pursuit of one's own goals" is unempathic, "even if [a] person's project is positive, worthy, and valuable" (8). Nonetheless, these characters are still separated along moral lines by their possession, or lack thereof, of empathy for the *skaa*. In other words, the text seems to illustrate the position that so long as a character has a 'good' motivation, they can still be qualified as 'good' themselves, even if they perform the same actions as 'evil' characters. The second part of my analysis shows that this is further complicated, however, when the primary antagonist of the first novel, the Lord Ruler, is retroactively redetermined as 'good' due to the discovery of his own 'good' motivations for his 'evil' actions. This complication leads the text to producing a relativistic understanding of the good/evil binary, suggesting that from different perspectives any character might appear on different sides of the divide.

I restrict my following analysis of the text to four characters due to their centrality to the plot, or their relevance to this discussion. Vin, the primary protagonist of the series, alongside Elend and Kelsier, are all initially determined as 'good' in opposition to the Lord Ruler's 'evil'. The following analysis will trace the opposition of the protagonists and antagonists along the line of the good/evil binary, based on their respective attitudes towards the skaa. Nonetheless, characters continually highlight the unstable nature of this opposition, which leads to its relativisation. This will finally be related to the larger monologic tendency of the text which concludes with a dialectical synthesis as the culmination of the central plot. Dialectical synthesis is a different form of monologisation in that it leads to a single monological view rather than the multitude of individual monologues seen in relativism. The centrality of this other form of monologisation to the climax of *Mistborn's* story shows how a monological understanding of binary opposition is embedded in the text, in contrast to the work of both Hobb and Jemisin which respectively take an increasingly dialogical view.

### *Identifying Empathy: Structural Identification of 'Good' and 'Evil'*

In order to identify the trait of empathy in certain characters in the text, it is necessary to focus on the determination of these characters. Determination is a term used by Mieke Bal to refer to the process by which the abstract actor is turned

into an individual character, by attributing unique qualities to them (7).<sup>7</sup> By analysing characters based on their possession or lack of a specific trait I am following Bal in her analysis of “relevant semantic axes” (114). According to Bal, if some characters are seen to share certain semantic values, then “they can be regarded as *synonymous* characters – that is, characters with the same content” (116). While characters in *Mistborn* are initially presented as opposed on the relevant semantic axis, in this case empathic/unempathic, this does not remain the case as the trilogy progresses. This results in a situational, or relative, notion of the good/evil binary, calling into question any strict definition of either term. In order to highlight this process, it is first necessary to discuss how characters are initially determined as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ based on the attribution of specific traits.

According to Bal there are two ways we receive information about a character:

“[e]ither the character itself mentions characteristics explicitly, or we deduce them from what the character does” (117). Bal calls this either ‘explicit qualification’ or ‘qualification by function’. ‘Explicit qualification’ refers to any information offered by a character about a character, whether as a form of self-analysis, one character talking about another character, or the narrator making statements about a

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<sup>7</sup> In Bal’s terminology, ‘actor’ refers to a structural position in the fabula, the abstract sequence of events that is later clarified into a story. A character is a “complex semantic unit”, an actor given distinct traits to individualise them (104). This conception is distinct, although related, to Algirdas Greimas’ actantial model, which also uses the terms ‘actor’ and ‘actant’. I follow Bal’s specific use of the term here, but for more see Greimas’ *On Meaning* (1987), chapter 6 “Actant, Actors, and Figures”, or Bal’s *Narratology* (2017), particularly chapter three, “Fabula: Elements”.

character (Bal 117-118). ‘Qualification by function’ occurs when “a character is presented by means of their actions” (Bal 118). It is worth noting the obvious similarity between Bal’s ‘qualifications by function’, or the characteristics implied by the actions taken by a character, and Propp’s methodology in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). Both Propp and Bal emphasise the importance of the actions performed by characters, what Propp calls functions. These functions are essentially actions performed by a character that serve a specific purpose in the narrative, or to put it in Propp’s terms, a “noun expressing an action” (21). However, Propp’s method is related more closely to the folktale tradition than contemporary fantasy.<sup>8</sup> Throughout my work I use Bal’s terminology as it is more appropriate for the study of contemporary fantasy and allows a more nuanced analysis of the series studied here.

Character actions equate to Bal’s ‘qualification by function’, which I argue are used in *Mistborn* to determine characters as either empathic or unempathic, meaning they dehumanise others, specifically in relation to the skaa. The reader also receives

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<sup>8</sup> While fantasy literature does share a lineage with the folktale, the novel form is fundamentally different from more traditional forms of storytelling. For one thing, the novel is inherently more changeable and less formulaic than the folktale as described by Propp, who states that his functions must occur in a specific order (22). This is one of the clearest ways that *Mistborn*, and most other contemporary fantasy, differs from Propp’s folktales. While repetition does often occur in fantasy, between books in the same series and between series themselves, as Palmer-Patel argues, this repetition is often metatextual, and serves to “create a resonance by building layers of depth and complexity” (179). However, these repetitions are not the same as Propp’s functions and should be considered elements of inter- or metatextuality, rather than as defining elements of genre itself.

information about character determination through a particular form of explicit qualification: not from the character directly, but rather through Free Indirect Discourse (FID). Bal considers FID to be “a form of mixture or interference between the Narrator’s text and the actor’s text” in which “[s]ignals of the personal language situation of the actor and of the (im)personal language situation of the narrator cross, without explicit reference to this” (47). This results in the personal language of the character being expressed through the narration, rather than maintaining an objective narrative voice. This interference serves to blur the line between narrator and character and is the most direct way into a specific character’s thoughts and opinions, and so is particularly useful in identifying empathy. As my analysis shows, many similar actions are performed by both ‘good’ and ‘evil’ characters, meaning qualification by function alone is not sufficient to determine a character as either ‘good’ or ‘evil’. This implies that the relevant factor in moral determination in *Mistborn* is a character’s motivation or intention to perform an action; whether this is rooted in empathy or not. As such both ‘qualification by function’ and ‘explicit qualification’, specifically through FID, are necessary to determine a character’s empathy. The division between empathy as ‘good’ and dehumanisation as ‘evil’ is maintained for much of the series, only to later be disrupted as the good/evil binary is relativised. This collapse occurs due to the protagonists’ increasingly ‘evil’ behaviour in pursuit of their ‘good’ goals, and the eventual redetermination of the Lord Ruler as ‘good’. This ultimately shows that what may seem like empathy on the part of the protagonists leads them to dehumanising others in much the same way as the ‘evil’ nobility. Similarly, the Lord Ruler’s redetermination shows that dehumanisation may be rooted in seemingly empathic ideals.

The terminology provided by Bal and Baron-Cohen helps to frame my following analysis. I first discuss Kelsier, whose determination is unstable throughout the first book. The reader is encouraged to see Kelsier's actions as problematic, largely due to questions regarding his primary motivation. He is nevertheless securely determined as 'good' by the end of the first book when his motivations are confirmed. I then discuss Elend, who provides a way of discussing empathy and 'goodness' in connection with political ideology. Elend's attempts to resist autocratic rule are rooted in his primarily 'good' motivations. The eventual failure of his democratic ideals does not correspond to a change in his motivations, however, suggesting that his 'goodness' is not reliant on subscribing to any particular political ideology. The events of the final novel present an alternative perspective on both Elend and the Lord Ruler. This ultimately suggests that any character can view their own actions as 'good' where others may consider them to be 'evil', resulting in a relativistic understanding of the good/evil binary. Finally, I discuss the way in which the good/evil binary appears in *The Farseer* and *The Broken Earth* trilogies to compare them to the relativistic, and therefore monological, resolution seen in *Mistborn*.

### 'Good' Intentions, 'Evil' Actions: The Case of Kelsier

Kelsier is a half-noble skaa Mistborn. After a failed heist results in the capture of both him and his wife, they are used as forced labour in a mining operation. When

his wife dies Kelsier discovers his Mistborn powers, and escapes. Kelsier forms the crew working to inspire a revolution which Vin eventually joins. A key issue in the first book involves Kelsier's uncertain motives. It is not initially clear whether he genuinely has empathy for the skaa, or simply hates the nobility, and this interferes with his determination as 'good' as he often engages in 'evil' actions. This is particularly problematic as his 'evil' actions are very similar to the actions of the Lord Ruler, as will be discussed later in this chapter. By comparing them solely based on their actions I show how these two characters could be similarly determined as 'evil'. This is a central issue for Kelsier throughout the first book and is not fully resolved until near the end of the text. While the text does encourage the reader to question Kelsier's determination by withholding information and implying that his motivations may not be rooted in empathy, Kelsier is eventually determined securely as 'good'. This occurs as the result of his recommitment to empathy and his change of heart regarding the fate of the nobility. Essentially, the first book ends with Baron-Cohen's understanding of empathy intact, Kelsier is 'good' because he both recognises and responds appropriately to feelings of the Other. The first book of *Mistborn* ultimately endorses the empathic ideal as 'good' as seen in the protagonists' successful revolution which sees nobles and skaa working together to form the post-revolutionary government. This process, from uncertain to secure determination, highlights the importance of motivation for the good/evil binary in *Mistborn*. Kelsier does complicate the good/evil binary through his initially unclear motivation, but the full relativisation of 'good' and 'evil' does not occur until the third book.

While the focus of this section is Kelsier's unstable determination as 'good', it is helpful to first address his introduction in the prologue. Interestingly, the first focalization the reader receives in *Mistborn* is not from one of the protagonists, but from a character called Lord Tresting. Kelsier first appears in the second half of the prologue, and so it is useful to present Tresting first as their initial contrast serves as an early determining factor of Kelsier as 'good'. The opening scene also introduces the reader to the good/evil binary as presented in the *Mistborn* series. Tresting is a minor noble, and so the first perspective seen in the text is from the 'evil' noble class, which maintains the dehumanising system of slavery of the skaa. His focalization provides an opportunity to analyse how the narrator uses FID to encourage a particular understanding of 'good' and 'evil' in *Mistborn*:

Ash fell from the sky.

Lord Tresting frowned, glancing up at the ruddy midday sky as his servants scuttled forward, opening a parasol over Tresting and his distinguished guest. Ashfalls weren't that uncommon in the Final Empire, but Tresting had hoped to avoid getting soot stains on his fine new suit coat and red vest.

(*Final 1*)

Tresting is a character in a clear position of privilege, as seen in his fine clothes and servants. Tresting is also vain, he is aware of the common ashfalls in the area but still wears his new clothes despite the risk of getting them dirty. As the very first character introduced, and as a member of the nobility, Tresting represents the current social system of the Final Empire. His privilege and vanity are therefore representative of the nobility as a whole, which is further confirmed as the text

continues and the privilege of the nobility is emphasised throughout. The narrator relates most of this information through straightforward description, leading to the following: “Hundreds of people in brown smocks worked in the falling ash, caring for the crops. There was a sluggishness to their efforts – but, of course, that was the way of the skaa. The peasants were an indolent, unproductive lot” (*Final 1*). This is a clear example of Sanderson’s use of FID in this text. The line ‘of course’ indicates that FID is being used to convey the particular opinion of Tresting, that being that the skaa are ‘unproductive and ‘indolent’. The line between the character and narrator is typically blurred by FID, but by including the ‘of course’ the interpretive statement is highlighted as Tresting’s subjective view.

Tresting’s position as focalizer in this scene would normally privilege his perspective. As Bal argues: “If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character” (135). Tresting’s perspective is advantaged by merit of his presence as the focalizer of this scene, but crucially the presence of his personal opinion is highlighted through FID, which undercuts the reader’s trust in this perspective. The obviousness of this subjective opinion, resulting from the inclusion of the ‘of course’, means this description tells the reader more about Tresting’s opinion of the skaa than it does about the skaa themselves. This is then further contrasted to the way in which the skaa are presented through straightforward narrative, rather than FID:

Tresting nodded as he watched the crowd of lazy skaa, some working with their hoes, others on hands and knees, pushing the ash away from the fledgling crops. They didn't complain. They didn't hope. They barely dared think. That was the way it should be, for they were skaa. (*Final 4*)

The word 'lazy' in the first line is a qualifying description that is given to the skaa by Tresting, again through FID. The rest of that same sentence, however, is straightforward narrative, and presents a more objective view of what the skaa are doing. This is in contrast to the final line of the quote, which presents the statement that this is the correct state of the skaa, as if it were objective narrative although it is in fact FID. This shift is indicated by the word 'should', which moves the sentence away from objective description and towards personal opinion. There is an obvious conflict between Tresting's opinion that the skaa are lazy, and the following description of them working 'on hands and knees' without complaint. This passage presents Tresting's personal opinion of the skaa as lazy, while at the same time revealing the large amount of work the skaa actually do. Furthermore, this passage highlights the casual dehumanisation of the skaa by the nobility, making it clear that Tresting does not view them as fully human. Thus, Tresting fails in both steps of empathy as identified by Baron-Cohen. He is unable to recognise the feelings of the skaa, and therefore cannot respond in an appropriate manner. While his position as focalizer would normally privilege his perspective here, the use of FID actually undercuts this perspective and encourages the reader to see Tresting's opinion as inaccurate and untrustworthy. This section from Tresting's perspective is unusual in the series, as he never appears again in the trilogy and focalization is heavily skewed in favour of the skaa rebels. Skaa-focalized sections do use FID, but less

overtly than the above example, and the reader is instead encouraged to trust the skaa perspective, particularly after Kelsier's more trustworthy narrative is introduced immediately after Tresting's.

The second half of the prologue is from Kelsier's perspective, providing an alternative focalization to Tresting's. It also serves to introduce the reader to the novel's interpretation of 'good'. Instead of dismissing the skaa, Kelsier finds their situation pitiable: "He avoided stepping on the plants – though he wasn't sure why he bothered. The crops hardly seemed worth the effort. Wan, with wilted brown leaves, the plants seemed as depressed as the people who tended them" (*Final* 5). Kelsier's focalization of the scene links the skaa workers with the struggling plants they tend, and by extension links Kelsier's care for the plants to his care for the skaa. The sentence following this is descriptive and serves to explain Kelsier's hesitation by reporting on the way he sees the plants and does so through FID. This provides a distinct contrast with the FID linked to Tresting's view, in that it refers to the skaa using the word 'people', which Tresting never does. There is a crucial difference between this use of FID and that seen in Tresting's focalization. Instead of dismissing the skaa as lazy, Kelsier shows a concern with the way they feel. His focalization is not undercut by FID, but rather supported by it. Furthermore, where Tresting referred to the skaa as lazy, even as they are described as working hard, Kelsier sees the skaa as overworked and mistreated. Kelsier's focalization serves to convey to the reader his empathy for the skaa, just as Tresting's served to convey his dehumanising view. As such, the reader can understand the characters in terms

of the good/evil binary from the very beginning of the text. Kelsier's introduction further qualifies Tresting's lack of empathy as 'evil', by showing the real lives of his skaa workers: "this was a people who had been fed on nothing but soup and gruel since they were children. To them, breads and fruits were rare delicacies – usually eaten only as aging discards brought down by the house servants" (*Final 9*). This passage highlights the real experience of the skaa, without the obviously subjective and contradictory statements which called Tresting's narrative into question: "Many lords didn't allow the elderly to remain home from daily work, and the frequent beatings that made up a skaa's life took a terrible toll on the elderly" (*Final 9*). The contrast with Tresting's focalization means this description is read as objective, rather than as a subjective and questionable qualification of the skaa as lazy. This scene draws a direct contrast between Kelsier and Tresting through their respective levels of empathy, while also activating the reader's empathy for the skaa.

Kelsier's introduction in the prologue also reveals more about his relationship to the skaa, which will later become a factor in his unstable determination as 'good'. He does not see himself as fully one of them and considers himself as somewhat apart: "Their fear of the mists was far too strong. *I'll have to cure them of that someday*, thought Kelsier" (*Final 6*). Throughout the series, italics are often used to indicate internal thoughts of characters, allowing an even more direct view of their perspective than FID. Here, Kelsier uses the word 'them' to refer to the skaa, distinguishing himself as separate, and further places himself in a more powerful position than the skaa by evoking the role of a doctor, or teacher. At the end of this

prologue, the narrative further foreshadows the eventual complication of Kelsier's 'goodness'. He takes revenge for Tresting's abduction and attempted rape of a skaa girl by burning down the manor and killing the noble. While this is done in retribution for Tresting's 'evil', it does indirectly cause harm to the rest of the skaa. One of the skaa from Tresting's plantation explains that they must now go on the run to escape potential punishment: "Because he knew we'd never rebel on our own, so he gave us no choice" (*Final* 15). In this example, while Kelsier's goals for revolution appear 'good', he also shows that he will pursue that goal regardless of what the rest of the skaa want. As observed by Baron-Cohen, the single-minded pursuit of one's goals is always unempathic. As will be shown, Kelsier's single-minded pursuit of his goals will ultimately call his 'goodness' into question. A key issue throughout the text is the lack of clarity around Kelsier's motives for inspiring a revolution. While empathy appears to be at the core of his actions, occasionally Kelsier seems to hate the nobility more than he cares for the skaa. Within the series, so long as a character's actions are rooted in empathic motives they are determined as 'good', even when those actions are similar to, or the same, as those taken by 'evil' characters. Kelsier's project of revolution is eventually shown to be rooted in empathic ideals, but his obsession with the nobility occasionally leads him to become unempathic regarding the immediate dangers to the skaa, or sometimes even to cause skaa direct harm. This is most clearly demonstrated by comparing Kelsier's actions to those of the Lord Ruler, the head of the Final Empire, and the figure presented as the ultimate 'evil' of the text.

The lack of direct determination for the Lord Ruler means that the initial similarities between him and Kelsier are obscured. But examining Kelsier and the Lord Ruler solely based on their actions reveals this early indication of the breakdown between opposites, and the importance of motivation in *Mistborn's* representation of the good/evil binary. For example, both characters are shown to lie to their followers and create an idea of their own divinity to further their own goals. This first becomes clear when Kelsier addresses the army he is building in secret. While Kelsier does possess the magic of allomancy, he does not have the power to magically protect others, despite what he tells the army: "I will not leave you unaided when you go against the soldiers of the Final Empire ... You have heard of the arcane magics that the Lord Ruler uses? Well, we have some of our own" (*Final* 361). This lie is intended to reassure his army and inspire them to attack the superior forces of the Lord Ruler, but it also serves to cement Kelsier's growing reputation. His actions are immediately questioned: "You just lied to my entire army" says one of Kelsier's allies (*Final* 362). Kelsier's answer is telling: "No ... I lied to *my* army" (*Final* 362). Again, Kelsier reveals his impression of himself in a position of power, or ownership, over his followers. As with the skaa that Kelsier 'freed' by killing Tresting, Kelsier's own impression of his superior position in relation to the rest of the skaa leads him to overlook the unintended harm his actions may cause. Furthermore, his superior position, and apparent vanity, result in his allies questioning his motivations, and therefore his determination as 'good'.

The lie is part of Kelsier's larger plan to turn himself into a religious symbol for the skaa in an effort to inspire the uprising, but he does not reveal this to the rest of the crew. As a result, his allies constantly question and doubt Kelsier's true motivation, whether his actions are selfless or serve only to promote his own ego. One of his allies even suggests that "[Kelsier] likes people to fawn over him", implying that Kelsier has selfish motivations for his actions (*Final* 340). The importance of his motivation is a result of the similarity between these actions and those of the Lord Ruler. Central to the climax of the plot of the first book is Vin's discovery of the truth of the Lord Ruler's ascension: "You killed the hero and took his place ... you claimed the power for yourself. But ... instead of saving the world, you took control of it" (*Final* 628). The Lord Ruler's usurpation of the prophecy and the divine power of the hero shares many similarities with Kelsier's actions. After taking over the hero's role in the prophecy the Lord Ruler presents himself as a god for the people to follow, securing his rule as divine right and justifying the Final Empire's brutality through the language of religion. The revelation of his lie effectively justifies the rebellion and is another factor in the Lord Ruler's determination as 'evil'. Kelsier's attempt to similarly deify himself becomes increasingly clear throughout the first book, and is eventually realised after his death at the hands of the Lord Ruler. His final words are particularly relevant: "you can't kill me, Lord Tyrant. I represent that thing you've *never* been able to kill, no matter how hard you try. I am hope" (*Final* 573). Here, Kelsier links himself to the immortal concept of hope for the skaa, claiming a symbolic divinity for himself. Ultimately, Kelsier's motivations to lie are revealed to be selfless, as they do result in his death, and his martyrdom does inspire the revolution. However, before these motivations are confirmed, his work

to promote his own fame among the skaa creates doubt in his allies and the reader. These doubts occur throughout the text and complicate just how trustworthy Kelsier is, or how far he is willing to go to achieve his ends, even when his actions draw him closer to the figure of 'evil' that is the Lord Ruler. This highlights the importance of motivation for any character's determination, but also the issue surrounding Kelsier's insecure determination due to his uncertain motives.

The questions around Kelsier's motives are a key issue in his determination as 'good'. For most of the first book it is unclear whether Kelsier's primary drive is empathy for the skaa, which would be considered 'good', or hatred for the nobility, which would be seen as 'evil'. Without a 'good' motive for his actions, Kelsier's determination cannot be secure, particularly as those actions are similar to those of the antagonist. The danger of this is evidenced by the eventual massacre of his army inspired to attack early by Kelsier's false promises of protection. Peter Melville observes that "[Kelsier] aspires to force the skaa rebellion into existence" even if this means lying to them, and potentially leading them to harm (33). Kelsier's ruthlessness is repeatedly used to inspire doubt about his motivations, both in other characters and the reader. Early in the first book, Kelsier reacts to killing the guard of a noble house as follows:

The man was likely a lesser nobleman. The enemy. If he were, instead, a skaa soldier – enticed into betraying his people in exchange for a few coins ... Well, then, Kelsier was even happier to send such men into their eternity.

*(Final 95)*

FID is used here to further determine Kelsier's character, this time to highlight his absolutist attitude and his willingness to resort to violence. It is clear that Kelsier has no empathy for skaa who work with the nobility, and he never expresses any regret for these deaths. While Kelsier's overall goals may be rooted in empathy for the skaa, these actions show that this empathy is at times secondary to his hostility towards the nobility. Kelsier may care for the skaa as a whole but should those skaa be perceived to side with his enemies, then his empathy is quickly forgotten. These actions do not go unquestioned, and other members of his crew confront him over the carnage left in the wake of his actions: "They had lives, families. Several of them were skaa ... just trying to do the best with what life gave them" (*Final* 129).

Kelsier's response is flippant, saying only that they "served the Final Empire" (*Final* 129). This example undermines Kelsier's determination as 'good' and primes the reader to continue questioning his motivations as the plot continues. Crucially, part of the reason that Kelsier's statement is so damning is because of the inherent dehumanisation of the skaa he killed. Even when he is invited to show empathy by being reminded of the humanity of his victim, he continues to dehumanise those that he sees as his enemies.

This is not the only instance in which FID is used to undermine the reader's trust in Kelsier's determination as 'good'. This is most clear in the following passage, in which FID is used to reveal that Kelsier has plans he is withholding from his friends, without revealing what those plans are: "*Ah, Ham, Kelsier thought. I wish I could explain everything to you. Plots behind plots, plans beyond plans. There was always*

another secret.” (*Final* 486). This use of FID effectively withholds information from both Kelsier’s allies and the reader, while at the same time revealing that there is information being withheld. In much the same way as FID was earlier used to imply the unreliability of Tresting, here the reader is told that there is information that they don’t know. Because Kelsier’s motives are in doubt and could be the result of hatred rather than empathy, all of his actions become suspect. The doubt this creates for the reader is a reflection of the doubt expressed by other characters throughout the first book, particularly Vin, who clashes with Kelsier over his absolutist view of the nobility.

Kelsier’s unclear motivation revolves around his hatred for the nobility, possibly overriding his empathy for the skaa. Furthermore, this hatred of the nobility leads Kelsier to dehumanise any he sees as an enemy, whether they are noble or skaa. It is not until Vin challenges Kelsier that this is explicitly stated in the text, however. By vocally questioning his motives, Vin addresses the potential impact that Kelsier’s ‘evil’ motivation could have on his revolutionary project, and further cements the importance of motivation for character determination in the text. Throughout the first book, Vin works for the crew as a spy within the nobility. Disguised as a lesser noblewoman, using the name Valette, she attends balls and meets and befriends Elend, the son of the most powerful noble household. Vin’s growing affection for Elend eventually results in a conflict between her and Kelsier, which highlights the importance of motivation and draws a clear line between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ within

*Mistborn*. Vin accuses Kelsier and the rest of the crew of not knowing what life is like for normal skaa:

What do any of you know about skaa? Aristocratic suits, stalking your enemies in the night, full meals and nightcaps around the table with your friends? That's not the life of a skaa! ... When's the last time you slept in an alley, shivering in the cold rain, listening to the beggar next to you cough with a sickness you knew would kill him? When's the last time you had to lay awake at night, terrified that one of the men in you crew would try to rape you? (*Final* 517)

Peter Melville sees this argument as indicating Vin's more nuanced view of subjugation and concludes that: "[Vin's] experiences reveal the fact that class warfare cannot be perceived as an absolute struggle between one group and another" (41). Vin's accusation that Kelsier does not know what it is really like to be a skaa highlights the fact that some "forms of social injustice – specifically violence against women – exceed the boundaries of class division", and thus questions how much empathy he can really have (Melville 41). In essence, Vin questions Kelsier's ability to truly recognise the feelings of the skaa, and therefore challenges his actions. Kelsier's inability to recognize his own privilege leads him to overlook his close connection to the nobility and the system he fights against. It is not until Vin points out this hypocrisy that Kelsier begins to consider an alternative route to revolution.

The question of his motivation runs the risk of Kelsier pursuing a seemingly 'good' goal for 'evil' reasons, corrupting his revolutionary project into a "mere reversal of domination, in which one class continues to dehumanise and oppress another" (Melville 40). The text even shows the reader exactly what this might look like. The Church of the Survivor is a new religion, founded after Kelsier's death, which worships him as the Survivor, god of the skaa and of freedom. This is the culmination of Kelsier's original, successful, plan to deify himself, but it also has far reaching consequences. In the third book, a fundamentalist branch of the Church of the Survivor takes over a city and leads it as they believe Kelsier would have wanted. This includes the routine execution of anyone with noble blood. In the following excerpt, Spook, an ally of Vin and Elend and a member of Kelsier's gang, objects to these executions:

"This should not be," Spook whispered harshly.

"They were noblemen," Durn said.

"No they weren't! Their parents might have been, but these were skaa. Normal people, Durn."

"They have noble blood." (*Hero* 149).

The people of this city take Kelsier's words to heart, to the extent that anyone with noble blood, even skaa, becomes a target. This is in spite of the fact that most of the protagonists of the first book, instrumental in achieving the revolution, were half-noble themselves, including Kelsier. The people of this city argue that these executions are precisely what Kelsier would have wanted: "This is the sort of thing he taught. Death to the noblemen; rule by the skaa" (*Hero* 150). Spook argues

against this, saying that this hatred and violence corrupts Kelsier's "voice of hope" (*Hero* 150). However, this 'voice of hope' was, at least initially, one which did promote precisely this kind of violence through an absolutist understanding of the nobility as the enemy. The 'good' intentions of Kelsier to gain freedom for the skaa are here disrupted by an 'evil' motivation: unempathic hatred for the nobility. By including an example of a revolution inspired by hate, rather than empathy, the trilogy intends to offer a clear example of the danger that Kelsier's uncertain motivation could pose for his revolutionary project.

While there are multiple instances in the text which highlight the similarity between Kelsier and the Lord Ruler, the former's motivation is nevertheless ultimately confirmed to be rooted in empathy, and the division between 'good' and 'evil' is reinforced in the first book of the trilogy. After the protagonists' fledgling army is destroyed following a premature attack on the Lord Ruler's forces, retribution is swift and brutal. The Lord Ruler calls for all nobles and skaa to witness a mass execution in response:

Four prisoners were forced to their knees ... and four Inquisitors raised obsidian axes. Four axes fell, and four heads were sheared free. The bodies, still held by soldiers, were allowed to spurt their last lifeblood into the fountain basins. (*Final* 436)

It is described as a casual event for the nobles, who "appeared bored – and a few even seemed to be enjoying themselves, turning and joking with one another as the beheadings continued" (*Final* 437). Crucially, the skaa being executed are not

themselves involved in the rebellion. Rather, these prisoners are “[r]andom people ... casual executions made in order to punish the skaa for harboring rebels” (*Final* 435). Not only does the execution itself suggest a complete lack of empathy and the complete dehumanisation of the innocent skaa, so too does the casual reaction of the nobility. This is one of the few times in the series in which the Lord Ruler is physically present, even if he is not directly visible, and it serves to fully cement his ‘evil’ as he oversees a brutal execution. Kelsier takes this opportunity to further solidify his own determination as ‘good’: “It’s time to stop the charade ... If we’re going to do this now, we have to be upfront and honest with ourselves. We have to admit that it isn’t about the money” (*Final* 437). This moment serves to oppose the Lord Ruler’s social system and the actions of Kelsier’s crew. Abandoning the charade that he and his crew are only interested in money, or personal gain, proves their essential ‘goodness’ and the empathy they have for the skaa, in direct contrast to the executions that symbolize the cruelty and dehumanisation of the Lord Ruler’s Final Empire. This recommitment to empathy is further proven by Kelsier’s change of heart regarding the nobility.

After Vin’s accusation that Kelsier doesn’t understand the true oppression of the skaa, Kelsier begins to see the nobility with more nuance. This results in Kelsier’s choice to save Elend’s life: “*Can’t believe I just saved a nobleman, Kelsier thought ... You’d better appreciate this, girl*” (*Final* 566). This change of heart is reinforced through a letter sent to the gang after his death, appointing them the leaders of a new government and giving them instructions on their new roles. To Vin he writes:

*“Your original duty tonight was going to be to assassinate the high noblemen remaining in the city. But, well, you convinced me that maybe they should live”* (Final 586). In the end, despite the many questions regarding Kelsier’s motivations, he is finally determined as securely ‘good’ due to his empathy, he both recognises the feelings of the Other and responds appropriately. For this empathy to be considered truly ‘good’ it must be extended to the nobility as well, allowing some to live and take part in the post-revolutionary government. The text, therefore, ultimately endorses Vin and Elend’s understanding of ‘good’ as an empathic ideal that requires the skaa and nobles to work together cooperatively to create a new, democratic, system. At the end of the first book, therefore, the good/evil binary is in fact reinforced through a secure definition relying on empathy as the determining factor between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. This understanding of empathy follows Baron-Cohen’s definition, in which both recognition and response are required. As the series progresses, however, the good/evil binary becomes increasingly complicated, particularly when analysing the character of Elend, and his struggles to protect the post-revolutionary democratic system.

## ‘Good’, ‘Evil’, and Political Ideology: The Case of Elend’s Government

In the second book of the *Mistborn* trilogy, the most important character for understanding the good/evil binary is Elend, who leads the post-revolutionary government he helps create in the first book. Elend’s central moral determination

revolves around his attempt to maintain the democratic system that he leads in the face of his father's attempt to reinstate an autocratic system through force. His motivation to maintain this system is rooted in the belief that it is the best for the skaa, and so Elend's empathy is initially linked directly to his political ideals, but these political ideals are later abandoned when his rule is threatened. This ultimately leads Elend to perform actions that are increasingly similar to those of the Lord Ruler and his father. Notably, Elend resorts to tactics that could be considered dehumanising, particularly in the way he treats Vin and manipulates the beliefs of the skaa. As such, the question of his motivation becomes increasingly important. Unlike Kelsier, the reader is never invited to question Elend's motives. However, his struggles with his position of leadership, and remaining 'good' in the face of internal and external threats to the new government, result in an expanded understanding of the limits of 'empathy' and 'goodness' within the text. In this section, I analyse the way in which Elend's character is determined securely as 'good', particularly against his father's more absolute 'evil', despite his occasionally questionable actions.

The link between Elend and the Lord Ruler is foreshadowed early in the second book in a scene in which Elend struggles to come up with a plan to deal with his elected Assembly, which represents the interests of both skaa and nobles:

"Sometimes Elend wondered if the Lord Ruler had been right. Not in oppressing the people of course – but in retaining all of the power for himself" (*Well* 21).

Nevertheless, Elend is repeatedly determined as 'good' by other characters who see

his previous commitment to the revolutionary project as proof of his empathic nature: “We didn’t just put a nobleman on the throne – we put a *good man* on the throne” (*Final* 641).<sup>9</sup> It is made clear that Elend does not desire power for himself, but the text also makes it evident that he is the best person to be in a position of power, due to his particular knowledge of political theory and the selfish ambitions of his rivals. This ultimately leads him to abandoning his democratic ideals and taking absolute power as he is the right type of person for the job. This does not immediately redetermine Elend as ‘evil’, however, and rather leads up to his characterisation in the third book when alternative perspectives on his actions are shown for the first time. These alternate perspectives will finally lead to the relativisation of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in *Mistborn*. This will come to a climax in which Elend is ‘forced’ to take power as emperor, despite his previously held democratic ideals. He is still determined as ‘good’, however, and the text ultimately severs the link between democracy and ‘goodness’. Furthermore, this begins to show a departure from Baron-Cohen’s definition of empathy in which both recognition and response are necessary. By the end of the second book, a new understanding of empathy is expressed in which ‘evil’ actions are permitted when they are motivated by empathy and a desire to achieve the greater good.

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<sup>9</sup> Elend’s initial determination is clear within the context of the narrative, but closer analysis highlights that his actions are not so purely ‘good’. For more see Melville’s article, particularly his critique of Elend’s rejection of noble ‘coming of age’ rituals. For the purposes of this study, however, Elend’s determination to the reader is ‘good’, largely due to his empathy for the skaa which is never truly questioned.

Throughout the second book, the good/evil binary is closely related to character ideology, before this link is broken by the end of the text. Elend's primary opposite in the second book is his father, Straff Venture. The two characters occupy opposite sides of the good/evil binary, and their interactions largely serve to secure Elend's determination as 'good' in contrast to Straff's more straightforward 'evil'. The two characters begin as not only morally, but also ideologically opposed, with Straff defending the old system of slavery and autocratic rule and Elend supporting freedom for the skaa and a democratic system. Ideology is a term with a number of different and shifting meanings, depending on the context. This is illustrated in Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991), in which he lists sixteen definitions at random, to highlight the variety of meanings attributed to the term (1). Eagleton later presents six possible definitions for ideology, having analysed the term more closely, and it is the third definition which is most relevant to this current study, which involves "the *promotion and legitimation* of the interests of ... social groups in the face of opposing interests" (29). Following this definition, Straff has an interest in maintaining his power and restoring the social system that sees skaa enslaved and dehumanised. This leads to an ideological discourse that promotes and legitimises this social hierarchy, based on a fundamental lack of empathy for the skaa which leads to their dehumanisation. Elend, on the other hand, has an interest in dismantling this system, and maintaining the new democratic order due to his empathy for the skaa and his understanding of the injustice of their former treatment. The discussion of ideology is important as it relates to Bal's thoughts on identifying binary opposition. Bal argues that if the

semantic axes model is used correctly it “lays bare the text’s ideological tenets”: in other words, it reveals how ideology is represented structurally in the relationship between different characters (116). It is important to note that in Eagleton’s definition, ideology as a concept is not necessarily morally qualified. However, in *Mistborn* the ideological binary is initially morally qualified, with Elend’s democratic system being determined as ‘good’ because it implies a level of equality between the skaa and the nobility. This is contrast with the ‘evil’ autocratic system represented by Straff, which relies on the dehumanisation of the skaa in order to be maintained. This connection between morality and ideology is later questioned, with the end of the text implying that the two binaries are related, but not exactly the same. This is a key distinction which ultimately allows Elend to turn towards autocratic rule while still maintaining his qualification as ‘good’ because of his continued empathy for the skaa.

Straff is introduced as a focalizing character in the second book, and the sections which follow his narrative quickly establish him as ‘evil’. In much the same way as Tresting’s ‘evil’ served to qualify Kelsier as ‘good’, Straff is even more overtly determined as ‘evil’ in order to better determine Elend. This sets up the central conflict of the second book, and so a close analysis of exactly how Straff is qualified is important before discussing Elend. This determination as ‘evil’ is once again the result of a lack of empathy. After the events of the first book, Straff begins amassing power as a warlord and lays siege to the city of Luthadel in an attempt to bring back the old order. Elend clearly has sympathy for the skaa, as seen in his attempts to

form a fair democratic society in which the skaa are represented in the government, whereas Straff treats the skaa with contempt. A further factor in Straff's determination as 'evil' is his treatment of women, which the text emphasises is extremely cruel and dehumanising. In the following passage, for instance, Straff summons one of his mistresses, Amaranta, whom he maintains for her skill with antidotes:

She had been quite attractive a decade before, but now she was creeping up into her late twenties. Her breasts had begun to sag from childbirth, and every time Straff looked at her, he noticed the wrinkles that were appearing on her forehead and around her eyes. He got rid of most women long before they reached her age. (*Well* 208)

The focus on her age has the tone of someone stating the obvious, but for the reader this is a shocking indictment of Straff's character. Most of the above passage is indirect discourse, in which the narrator conveys the character's thoughts without confusing the textual voices. This is contrasted by the rhetorical question later in the same section when Amaranta assumes she has been summoned in her capacity as mistress rather than medic:

*Well at least she's optimistic*, Straff thought. He would have thought that after four years without being called to his bed, she would understand.

Didn't women realize when they were too old to be attractive? (*Well* 208).

The final line in this quote is highly reminiscent of the prologue in which Tresting dismisses the skaa as lazy. The use of FID offers a direct view of Straff's thoughts and opinions, particularly his fundamental lack of empathy for Amaranta. While

Straff seems able to recognise her feelings, he fails to respond appropriately to Amaranta. In Straff's eyes, she exists only to serve her function of preparing antidotes. Thus, this act of dehumanisation serves as a way of indicating that Straff is to be considered 'evil'.

In contrast to the Lord Ruler, Straff's determination as 'evil' is direct, and the result of his own thoughts, opinions, and actions as represented to the reader by the narrator. Here, Straff's dehumanisation of Amaranta is related to his dehumanisation of women more generally.<sup>10</sup> Straff's continued enforcement of the system of slavery furthers the idea of his reduction of others to objects, and this is where he and Elend are most clearly opposed. Elend condemns his father's behaviour as seen in his sympathetic view of the skaa slaves when he visits his father's camp to parley: "The servants were skaa – imperial skaa, after the old tradition. They were ragged, their clothing made of torn smocks, and showed bruises from a recent beating" (*Well* 306). Elend's focus on the clothing and condition of these imperial skaa shows his empathy for them, in that he recognises their suffering and responds with appropriate sympathy, thus highlighting Elend's

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<sup>10</sup> Amaranta's presence in the text is a clear indication of Straff's evil, but her particular representation is in itself somewhat questionable. The reader never receives her own focalization reducing her agency within the narrative. This issue is also reflected in the fact that her actions have very little influence on the plot. She is eventually revealed to be poisoning Straff, but on discovery he strangles her to death. Ultimately Straff is killed by Vin and not the poison. Amaranta's presence in the text only has a minor impact on the plot itself and she serves more as a method of determining Straff's character than a character in her own right.

'goodness' in contrast to the 'evil' of his father. However, while initial opposition between the two characters is clear, a closer analysis of the rest of the text reveals several similarities between them.

While Elend and Straff appear to be in direct conflict with each other, one particular thread which runs throughout the second book draws a direct comparison between the two characters. Straff has been shown to treat others, particularly women, as little more than objects, whereas Elend supposedly maintains his empathy. Straff's utilitarian attitude towards others can also be seen in his attitude towards his illegitimate Misborn son, Zane, who he maintains as a useful assassin despite his apparent madness. However, Elend's willingness to use Vin's reputation for violence highlights one way in which his empathy is conditional, displaying a similarly utilitarian attitude. Elend's conditional empathy is most notable when he first meets with his father. In order to escape what is discovered to be a trap, Elend threatens Straff with Vin's retribution: "If you kill me, Father ... then she'll begin the slaughter. Men will die like prisoners before the fountains on a day of execution" (*Well* 318). This direct reminder of the executions ordered by the Lord Ruler draws a clear and startling connection between the 'evil' dictator and the 'good' king Elend. The statement itself suggests a lack of empathy for Straff's soldiers who are, after all, forced into his service in much the same way as the skaa Kelsier killed for working with the nobility. As previously observed, Baron-Cohen argues that the single-minded pursuit of one's own goals is always unempathic, even when those goals might themselves be seen as positive. In this case, while Elend is able to feel

empathy for the skaa he rules over, and thus attempts to preserve his rule as a way of protecting them, he shows an inability to empathise with the forces of his enemies. This is similar to the way Kelsier treated those skaa in the employ of the nobility in the first book. However, unlike Kelsier, Elend does not follow through with this threat. While unfulfilled the threat is nevertheless unempathic, and the crucial detail is how willing Elend is to use Vin's powers and reputation for violence for his own gain.

This is not the only time that Elend does this, and afterwards he even refers to her as a "weapon" (*Well* 324). Throughout the second book, Vin struggles with her identity as a Mistborn, fearing that her friends will ultimately reject her due to her dangerous abilities, coupled with her feelings of being trapped and unable to fully utilise her skills. Elend's use of her reputation alienates and objectifies Vin, evidenced in his use of the word 'weapon' to describe her. This allows Zane to manipulate Vin into seeing a connection between Straff and Elend. Zane's manipulation is effective because it relies on his own position as a tool of his father, and so Elend's use of Vin's reputation shows a clear link between him and Straff. Zane shows this explicitly to Vin, saying: "Straff would lose his Mistborn, and Elend would lose his. We could deny them *both* their tools" (*Well* 405). Despite Vin's feelings, Elend relies heavily on the threat she poses to maintain his city's independence and his own power, for the most part without consulting her first. This is an example of Elend occasionally dehumanising Vin, and failing to recognise her feelings, all for the greater good of maintaining his own power. These

similarities between Straff and Elend run throughout the second book and serve to create conflict between Elend and Vin. Crucially, however, the text does not invite the reader to question Elend's fundamental motivation as empathic. While his actions may dehumanise Vin, they are rooted in a larger empathy for the skaa. In this case Elend's use of Vin's reputation is here justified as his goal is to keep his city free of Straff's rule, and free of a return to the larger dehumanisation of the skaa through the system of slavery. This will become particularly important as he continues to try and maintain his position of authority. What was initially an occasional act of dehumanisation in service of the greater good, becomes more common as the series continues, ultimately leading to a reevaluation of the relationship between the ideological and moral binaries.

Most of Elend's storyline in the second book revolves around his attempt to hold on to political power after his elected Assembly moves in favour of voting for a new king. The methods he uses highlight his commitment to the democratic system, as he refuses to take control through force and rather tries to maintain power through legal means. Elend has the right to run again, and so he plans to gain as many votes as possible in order to maintain control. Some of his strategies further complicate his determination, however, and again the issue of motivation is the key factor in maintaining his qualification as 'good'. In an effort to gain votes, Elend manipulates the religious beliefs of the skaa members of the Assembly by officially joining the Church of the Survivor so they "might be afraid to vote against him" (*Well* 454). Vin observes that the Church "could become as powerful in Luthadel as the Steel

Ministry had once been”, directly linking the Church to the religion that worshipped the Lord Ruler as a god (*Well* 455). The Lord Ruler maintained his rule partly through the religious fear he inspired in both the skaa and the nobility, and here Elend does the same. Despite knowing Vin’s misgivings concerning her role in the Church, Elend does not consult her in this decision. Nor does he tell her before the vote, leaving Vin to discover the fact alongside everyone else. The focalization from this scene is from Vin’s perspective, emphasising her shock and feelings of betrayal that Elend would not tell her beforehand: “*Why didn’t you tell me?*” she thought. *How can I be ready if you don’t tell me what you’re planning?*” (*Well* 453). As a key figure in the Church’s pantheon and a vocal supporter of Elend, Vin’s presence becomes a threat to the loyal followers of the Church and ensures Elend some key votes. Once again, he is shown to make use of her reputation to maintain his authority. Ultimately Elend’s attempt fails, as the Assembly votes for another king, and all he achieves is further alienating Vin who feels even more dehumanised: “She was the knife – a different kind of knife, but still a tool. The means by which Elend would protect the city” (*Well* 455). Once again, Elend’s actions show a willingness to engage in dehumanising tactics in order to achieve what he sees as the greater good.

These actions are justified by Elend’s belief in himself as the right person to lead the government, and that this is in the best interest of the people. He explains: “I will not be like the tyrants who would take Luthadel from us! I will not force the people to do my will, even if I know it is best for them” (*Well* 332). In this quote Elend

explicitly distances himself from those in favour of authoritarian rule. At this point in the trilogy, empathy and ideology coincide in the democratic system Elend leads. The government Elend created is determined as 'good', due to an empathic ideal at its core that sees skaa and nobility equally represented without the need for violence. Elend's refusal to resort to military force shows his commitment to the 'good' democratic system, thus ensuring his own determination as 'good'. This remains the case even when Elend's actions to maintain power through the democratic system are questionable, because he does ultimately give up that power when the system demands it. What the above quote shows is the beginning of a problem which will ultimately challenge Elend's determination as 'good': the idea that, because he 'knows what is best', he 'deserves' his position, no matter what the democratic process dictates.

Even if his attempt to retain power is questionable, his commitment to empathy and the democratic system secures Elend's determination as 'good'. However, because Elend 'deserves' to rule, the fact that the Assembly fails to vote for him calls into question the perceived 'goodness' of the democratic system in the text. This sets up the separation of the ideological and moral binaries which will ultimately result in Elend taking autocratic control as emperor. Initially, however, Elend's commitment to democracy is reinforced. After the vote Elend does give up power, even revealing a key piece of legal information that ensures he loses his authority. Elend's 'goodness' in relation to his democratic ideals is explicitly stated by Tindwyl, who sums up the reasons Elend lost the throne:

You lost the throne because you wouldn't command your armies to secure the city, because you insisted on giving the Assembly too much freedom, and because you don't employ assassins or other forms of pressure. In short, Elend Venture, you lost the throne because you are a good man. (*Well* 503)

This offers a new definition of 'good' in the political space that goes beyond just empathy. Elend's determination as a 'good man' is here reliant on his refusal to resort to military violence and his commitment to the democratic process. This 'goodness' is still related to Elend's empathy for the people and his desire to do what is best for them. Like Kelsier after his change of heart, empathy must be extended even to Elend's political enemies within the government, allowing them to take control when the democratic system demands it. Nevertheless, Elend's commitment to a particular political system, and refusal to resort to violence to maintain that system, are here also emphasised as factors in his determination as 'good'. The weakness of this democratic system, however, is revealed soon after the vote when the new king is shown to have secret dealings with Straff to turn the city over. While Elend's commitment to democracy and the fact he does relinquish power are central factors in his determination as 'good', the motives of the new democratically elected king, Penrod, are shown to be far less selfless. This is illustrated by Straff's offer to him, which would see Straff claiming the title of emperor and Penrod ruling in his name: "You want to keep your crown and rule as a subject king under me?" (*Well* 474). At this point, the democratic system, which was previously determined as 'good', results in the election of an 'evil' king. This erases the link between the moral and ideological binaries, allowing Elend to take back control as the more 'deserving' ruler. After Vin defeats the armies amassed against

them, Elend is named emperor, which gives him control of both the city and the remaining forces of their enemies, who surrender to Vin. Vin is initially concerned that Elend will not want to be emperor after all his efforts to “make certain the people had a choice” (*Well* 733). But rather than refuse the position, Elend accepts, saying: “I’m beginning to think my opinions were simplistic. Honorable, but ... incomplete” (*Well* 733). From this point on, Elend and Vin are emperor and empress of a new empire, despite their efforts in the first book to overthrow the Lord Ruler’s empire and bring freedom to the skaa.

Elend had lost his power democratically, but then regained control of Luthadel through the military strength of Vin. This coincides with Elend gaining the powers of a Mistborn, and thus military power of his own. This final separation of the ideological and moral binaries allows Elend to gain autocratic control through military force and still be determined as ‘good’, because he uniquely understands what is ‘best’ for the people. In this case, he maintains his recognition of the feelings of the skaa, thus justifying what may be considered an ‘evil’ response to those feelings. While maintaining autocratic power was previously determined as ‘evil’, here that same action is permitted. This is not only a separation of the moral and ideological binaries, in that autocracy is no longer determined as unequivocally ‘evil’ but is also an example of the text departing from Baron-Cohen’s understanding of empathy. What was once considered an ‘evil’ action is now justified due to the recognition of the feelings of the Other. Where Baron-Cohen’s understanding would see this as a lack of empathy, due to the failure to respond

appropriately, Elend is nevertheless still determined as 'good'. This trend will continue into third book, in which the empathic recognition of the feelings of the Other is shown to justify what might otherwise be considered 'evil' actions.

A central issue in the second book is the fact that the 'people', as represented by their democratically elected government, cannot be trusted to elect the 'right' person. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) offers an interesting way of interpreting Elend's position in relation to the people he rules. In the first essay in this collection, Frye describes five kinds of heroes found in romance literature, which can be useful when approaching the issue of Elend's character. These heroes can either be superior, inferior, or the same as other people. There are three kinds of superior hero and Elend is, initially, of the third kind: "superior in degree to other men but not his natural environment, the hero is a leader" (Frye, *Anatomy* 33-34). While he does not, at first, have magical abilities making him superior to the world itself, he does have "authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours" (Frye, *Anatomy* 34). Elend is a mortal man, but it is made clear that he does have the superior wisdom and knowledge that make him right for the position of king. He knows more about political theory, argues more passionately about the virtues of democracy, and even gives up his power when that system demands it. But interestingly we can also see that the general population of this democracy falls into another category of hero: "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage" (34). The skaa, the normal population that Elend rules over, strangely have little presence in the

second book, despite the text being largely concerned with the democratic system that supposedly represents them. They are most often described as a singular group, and in relation to the new religion they follow which is seen as foolish by the protagonists. The difference in power between Elend and the skaa results in the impression that the people of this democracy cannot be trusted with their own rule, and only someone like Elend, superior to normal people, can truly operate in their best interests. The implication is that Elend, being superior in degree to other men as Frye puts it, is uniquely qualified to keep a position of power. Furthermore, because the general population are so inferior to him, they are specifically underqualified to know their own best interests.

Thus Elend's 'goodness' coincides with his right to rule as an inherently superior person. He does give up political power when the system demands, which allows him to maintain his qualification as 'good'. But when the democratic system almost hands the city to an 'evil' king, Elend's inherent superiority and the flawed democratic system means the only 'good' course of action is for him to take autocratic control as emperor. This problem is further compounded when Elend gains magical abilities at the end of the second book, essentially making him another kind of hero, one that is "superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being" (Frye, *Anatomy* 33). Elend is pushed further and further from the people he supposedly leads, to the point where he can no longer be considered to truly represent them. In fact, he is no longer really human at all – he is Mistborn, and according to his superior position in

Frye's hierarchy of heroes, Elend's 'natural' political position would be one of complete authority.<sup>11</sup> However, the question of how a hero's relationship to non-hero characters influences their political authority lies outside the remit of this thesis, and I do not intend to suggest that all fantasy texts with a hero figure in a political role must result in authoritarianism. Nevertheless, when it comes to the end of the second book of the *Mistborn* trilogy, a tension exists between Elend's power, both magical and political, and his relationship to the 'normal' skaa. At the end of the second book Elend occupies exactly the same position as the Lord Ruler once did, maintaining control through military power. The separation of the ideological and moral binaries means Elend can still be determined as 'good', despite this link to the Lord Ruler. However, their shared position sets the stage for the redetermination of the Lord Ruler in the third book and the relativisation of the good/evil binary.

Elend's autocratic rule is seen as almost inevitable in the context of the novel.

Initially, we are invited to see the opposition between Elend and the Lord

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Frye's analysis was not originally intended as a 'hierarchy'. He specifically set out to document the kinds of heroes found in romance literature, only one of which usually appeared in any one story, and who defined the kind of story they appeared in. My reason for including this aspect of Frye's analysis is twofold. For one, it highlights the structural nature of the position of the hero, the way that hero relates to other characters or groups within the text. Second, this also highlights the value of Frye's argument to contemporary fantasy criticism. While these specific categories need to be reconsidered in a contemporary context, they do provide a unique viewpoint on the different kinds of epic fantasy hero, how they relate to each other, and to the non-hero characters of the text.

Ruler/Straff as representing democracy in opposition to authoritarianism. But ultimately democracy fails, and authoritarianism is seen as necessary to save the city, calling into question the previous determination of authoritarianism as 'evil'. Thus, in the second book, the ideological binary collapses while the moral binary is maintained. This begins the disruption of the Lord Ruler's determination, as the reader now sees a 'good' character as the head of an authoritarian empire, a political system previously determined as 'evil'. At this point, the only thing left to separate Elend and Straff, as well as the Lord Ruler, is their empathy. This sets up the ultimate collapse of the good/evil binary in the third book, which sees Elend's empathy increasingly in conflict with his actions as emperor, and the Lord Ruler's 'good' motives finally revealed.

## Monologue in *Mistborn*

### *The Lord Ruler Turns 'Good': Relativism as Monologue*

Despite Elend's turn towards authoritarianism at the end of the second book he is still determined as 'good' because of his empathic motives. This is challenged, however, in the third book, in which the reader is presented with alternative perspectives on his actions. These alternate perspectives highlight the way in which determination can be highly subjective, even if the character in question maintains their empathy. Despite Elend's continuing commitment to empathic ideals, he often engages in dehumanising acts in service of the greater good. Much as Kelsier was

previously condemned by Vin for the single-minded pursuit of his own goals, even when those goals were rooted in empathy for the skaa, Elend's actions in the final book of the trilogy complicate his determination as 'good'. The text seems to suggest that any character can see themselves as empathic, while still engaging in 'evil' actions. This is, therefore, the beginning of the relativisation of the good/evil binary in the text, which is further reinforced by the revelation of the Lord Ruler's 'good' motives. This relativisation of the good/evil binary means true dialogue, in the Bakhtinian sense, does not occur, as all perspectives becomes isolated with no possibility of contact between them. The relativisation is finally related to the central climax of the plot, which rejects dialogue in a different way, through the dialectical fusion of opposites into a single whole. This section begins with an analysis of the alternative perspectives the text introduces on Elend's actions as emperor, revealing how unstable his determination is. This will then be linked to the redetermination of the Lord Ruler, whose own perspective is revealed, retroactively showing his own motives were rooted in empathy all along.

The plot of the final book is primarily concerned with the fight against Ruin, released at the end of the second book, and his plans to end the world. Elend and Vin's attempts to stop Ruin, or save as much of humanity as they can, result in them performing increasingly 'evil' actions. After the formation of their new empire, Elend and Vin discover secret bunkers created by the Lord Ruler intended to help humanity survive the apocalypse. To access these bunkers, however, they must first gain control of the cities in which they are housed, thus beginning a campaign to

expand their empire. Elend continues to manipulate his people's beliefs to achieve these aims, particularly when he needs to expose his armies to a new deadly sickness, seemingly caused by the mists of the world of *Mistborn*, to ensure those who survive are immunised against it: "These mists will strike down some of us ... We *cannot* arrive at Fadrex City without having inoculated ourselves ... we would have to fight with a sixth of our men shaking on the ground from sickness!" (*Hero* 160). He manipulates his army through their faith to convince them the risk is necessary, saying: "I trust in the Survivor! He named himself Lord of Mists. If some of us die, then it is his will" (*Hero* 160). Crucially, Elend is not himself convinced of this religion, expressing his own doubts to those he is close with, arguing that "having faith in Kelsier is better than the alternatives" but giving no indication of real belief (*Hero* 162). Again, Elend's actions are highly reminiscent of the Lord Ruler's, who similarly used religious beliefs to control the population and justify his brutal regime. While it is clear that Elend recognises the feelings of his followers, his action appears to manipulate of these feelings rather than constitute what might be considered an appropriately empathic response. While his motivation may be considered broadly 'good', the action itself is one which was previously considered 'evil' when performed by the Lord Ruler.

The Lord Ruler's religious system that saw him as a divine being survives the revolution, with some characters continuing to believe in his divinity. One adherent says to Vin: "Think of how I see you, claiming to have slain a man I *know* to be God. Is it not plausible that he wanted this to happen? That he's out there, still, watching

us" (*Hero* 547). The fact that the Lord Ruler is discovered to have lied about his divinity was a key factor in cementing his 'evil' in the first book. By usurping a prophecy and claiming godhood the Lord Ruler's oppression was legitimised, and by revealing his lie the protagonists were, in turn, justified in their revolution. However, Elend is shown to similarly manipulate religious belief to control his followers. This contradiction is reinforced by Elend's sudden shift toward authoritarianism, a fact addressed by the leader of a rival city:

You're a hypocrite of the worst kind. You pretended to let the people be in charge – but when they ousted you and picked another, you had your Mistborn conquer the city back for you. You rule by force, not by common consent. (*Hero* 285)

Thus, Elend's democratic ideals have seemingly disappeared by the third book. While cities in his empire are governed by a parliamentary council, he himself rules exclusively through violence and force. While Elend is never considered 'evil' by another focalizing character, his actions are strikingly close to those of the Lord Ruler. In fact, this gap in focalizing Elend as 'evil' contributes a great deal to his continued determination as 'good', much as the Lord Ruler's lack of direct focalization is a major factor in his determination as 'evil'. Elend's previous determination as 'good' appeared to justify his 'evil' actions to the reader, even when those actions were the same or similar to those of the Lord Ruler. But the above passage offers an external perspective to Elend's actions, a perspective which sees his actions as unempathic and therefore 'evil'. This begins to highlight how

perspective can alter the way in which a character is determined, a trend that continues throughout the third book and is addressed from the very start.

At the start of the third novel, Elend's commitment to giving people a choice has become remarkably corrupted. The first chapter is focalized from the perspective of Fatren, a new character who is attempting to lead a small settlement in its defence against an army of koloss, rampaging monsters feared for their violence and destructive tendencies. This shift in perspective mirrors the way the Lord Ruler was previously indirectly determined, a form of representation now used for Elend. The text seems to suggest that, when viewed from an external perspective without understanding their motivations, any action could be seen as 'evil'. After his appearance, Elend swiftly takes command of the situation and delivers an ultimatum to Fatren: either join willingly, or Elend will "just take command anyway" (*Hero 11*). When Fatren calls Elend a tyrant he is surprised that Elend agrees: "I used to think that I could do things differently. And, I still believe that I'll be able to, someday. But, for now, I don't have a choice. I need your soldiers and I need your city" (*Hero 11*). This is the state of exception that Peter Melville refers to in his own analysis, which allows Elend to ignore the democratic freedoms, that were once so important to him, in the face of external threats to his empire. Focalizing this scene from another character's point of view invites the reader to view Elend's actions as they would appear to the people Elend 'saves', contrasting Elend the emperor with his previous commitment to democratic freedom. The choice Elend offers is empty, as regardless of what Fatren says the result will always be the same. The use of the

word 'tyrant' also draws an ironic connection to Kelsier's last words in which he calls the Lord Ruler "Lord Tyrant", further linking Elend and the former antagonist (*Final* 573). Later, Elend even makes a remarkable statement about the Lord Ruler himself: "We may not have liked his rule, but I can understand him somewhat. He wasn't spiteful – he wasn't even evil, exactly. He just ... got carried away" (*Hero* 108). The Lord Ruler, as has been observed, presided over an abusive system that allowed the rape of skaa women and the murder of children, alongside the systematic oppression of the entire skaa population. But here, one of the central protagonists describes him as getting 'carried away', dismissing the abuses that the same protagonists fought against in the first book. Now that he occupies much the same position as the Lord Ruler once did, Elend's struggles with power suggest that sometimes 'evil' actions are 'necessary'. At this early point in the final text, the secure qualification of the Lord Ruler as 'evil' is already in doubt. While Elend's personal experience with leadership has enabled him to view the Lord Ruler in more nuanced ways than simply 'evil', for the reader the fact of the previous antagonist's perceived lack of empathy remains. It is not until the Lord Ruler's own perspective is offered that his determination is truly reversed, and the collapse of the good/evil binary is complete.

Most of what is expressed about the Lord Ruler in the third book is related to his secret storage bunkers, which play a key role in saving humanity from the coming apocalypse. We learn that the Lord Ruler has spent the last few hundred years planning for the eventuality of his death and the release of Ruin, in order to let

*"mankind survive a little longer"* (Hero 434). It is through the messages he leaves in these caverns that the reader learns the truth about the Lord Ruler from his own perspective. It is shown that he did have 'good' motivations, and that he spent the last thousand years tormented by Ruin, who worked to corrupt him. This is revealed in the Lord Ruler's own words, who writes: *"the voice that whispers to me always, telling me to destroy, begging me to give it freedom. I fear it has corrupted my thoughts"* (Hero 433). Despite his torment, the Lord Ruler continued to work towards what he saw as *"a land of order"*, lamenting that the skaa rebellions he defeated over the years could not *"see the perfection of [his] system"* (Hero 434). Because most of the series is focalized from the perspective of characters working to free the skaa, the determination offered to the reader is that the Lord Ruler is 'evil'. He appears to operate without empathy for the skaa people, as seen in their daily suffering and dehumanisation as told from their own perspective. However, once the reader is offered the Lord Ruler's perspective, they are given an alternate view of this suffering.

The Lord Ruler, it is revealed, genuinely *"tried to be a good ruler"* and sought to defend humanity from Ruin, a greater threat (Hero 434). As far as the Lord Ruler's perspective is concerned, his own actions were justified because his intentions were always good. Another character later writes, as an epilogue to the series, that *"[The Lord Ruler] planned very well for this day. He suffered much beneath Ruin's hand, but he was a good man, who ultimately had honorable intentions"* (Hero 724). While the Lord Ruler's intentions may have been 'honourable', this does not completely

redetermine his actions as 'good'. The tension that exists between his 'good' intentions and his 'evil' actions, which include the enslavement and brutalisation of the skaa, is never fully resolved in the text. He is nevertheless redetermined as 'good' in this quote precisely because of his 'good' intentions. Similarly, Elend's own intentions are determined as 'good', being rooted in empathy, which from his perspective justifies the 'evil' actions he commits in pursuit of his 'good' ends. Thus, his broader empathic goal of saving humanity seemingly justifies actions which were previously considered 'evil'. The text therefore departs from Baron-Cohen's definition of empathy, and instead proposes that a character's motivation of empathy is the determining factor of 'goodness', even when they perform actions which may otherwise be considered 'evil'. Thus, when it comes to the relationship between these two pivotal characters, the opposition between 'good' and 'evil' becomes relativised. The only secure form of meaning this binary can have is subjective, and therefore monological.

While 'good' and 'evil' can still be related to the possession of empathy, the third book of *Mistborn* illustrates that this is not so concrete a foundation for determination as it first appeared. Alternative perspectives are offered which reveal that any character could be considered 'good' from their own point of view, and 'evil' from the point of view of their enemies. An essential element of dialogue is the importance of subjectivity and context. However, according to Hana Owen, while relativism may seem to prioritise the same aspects, rather than enabling contact between views it "draws boundaries around these contexts so they become

isolated" (142). Rather than an endless 'unfinalisability' of meaning, relativism would see subjective meanings entirely independent and isolated, precluding any possibility of dialogue. In *Mistborn*, any dialogue in relation to the good/evil binary becomes impossible. Where any character can see their own actions as 'good', it essentially makes 'good' and 'evil' equally arbitrary terms, as Gary Morson and Caryl Emmerson put it in their definition of relativism (59). By resisting the possibility of dialogue between opposed perspectives, this relativisation of the good/evil binary becomes an example of monologue. This monological resolution is most usefully illustrated through Vin.

While Vin is the central focalizing character for the majority of *Mistborn*, her character has not thus far been relevant to my discussion. Her attitude toward the good/evil binary is telling when turning to the discussion of monologue and dialogue in *Mistborn*. Vin does see the Final Empire as brutally oppressive and sympathises with the skaa, however, her opinion about the Lord Ruler is somewhat more ambiguous. Early in the first book, Vin struggles with her position in the gang and her feelings concerning their goal of overthrowing the Lord Ruler: "Besides, didn't the Lord Ruler have *some* right to his place? ... He'd saved the world, which – in some twisted sort of way – made it his. What right did they have to try and take it from him?" (*Final* 333). Rather than a personal desire to defeat the Lord Ruler, either for revenge or to protect the other skaa, Vin's reasons for staying with the gang are rooted in the personal connections she makes: "She knew the reason she stayed in the crew. It wasn't the plan; it was the people" (*Final* 333). As the central

protagonist, an obvious pairing exists between her and the Lord Ruler, but Vin's hostility towards him is a result of her association with Kelsier and the crew rather than any inherent philosophy of her own. Vin does not share the vision the crew has of a world without the Lord Ruler, her loyalty is to the individuals rather than the cause. As far as Vin is concerned, the Lord Ruler has earned the right to rule through force. In fact, she herself begins the transition from democracy back to empire when she defeats her enemies' armies and declares Elend emperor. Her position of authority is justified by the simple fact that she took it by force, aligning her more with what she sees as the Lord Ruler's philosophy. Unlike Elend, Vin has no concern with democratic ideals, or even whether she is the 'right' person to rule. It is made clear throughout the later texts that Vin no longer engages in complex debates about morality, as seen in the way she thinks of herself: "I'm not a good person or a bad person. I'm just here to kill things" (*Well* 255). This quote foreshadows the eventual relativisation of the good/evil binary.

The Lord Ruler's redetermination is fully realised when Vin actively claims a place in the former antagonist's theology. At one point she tells a faithful follower of the Lord Ruler's religion: "[The skaa] don't worship me, they worship what they think I should be. But I'm not the Heir of the Survivor. I didn't do what Kelsier did. He freed them.' *You conquered them, Ruin whispered*" (*Hero* 548). Confronted with the realisation that she has conquered and ruled over the skaa in much the same way as the Lord Ruler did. This leads her to tell the faithful that the Lord Ruler is "not coming back. He doesn't need to. *I took his place*" (*Hero* 548). Her position as

protagonist and her acknowledgement of her link to the Lord Ruler is one of the strongest factors in the former antagonist's redetermination as 'good'. However, Vin herself does not enter into discussions over an individual's 'goodness'. In the third book, she fully expresses her view when an informant tells her that an enemy ruler is also a good man:

"You didn't expect that? Everyone who is your enemy must also be an evil person?" "No," Vin said, thinking back to the days before the fall of the Final Empire. "I ended up marrying someone my friends would have named an enemy." (*Hero* 227)

Thus, Vin's reluctance to engage in debates around 'good' and 'evil' reflects the monological nature of the relativised binary. By refusing to enter into dialogue around the morality of her actions, Vin highlights the problem that relativisation creates. This links directly to Bakhtin's view on relativism and monologue. Dialogue becomes impossible when every viewpoint is relative, as it denies the possibility of direct contact between points of view. Because each voice relies only on its own point of view for meaning, any contact between voices becomes meaningless.

### *The Merging of Ruin and Preservation: Dialectical Synthesis as Monologue*

This notion of monologue is a central element of *Mistborn*, not only in regard to the good/evil binary. Another main conflict of the series is also resolved monologically, albeit through a different process than relativisation. The binary opposition

between Ruin and Preservation primarily appears in the third book, where they are introduced as two powerful cosmic forces in conflict over the fate of the world. These two opposed forces are ultimately resolved through dialectical synthesis which, I argue, can be understood as another form of monologisation. While it is important to note that the dialectical synthesis of the Ruin/Preservation binary is distinct from the relativisation of the good/evil binary, both result in different forms of monologue and are therefore opposed to dialogue. Dialogue relies on difference, but also on the ability of different perspectives to interact. Rather than denying any form of contact between different perspectives, dialogue enriches the understanding of both while maintaining the differences that separate them (Morson 55). Monologue occurs when this contact is denied. The good/evil binary is monologically understood in *Mistborn* because the relativisation resists the possibility of contact by isolating different perspectives. However, monologue can also occur through dialectic discourse, which “can be contained in a single consciousness and overcomes contradictions in a single, monologic view” (Morson 56). This single monologic view is seen in *Mistborn’s* Ruin/Preservation binary, where two oppositions are synthesised into a single whole at the end of the story.

This synthesis occurs due to the actions of Sazed, a character who had previously been in a secondary role, but who becomes a major focalizing character in the second and third books. As an ally of the skaa rebels, he works with them to fight the Final Empire and later to support the post-revolutionary government. Sazed is a Terrisman, a group separate from the skaa but also oppressed by the Lord Ruler’s

social system. They are valued as obedient servants, and in order to control them the Lord Ruler uses a system of forced breeding and castration. Sazed is a eunuch, castrated at birth, and raised to serve the nobles completely. He is also a Keeper, part of a group of Terrispeople dedicated to secretly discovering and preserving fragments of their own culture, alongside any other information about the world before the Lord Ruler. Terrismen have their own set of magical abilities different from allomancy, known as feruchemy. Feruchemy allows a person to store certain physical or mental attributes to be used later. Sazed is also a historian, who has records of everything the Keepers have been able to discover about the world before the Lord Ruler came to power stored magically in his bracelets. It is through his translations that the reader receives information about the prophecy of the Hero of Ages. His plot revolves around discovering the truth of this prophecy and, ultimately, resolving the conflict between Ruin and Preservation, thus saving the world.

Sazed's storyline in the third book ultimately leads to his apotheosis and the revelation that the ancient prophecy of the Hero of Ages in fact refers to him.<sup>12</sup> The process of his apotheosis is dialectical, a fact reinforced when analysed through the lens of Joseph Campbell's work on the monomyth. For most of the second book we

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<sup>12</sup> I will be referring to Sazed using he/him pronouns for this section, because the narrator does the same throughout the series. This is despite the complex, and problematic, portrayal of this character's gender, as will be discussed below.

are led to believe that the prophecy of the Hero of Ages refers to Vin because of one crucial element. The original prophecy was written in the ancient Terris language using gender neutral pronouns to refer to the Hero, leading several main characters to assume it refers to a woman. It is only at the end of the third book that the reader discovers it is in fact Sazed who will fulfil the prophecy: *“The prophecies always used the gender-neutral, he thought. So that they could refer to either a man or a woman, we assumed. Or ... perhaps because they referred to a Hero who wasn’t really either one?”* (Hero 714). In the climax of the series, Sazed takes the two opposed powers of Ruin and Preservation into himself, and discovers that they can, in fact, coexist: *“Ruin and Preservation were dead, and their powers had been joined together. In fact, they belonged together”* (Hero 718). The fact that the two powers ‘belong together’ suggests that they each constitute one part of a single whole, which was artificially split into the Ruin/Preservation opposition.<sup>13</sup> This coexistence is therefore a synthesis. The implication is that Sazed’s ambiguous gender is somehow also a synthesis, and therefore is related to his identity as the Hero, and his ability to combine the seemingly opposed forces of Ruin and

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<sup>13</sup> Ruin and Preservation are in fact two of sixteen Shards of a greater being called Adonalsium. This is a running theme in Sanderson’s Cosmere universe which includes many of his works.

Preservation.<sup>14</sup> This puts Sazed into the position of a male-female god, to use the terminology of Joseph Campbell. Campbell's work is broad and includes examples from a wide range of traditions and myths that are necessarily brief.<sup>15</sup> Sanderson has explicitly said that the symbols Campbell recounts in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (2008) are a central part of his creative process and that "[w]hen one writes a book, one cannot help but include these symbols" (Form, Part Four). The symbolic meaning of the male-female god, as described by Campbell, is telling: "the male and female are to be envisioned ... as time and eternity. That is to say, the two are the same, each is both, and the dual form ... is only an effect of illusion" (Campbell 145). The presence of a male-female god indicates the breakdown of opposites, the revelation that there is really no such thing as opposition, and what seems like a duality is in fact a single whole.

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<sup>14</sup> The portrayal of Sazed as 'gender-neutral' is problematic. Sanderson directly links Sazed to the concept of gender-neutrality by having the prophecy refer to a hero who was, in Sazed's own words, 'neither really male nor female'. Furthermore, to say that Sazed is gender-neutral due to his castration implies a direct link between gender and the ability to reproduce. Further questioning along this line is outside the remit of this research and requires more space than is available here. Regardless, questions about gender are a growing theme in contemporary epic fantasy, and further research into Sanderson's writing would provide valuable insight. This is particularly true as it is not the only time the issue occurs in Sanderson's work, with similar themes presented in *The Stormlight Archive*.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the many critiques of Campbell's work see Robert Segal's *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction* (1990).

This is analogous to the process of dialectics in Bakhtin's theory. Whereas Ruin and Preservation were previously two distinct forces, in the conclusion of the text they are synthesised. Because all distinctions between them disappear, dialogue is impossible and thus monologue becomes central to the resolution of the plot. This monologue was the result of relativism when it came to the good/evil binary. In the case of Ruin and Preservation it is the result of dialectic synthesis. Sazed, by holding both the seemingly opposed powers of Ruin and Preservation at the same time, realises that these powers can be combined into one, Harmony. It is through this realisation that Sazed is finally able to save the world and repair the damage that Ruin has caused. As an example of a dialectical process, with two opposed points being synthesised into a single whole, Bakhtin would also argue that this is monological. While the Ruin/Preservation binary is resolved monologically, it is worth pointing out that the conclusion of *Mistborn* is not inherently monological. Indeed, a key aspect of Sazed's actions at this stage is to encourage a plurality of perspectives by seeding the newly renewed world with all the religions he has saved. Furthermore, Sazed, as Harmony, is still able to interact with others as an independent entity, preserving the possibility of dialogue in the future. This will be a key consideration in chapter two when I discuss the representation of immortality across all three trilogies studied. Nevertheless, it was the opposition between Ruin and Preservation which drove much of the history of the world of *Mistborn*, and the plot of the text. This opposition no longer exists as a result of their synthesis, a monological process which reduces the plurality of opposition. The fact that both the good/evil and ruin/preservation binaries are resolved monologically highlights a concern with monologue as a core theme of the text.

*Mistborn's* relativistic understanding of the good/evil binary sees the opposition collapse into individual monologues with no possibility of dialogue between. The culmination of the Ruin/Preservation binary sees the opposed forces fused into one single monologue. In both cases, dialogue becomes impossible, revealing a monological tendency throughout the *Mistborn* series. What could be considered the quintessentially 'simplistic' binary associated with epic fantasy, the good/evil binary is here used to question the nature of binary opposition itself. 'Good' and 'evil', in *Mistborn*, are ultimately impossible to determine, and much like in the resolution of the Ruin/Preservation binary, the strictly defined separation between these alterities ultimately disappears.

### The Good/Evil Binary in *The Farseer* and *The Broken Earth*

In this final section I will compare the representation of the good/evil binary in Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy*, and Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy. Sanderson's text shows a concern with monologue in its understanding of binary oppositions. While the good/evil binary and the Ruin/Preservation binary are treated differently, they both ultimately result in monologue. The good/evil binary is not as central in either Hobb or Jemisin, however, these texts do deal with the opposition of antagonist and protagonist on a moral level. Each text uses a different starting framework in its representation of the good/evil binary. Whereas in *Mistborn* 'good' and 'evil' were defined in relation to the quality of empathy, in Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* the

relevant quality is loyalty. N.K. Jemisin's series places subjective experience more centrally at its core, meaning a discussion of the good/evil binary cannot be encompassed by a single quality for all characters. Rather, character perspective is itself the binary, with the characters of Essun and Nassun in particular clashing over their respective points of view in *The Broken Earth*. This clash is, nonetheless, dialogically resolved, with each coming to understand the other more fully and thus opening up new possibilities for the resolution of the plot. Jemisin's text is fundamentally dialogical, as will be seen in her inclusion of multiple different perspectives and resistance to both relativism and dialectics. Hobb's representation of the moral binary, on the other hand, initially appears more rooted in dialogue than Sanderson's, but closer analysis shows that it is also resolved monologically. This is most clear when analysing the conflict between protagonist and antagonist, Fitz and his uncle Regal.

Both *Mistborn* and *The Farseer Trilogy* share some similarities in their representation of the good/evil binary. Both series rely on a single attribute to determine a character as either 'good' or 'evil', and understanding this initial separation of the binary is essential before analysing the way the texts resolve the opposition. In contrast to the multiple focalizers of *Mistborn*, Hobb's series is told entirely from the perspective of the protagonist Fitz, specifically an older Fitz relating the stories of his past. The strict first-person perspective would normally result in a highly subjective view of the events of the story, leading to the opposition between 'good' and 'evil' being framed exclusively from Fitz's point of

view. In other words, the first-person perspective could result in a tendency towards monologue. However, further analysis of *The Farseer Trilogy* reveals this is not the case. Initially, Fitz appears to have a very strict sense of morality, seen particularly in one formative experience resulting from his training as an assassin. Early in the text, Fitz's paternal grandfather, King Shrewd, recognises the value of an illegitimate member of the royal family and makes a bargain with Fitz, promising protection in return for loyalty: "You need not eat any man's leavings. I will keep you, and I will keep you well" (*Apprentice* 55). As a result of this promise, Fitz begins his assassin training, while also gaining the privileges of a member of the royal family, albeit an illegitimate member. The enigmatic Chade becomes his secret assassin master, and he makes the bargain even more explicit, telling Fitz: "[Shrewd] feeds you, he clothes you, he sees you are educated. And all he asks in return, for now, is your loyalty. Later he will ask your service." (*Apprentice* 79). Chade comes to care deeply for Fitz, and Fitz sees Chade as something of a father figure. However, this relationship is tested when it is pitted against Fitz's loyalty to King Shrewd. During Chade's tutelage, Fitz is tasked with carrying out several pranks on the common folk of the castle as a way of testing his skills, for example hiding tools or stealing letters. But one prank proves particularly challenging for Fitz. Chade asks Fitz to steal something from the king himself: "Take something simple if it worries you so; it needn't be the crown off his head or the ring from his finger!" (*Apprentice* 97). Chade presents this task as a simple game, but it leads to a direct conflict between Fitz's loyalty to his teacher and his loyalty to the king. Fitz's refusal to carry out this task results in a lengthy period of isolation for him, as Chade angrily ejects him from his chambers and refuses to see him again. Fitz's moral dilemma even has

a physical effect on him, as he falls ill for several days: “I acquired a headache that never ceased, and my stomach stayed so clenched on itself that food held no interest for me” (*Apprentice* 100). While it is eventually revealed that the entire scenario was created by King Shrewd to test Fitz’s loyalty, this sequence shows Fitz’s strong sense of morality and the primary issue around which his morals revolve. This becomes central to the representation of the good/evil binary in the text, when related to the primary antagonist of the series who is defined by his distinct lack of loyalty.

The conflict between Prince Regal, the antagonist, and Fitz revolves entirely around their different perspectives on loyalty. This is the primary conflict related to the good/evil binary in *The Farseer Trilogy*, so understanding these two characters is important for further analysis. Fitz’s strict sense of morality is seen throughout the series, and often means he is forced to sacrifice his own desires for the good of those he is loyal to. In the above example, Fitz has to choose between Chade, his mentor, and the king who protects and provides for him. It is only when he discovers that the original order came from the king himself, that Fitz can resolve that conflict without undermining his sense of morality and can perform the task:

And I rose, but as I did so, I took from his tray a little silver knife, all engraved, that he had been using to cut fruit with. I looked him in the eyes as I did so, and quite openly slipped it up my sleeve. (*Apprentice* 106)

Understanding that the order originally came from Shrewd frees Fitz from this clash of opposed loyalties, allowing him to complete the task without risking either

connection. This focus on loyalty is in direct contrast to Fitz's uncle, Regal, the youngest of Shrewd's children and the primary antagonist of the series. Throughout the three books Fitz must constantly attempt to disrupt Regal's plans to secure power for himself. Regal's defining attributes are ambition and ruthlessness, leading him to betray his older brother, murder the king, and abandon the coast of the Six Duchies, under attack by the mysterious Red Ship Raiders. Whereas loyalty is so important to Fitz it leads him to sacrifice his own desires for the sake of others, Regal has no such restrictions, at one point saying: "Ruthlessness creates its own rules" (*Apprentice* 446). Regal rejects loyalty as an unnecessary restriction. A mark of how essential loyalty is to most characters in the trilogy is seen in Shrewd's inability to conceive of his own son as capable of such terrible acts as Regal commits: "Even having felt Regal's ruthlessness, it is still hard for [Shrewd] to say the Prince threatens his life" (*Royal* 669). Loyalty is therefore the attribute that determines a character as 'good' or 'evil' in *The Farseer Trilogy*, in much the same way empathy was in *Mistborn*.

As Fitz is the protagonist and the only focalizer throughout the text, his is the moral perspective the reader receives throughout the trilogy, and so the reader is encouraged to see loyalty as just as important as Fitz does. This is further supported by the antagonist's defining lack of loyalty. This, coupled with the narrative structure of a first-person perspective, seems to create a strict moral binary that is sharply opposed. However, Fitz's own attitude towards others highlights the importance of dialogue in his understanding of the world. While the first-person

perspective and firm understanding of loyalty as 'good' may appear limiting in terms of dialogic contact, Fitz in fact often presents the views of others with more nuance. At one point, his friend Starling reveals the existence of Fitz's daughter to those who would use her for the throne, against Fitz's wishes. This is the ultimate betrayal as far as Fitz is concerned: "I trusted you! ... I trusted you with my secrets and you have betrayed me" (*Quest* 447). At the time this appears to be a justified reaction in the face of a lack of loyalty. However, later Fitz comes to understand Starling's behaviour in a more nuanced way, telling her "I have come to understand that you do not live by the same rules that I do" (*Quest* 647). Fitz's ability to look beyond his own moral understanding and accept that Starling can live by another set of rules can be linked to his own moral position in relation to the wider society of Hobb's world. While Fitz is shown to hold very strict morals, this morality is not necessarily the socially accepted standard. His moral position is complicated by his possession of the Wit, a magic associated with animals and considered 'evil' by most of the population. Fitz experiences a great deal of internal conflict because of his Wit powers, having been raised to believe in the 'evil' nature of the magic himself. He is warned away from its use early in the series by his caretaker, Burrich, who has repressed his own possession of this magic: "Fitz, this is wrong. It's bad, very bad, what you've been doing with this pup ... It's worse than stealing or lying" (*Apprentice* 42). Burrich presents the issue in clear moral terms, declaring the use of this magic as like, indeed even worse, than an actual crime. Nevertheless, Fitz finds it difficult to fully reject his abilities, and comes to rely on them in support of his activities as an assassin. He says to Burrich "I don't see it the way you do", implying that another perspective is possible (*Apprentice* 411).

Despite Fitz's attempt to justify his alternative perspective, Burrich rejects him because of his continued use of the Wit. They do, however, eventually come to an accord with Fitz arguing: "I know you will never approve ... But it is not something I can choose, it is what I am" (*Royal* 555). Chade, who later learns of Fitz's ability, has an even more pragmatic attitude, and argues with Burrich over the morality of using the Wit: "Perhaps my trade does not allow me so many niceties of conscience as yours" (*Quest* 19). Fitz's role as an assassin, and practitioner of a forbidden magic, leads to a more nuanced understanding of the moral binary. Fitz is able to accept that his perspective is not the only possibility, and even engages in dialogue between opposed perspectives. For example, Burrich is ultimately able to overlook Fitz's use of the Wit, and even make use of it himself to save Fitz's life. However, the differences between them are not erased. Burrich continues to warn Fitz of the influence of the Wit, which he fears will lead to Fitz losing his humanity, while simultaneously accepting that Fitz's competing perspective may never change: "I think you decide as an animal would ... You stopped living as a wolf because I forced you to. Now I must leave you alone, for you to find out if you want to live as a wolf or a man" (*Quest* 51). This example highlights that, while Burrich and Fitz accept their mutual differences, these differences are not erased. Nevertheless, they continue to engage in dialogue with each other over their alternate views of the Wit, and Burrich is finally able to allow Fitz to make his own decisions on the matter. This resists the monological tendency to erase difference and subjectivity. Even when Fitz's actions would be viewed negatively by the larger population, or those opposed to his goals, the text does not offer a complete relativisation of the

moral binary as seen in *Mistborn*. This remains the case even after Fitz comes to understand the motives of his enemy through another form of magic, the Skill.

The final confrontation between Fitz and Regal comes at the end of the trilogy, and is facilitated by Fitz's use of the Skill, the other kind of magic he possesses. Where the Wit is used to communicate with animals and is considered 'evil', the Skill can allow telepathic communication between humans, among a variety of other abilities. Both magics are concerned with communication, but the Skill provides the clearest example of this.<sup>16</sup> Having been outlawed and hunted by Regal's forces throughout the third and final book, near the end of the series Fitz uses the Skill to gain access to Regal's mind. Through this use of the Skill, Fitz comes to understand Regal intimately, and specifically his enemy's attitude toward his half-brothers, called Verity and Chivalry, and those around him:

"Verity and Chivalry, always together, always older, always bigger. Always thinking they were better, even though he came of finer blood than they ... His mother had warned him of their jealousy of him. His mother had bid him be careful, and more than careful. They would kill him if they could, they would, they would ... There was only one way to be safe, only one way."  
*(Quest 824)*

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the relation between Hobb's magic system and dialogue see chapter two.

Previously, Regal's defining attribute was his lack of loyalty, in contrast to Fitz's emphasis on loyalty. King Shrewd dies, in part, because he struggles to believe that his own son could plan his murder. However, the above quote shows that this lack of loyalty is a result of his own inability to trust others. Regal's actions stem from an understanding that others must be as jealous and ruthless as he is. The reader knows, through Fitz's perspective, that Verity has no secret plans to kill Regal. Therefore, Regal's 'evil' and lack of loyalty in fact arise from an inability to see and accept any alternate perspectives. His own attitude to others is purely monological, in that he assumes everyone must hold the same values he does. In contrast, this scene highlights Fitz's dialogical understanding of Regal. He learns about Regal's perspective, even if he himself is fundamentally opposed to it. The opposition between Regal and Fitz, which can be associated with the good/evil binary in the text, is in fact the opposition between dialogue and monologue.

While this final scene between Regal and Fitz is itself an example of dialogue, it is nonetheless resolved with a monologue. At the same time that Fitz gains a dialogical understanding of Regal's perspective, he also learns the source of his power over others. The Skill is the name of another magic in *The Farseer Trilogy*. It is revealed that the many Skill-users Regal sends against Fitz and Verity were forced to be loyal to him through the Skill. At this point, Fitz is in a position to enact his revenge on Regal and kill him as he had earlier sworn to do, enabled by his own use of the Skill. His new understanding of Regal, however, creates a different possibility. Inspired by the information he found through their contact, Fitz allows Regal to live,

albeit with a magically created loyalty to the true heir of the Six Duchies: “While Regal lived, Queen Kettricken and her child would have no more loyal subject” (*Quest* 831). Fitz’s understanding of Regal’s motives does not redetermine him in Fitz’s eyes. Rather, Fitz’s and Regal’s opinions about the nature of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are held as distinct. However, it cannot be considered dialogue in the strictest sense. While Fitz does learn more about Regal’s perspective, this does not go both ways, and Regal learns nothing of Fitz. In fact, Fitz forces his own perspective on Regal when he orders his new loyalty to the true heir, a distinctly monological conclusion. The emphasis on seeing an alternate perspective while maintaining one’s own is more dialogical than *Mistborn’s* conclusion, but the particular representation of the good/evil binary is ultimately monologically resolved in *The Farseer Trilogy*. Hobb’s series resolves the central good/evil opposition, as represented by Fitz and Regal, monologically despite the seeming dialogicality of the rest of the text. While some elements appear to be more dialogical than Sanderson’s series, both *Mistborn* and *The Farseer Trilogy* ultimately put monologue at the core of the resolution of the moral binary, and the conclusion of their respective plots. In *Mistborn* this binary was resolved through relativisation, essentially making any difference between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ meaningless, as any interaction between perspectives is denied. In contrast, in *The Farseer Trilogy* the reader does see interaction between perspectives, but ultimately the opposition sees Fitz’s ‘good’ perspective enforced on Regal’s previously ‘evil’ understanding of the world. This denies a central tenet of dialogue which is the importance of plurality. By essentially erasing Regal’s alternate perspective, Fitz’s engages in a monological reduction of alterity.

N.K. Jemisin's series, on the other hand, is more strictly dialogical in its representation of the moral binary than either Sanderson or Hobb's trilogies. *The Broken Earth* trilogy revolves around Essun's attempt to find and rescue her daughter Nassun at the beginning of a catastrophic ecological event known as a 'fifth season'. Essun and Nassun are both orogenes, people capable of sensing and manipulating seismic activity. Orogenes face extreme discrimination as they are feared for their destructive potential. Having escaped the brutal and oppressive environment of the Fulcrum, the organization dedicated to housing and controlling orogenes, Essun has begun a new life living in secret. But when the fifth season begins and her husband discovers their children are orogenes, he kills their son and kidnaps Nassun in an effort to 'cure' her of her abilities. The story is told primarily in the second person from Essun's perspective, with occasional chapters focalised through Nassun. While the level of dehumanisation experienced by orogenes provides an interesting resonance with *Mistborn* and the issue of empathy, in analysing this text I am more interested in the way character interaction and perspective can influence the representation of the good/evil binary. The conflict between mother and daughter is the central example of dialogue in the series, and their respective views regarding a particular character, Schaffa, revolve around the good/evil binary. The differences in the way each character sees Schaffa is only one example of the moral binary in *The Broken Earth*, however. The conflict between Essun and Nassun reflects a larger conflict between life and the Earth itself, which is eventually revealed to be sentient. The ecological disasters that have brought humanity close to extinction are the result of the Earth's attempt to win what it

perceives as a war. This war has continued for so long that most of humanity has forgotten about it completely, but nevertheless it is partially remembered through the repeated phrase “Evil Earth”, that occurs throughout the text (*Fifth* 114). The resolution of this conflict occurs at the same time as, and in conjunction with, the resolution between Nassun and Essun. Both resolutions are inherently linked and are shown to be fundamentally dialogical.

For most characters the ‘Evil Earth’ is a kind of fairy tale, and it is not until later in the series that it is revealed to be truly sentient and hostile to humanity. A key element of the conflict between the Earth and humanity is culpability, and the resolution of this conflict relies on understanding from both sides. The hostility is due to an ancient wrong humanity committed, which resulted in the moon, the Earth’s ‘child’, being lost. This occurred so long ago that almost all of humanity has forgotten the details of this event. Nevertheless, the Earth pursues a long campaign against what it perceives as those responsible for its loss. This campaign manifests in the reoccurring seismic disasters that occur in this world, begun in response to humanity’s attempt to control the magical energy of the Earth itself: “The world, for [humanity] and any possible creature that might ever evolve in the future to hurt the Earth, would end. The Earth itself would be fine, however” (*Stone* 339). It is significant that the Earth’s goals are essentially monological. By destroying all life and preventing the evolution of anything that has the potential to harm it, the Earth is essentially denying any possibility of dialogue, erasing all alternative points of view. Essun’s plan, alternatively, can be seen as a way of preserving dialogue. While

her personal goal is to reunite with her daughter, Essun is brought into this conflict and charged with restoring the moon, so that negotiations can continue: "Give Father Earth back his lost child and perhaps his wrath will be appeased ... Peaceful coexistence by any means necessary" (*Obelisk* 172). A crucial element of Essun agreeing to this plan is in her understanding of both sides. She is even able to connect personally to the Earth through the shared experience of losing a child:

This is what you need to understand. "What does the Earth want?"

Alabaster's gaze is heavy, heavy. "What does any living thing want, facing an enemy so cruel that it stole away a child?"

Your jaw tightens. *Vengeance*. (*Obelisk* 207)

While the Earth is considered 'evil' by most of the population, so too are orogenes, and it is in their shared experiences that Essun is able to understand the Earth's perspective. However, the reader does not receive any indication that this sharing of perspectives occurs on both sides, as the Earth's point of view is never directly related. Much like Fitz and Regal's interaction, this could make the dialogue one-sided. However, the text does show the Earth engaging in dialogue and it is through mutual understanding that the conflict is ultimately resolved: "We spell out the terms in placatory fluxes of reverberation ... We have given it back the Moon, and thrown the obelisks in as a surety of good faith. But in exchange, the Seasons must cease" (*Stone* 392). This results in the survival of humanity and an end to the Earth's hostility, seen in its response to the above offer: "There is a period of stillness ... *Agreed*" (*Stone* 392). Thus, the conflict is not only resolved dialogically, through greater understanding on both sides and the preservation of plurality, but it is also

resolved through dialogue. It is important to note that while peace is achieved, the good/evil binary has not been totally collapsed: “The Earth – for the sake of good relations I will no longer call it Evil” (*Stone* 396). Note that the character stresses they will not call the Earth ‘Evil’ for ‘good relations’, but the term ‘evil’ has not changed. While the two sides have developed a greater understanding, as evidenced in the agreement they reach, they have not dialectically synthesised their perspectives, nor has their opposition become relative. The central conflict of the narrative is resolved through a negotiation, a dialogue, in which the subjectivity of each side is acknowledged. This trend is also seen in the climax of the series: the resolution of the conflict between Nassun and Essun.

While the conflict between Father Earth and humanity is central to the plot of *The Broken Earth* trilogy, in many ways it is secondary to the more personal story of Essun’s relationship with Nassun. Over the course of the three books the reader learns that their relationship is far from ideal, with Essun often behaving very harshly towards Nassun in regard to her orogenic abilities. The narrative structure of the text aids in the representation of their perspectives. The second-person narration highlights Essun’s presence within the text, while at the same time helping to immerse the reader in her perspective.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Nassun’s perspective is also present within the text. While there are differences in their individual perspectives, unlike the relativism seen in Sanderson’s series, dialogue

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<sup>17</sup> For more on immersion and second-person narration see chapter three.

remains possible. This primarily revolves around their differing perspectives on a particular character, Schaffa, whom Essun sees as 'evil' and Nassun sees as 'good'. Schaffa is a guardian, charged with keeping orogenes controlled by any means necessary. He was the one who found Essun when she was a girl and brought her from her family to the Fulcrum. Their relationship is highly abusive, with Schaffa stressing that his violence towards her is due to his love, and necessary for her protection. This highly abusive relationship leaves Essun with a great deal of trauma, even after she eventually escapes the Fulcrum and Schaffa. Once she has children of her own, and realises they are orogenes, she must train them to control their abilities or risk them being caught and sent to the Fulcrum as she once was, leading her to commit the same kind of violence that was once done to her. Essun sees this as essential, and a sign of her love for her children. The reader understands all this from Essun's perspective, and it is not until later in the series that they learn how this appeared to Nassun: "*for Earth's sake can't you do anything right, stop crying, now do it again.* Endless commands. Endless displeasure. Occasionally the slap of ice in threat, the slap of a hand" (*Obelisk 77-78*). The reader is therefore offered two completely different perspectives on the same behaviour. Likewise, they are offered two different perspectives on Schaffa. While Essun sees him as a symbol of all the trauma she has suffered in the past, once Nassun meets him she forms a very different relationship: "He is the man who soothed her when she was afraid, tucked her into bed at night" (*Stone 373*). These alternate impressions of a single character highlight the essential opposition between Nassun and Essun's perspectives which appears initially insurmountable.

The idea that their two perspectives on Schaffa can be so completely opposed would seem to deny any possibility of dialogue. Indeed, Nassun explicitly believes this to be the case, as the narrator relates to Essun: “[Nassun] intuits the thing that you have, until now, denied: That it is hopeless. That there can be no relationship, no trust between you and her” (*Stone* 373). In this pivotal scene, Nassun attempts to sacrifice herself to save Schaffa, while Essun wishes to restore the moon and gain humanity another chance. Essun understands how important Schaffa is to Nassun: “She won’t hear you until she’s helped ... Schaffa ... Okay. ‘L-let me help you!’” (*Stone* 375). Essun’s ability to understand and recognise Nassun’s perspective opens up a new possibility. This offer to save Schaffa is a dramatic departure from Essun’s prior feelings, but Schaffa is not redeemed as far as Essun is concerned. While Essun’s understanding of ‘evil’, represented by her feelings towards Schaffa, remains unchanged, she is still able to engage in dialogue with Nassun’s perspective, and learns that she loves her daughter more than she hates Schaffa. The good/evil binary is intact, and dialogue is possible between these two separate terms. However, Essun hesitates when she realises that the attempt will kill Nassun: “you can’t watch another of your children die” (*Stone* 385). Nassun, interprets this hesitation as a refusal, and so rejects her mother’s aid. It is not until Nassun understands that her mother does care deeply for her that she can accept Essun’s intentions and complete her goal of restoring the moon: “for some reason that she does not think she’ll ever understand ... even as [Essun] died, [she was] reaching for the Moon. And for her” (*Stone* 387). Nassun, therefore, has to accept her mother’s alternative perspective and life history. By finally coming to understand how much Essun cared for her, Nassun is able to trust in her mother’s plan.

In *Mistborn*, relativism saw the good/evil binary collapse into multiple monologues with no possibility of contact between them, and the Ruin/Preservation binary was synthesised into a single, all-encompassing monologue. In *The Broken Earth*, two individual perspectives come into contact, and through that contact they learn more about each other and themselves. This is neither a synthesis, nor a total collapse into relativism. Rather, this is an example of Bakhtin's dialogue in which two perspectives come together and new possibilities are created, with "neither negation nor assimilation" (Peeren 100). Fitz's interaction with Regal could be seen as a form of dialogue, but it negates Regal's perspective, making dialogue impossible. *The Broken Earth*, then, offers the fullest example of dialogue interacting with the good/evil binary. Jemisin's text offers the reader a full understanding of both sides of the conflict and illustrates how mutual understanding can create new possibilities for resolution. *Mistborn* instead highlights the difficulty in determining any one character's moral determination when that character can always see their own actions as 'good'. The presence of a dialectic synthesis in the resolution of the main plot offers a hint to the centrality of monologue in *Mistborn*. Where *The Broken Earth* showed how meaning can adapt through dialogue, *Mistborn's* relativism denies any chance of true dialogue taking place. While there are significant differences in the way these texts portray the resolution of the good/evil binary, they all illustrate a more complex relationship between the two qualifications than the charge of 'simplicity' can account for.



## Chapter Two – Symbolic and Animal Selves in Robin Hobb’s *The Farseer Trilogy*: Immortality as Monologue

### Introduction

Robin Hobb is the pen name of Megan Ogden, who has also written as Megan Lindholm. While her previous novels achieved some critical acclaim, she first gained widespread commercial success with *The Farseer Trilogy* (1995-1997), the first novels written under this pen name (Flood). The trilogy is the first instalment in Hobb’s *Realm of the Elderlings*, a shared setting that includes sixteen novels at the time of writing, all of which have reached wide commercial success and popularity. Previous academic work on *The Farseer Trilogy* has largely focused on the representation of queerness in the text, as well as the way the text subverts the gender binary.<sup>18</sup> My analysis will focus on a different binary, one which is more closely related to the issue of dialogue versus monologue. This chapter is concerned with the opposition between the Skill and the Wit in Hobb’s series, as understood through the work of Ernest Becker. The two magics found in *The Farseer Trilogy*, the Skill and the Wit, both magically facilitate communication through telepathy. The Skill allows human beings to connect telepathically, whereas the Wit allows contact between humans and animals. As they are primarily magics of communication, both

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, see Lenise Prater’s “Queering Magic” (2016) and Peter Melville’s “Queerness and Homophobia in Robin Hobb’s Farseer Trilogies” (2018).

the Wit and the Skill can be linked closely to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue. Much of the tension in *The Farseer Trilogy* results from the fact that Fitz, the protagonist, possesses both of the two opposed forms of magic in Hobb's world. The Skill is the magic of the royal family, and while it is not generally well understood by the wider population, it is accepted in society. On the other hand, the Wit is treated with suspicion and considered evil by most. Anyone suspected of using the Wit is expected to be ritually executed, as justified retribution for their use of evil magic. However, this association between the Wit and 'evil' is complicated early on in the series, primarily through Fitz's continued use of this magic offering a more nuanced perspective to the view of the wider society of Hobb's world. Nevertheless, the sense that they are fundamentally opposed forms of magic is maintained throughout most of the series, before finally being questioned in the conclusion.

In what follows, I explain the connection between Hobb's magics and the animal and symbolic selves proposed in the work of Ernest Becker. I argue that the opposition between the Skill and the Wit follows the conflict between the two sides of the Self suggested by Becker. Becker's animal and symbolic selves are opposed due to the inevitability of death, and as such, the conflict between them can never be resolved. However, in Hobb's trilogy, immortality is possible, which allows these two elements of the human Self to come together. This immortality is achieved through the monological fusion of the Wit and the Skill. At the end of this chapter, I compare the representation of immortality in the other two texts studied. I argue

that, while *The Farseer* and *Mistborn* trilogies represent immortality monologically, *The Broken Earth* illustrates a dialogical form of immortality.

*The Farseer Trilogy* follows FitzChivalry Farseer, known throughout as Fitz, the illegitimate son of Prince Chivalry who is next in line for the throne of the kingdom of the Six Duchies. The trilogy is narrated from the perspective of an older Fitz, who reflects on the events of his life. In Hobb's world, members of the nobility are named for the qualities they are expected to possess, and so Prince Chivalry abdicates after Fitz's existence is made public. Chivalry retires from the court, never having seen Fitz in person, and as a result Fitz is abandoned to the machinations of the court. Chivalry's younger brother, Verity, becomes king-in-waiting, the next in line for the throne. Fitz's identity as an illegitimate member of the royal household is seen as a threat by many, particularly the youngest prince, Regal. But Fitz's grandfather, King Shrewd, protects and provides for Fitz, seeing him as a useful tool. On the king's orders, Fitz begins to learn the "diplomacy of the knife", training to become an assassin for the royal family (*Apprentice* 54). During this time, the kingdom of the Six Duchies is in crisis due to constant raids from the mysterious Red Ship Raiders, who originate from the Out Islands off the coast. While raids were common in the past, this new group seem to operate differently. The Red Ship Raiders can somehow affect the hostages they take. These hostages are eventually returned. However, they are now selfish and often violent versions of their former selves, and have seemingly forgotten all social norms and connections to their loved ones. This process is called Forging, after the first town in which the Raiders'

victims, called Forged ones, first appear. The Forged ones and the Raiders steadily become greater threats to the survival of the Six Duchies throughout the series. Nevertheless, the central antagonist of the trilogy is Regal, who uses the crisis to gain power for himself, eventually betraying his older brother and claiming the throne.

In the first book, Fitz trains in the abilities he will require for his role as an assassin and begins training in the magic called the Skill. It is revealed early on that Fitz is also able to use the Wit, a fact which he must keep secret due to the general view that this magic is evil. The Skill allows Fitz to communicate telepathically with other humans, and even manipulate their perception of the world. On the other hand, the Wit connects Fitz to other animal beings, and is primarily used to allow him to communicate with his Wit-partners. Fitz connects with a number of animals in this way, but his most lasting and impactful partnership is with a wolf called Nigteyes. In order to secure supplies to reinforce the fleet of the Six Duchies, it is decided that Verity should marry the princess of the Mountain Kingdom, Kettricken. Fitz foils Regal's plan to have Verity killed during the ceremony, making him a target for Regal's future schemes. In the second book, Fitz and Verity work together against the Raiders. Fitz becomes increasingly loyal to Verity over the course of the second book, and they create a strong connection to each other through the Skill. However, due to Regal's interference their efforts against the Raiders are unsuccessful, and Verity decides the only hope is to enlist the aid of the Elderlings, legendary beings said to be sworn to aid the Six Duchies in times of need. He leaves on a quest to find

them, leaving Fitz behind to watch over Kettricken and the kingdom. Verity goes missing on his quest to find the Elderlings and is declared dead, leading to Regal taking the throne and framing Fitz for the death of King Shrewd. In the third and final book, after faking his death Fitz goes on his own quest to find Verity, accompanied by Kettricken and several other allies, in order to prevent the destruction of the Six Duchies and restore the rightful ruler to the throne. On finding Verity, they learn of his attempt to bring the Elderlings to the aid of the kingdom by becoming one himself. In order to do this, he must carve a dragon out of magical stone and animate it by sacrificing his whole being, including emotions and memories, as well as his physical body, to the dragon. This process ultimately reveals the innate connection the seemingly opposed Skill and Wit magics share when they are brought together in the creation of the dragon, making Verity immortal, and saving the Six Duchies from destruction. However, in Hobb's world the attainment of immortality results in a corresponding loss of identity. Verity's sacrifice in becoming immortal will be central to my argument concerning the collapse of the Skill/Wit binary.

Below I first analyse the dialogic nature of the two magics arising from their fundamental operation to facilitate communication. Further analysis of the magics will show, however, that they also carry the possibility of monologue. Having established that monologue and dialogue are of central concern to the series, I then briefly outline Becker's theory, before showing how it connects to the opposition between the Wit and the Skill. While the two magics are not directly analogous to

the symbolic and animal selves, the opposition between them does fall along the same lines as Becker's theory. The resolution of the Skill/Wit and symbolic/animal binaries is a key step in the conclusion of the text, which is represented by the achievement of immortality. The opposition between the magics is ultimately resolved monologically, but the concern that Hobb's text shows with dialogue profoundly impacts the representation of this resolution. Thus, while what I consider a monological conclusion is related to the attainment of immortality and the salvation of the Six Duchies, it is nonetheless considered a tragic ending in the text. This tragedy is the result of the inherent loss of plurality seen in the monological resolution of the central binary opposition of the text. Connecting this opposition to the theory of Ernest Becker is the key to understanding how that opposition is ultimately resolved. Finally, I analyse the particular representation of immortality found in the other two texts studied. This comparison will highlight the way in which the texts' varying levels of concern with dialogue change their representations of immortality.

### *Monologue and Dialogue Through the Wit and the Skill*

The Skill and the Wit are opposed almost from the very beginning of Hobb's trilogy. Despite this opposition, both magics operate in similar ways. In essence, they both allow telepathic communication, between humans in the case of the Skill, and between humans and animals in the case of the Wit. However, while the Skill and the Wit are often shown to facilitate dialogue, they also carry the possibility of

monologue. This can be seen in key moments throughout the text, and most importantly in the conclusion of the series. Understanding these two magics in relation to the work of Bakhtin is a central element of my analysis of the conclusion of the series.

The dialogical nature of the two magics has been addressed by other scholarship on Hobb, although never in connection with the work of Bakhtin. In the light of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, this other scholarship takes on a particular relevance to the current study. Lenise Prater writes that the Wit and the Skill offer a "challenge to gendered and heteronormative representation of identity" (22). Prater argues that the Wit and the Skill destabilise the traditional gendered understanding of the "unified masculine subject" by allowing the possibility of a "plural or integrated mode of being" that disrupts heteronormative gender dynamics (22-23). This integrated mode of being "recognises the other's differences instead of being in opposition to it" (Prater 23). The importance of recognising difference that Prater highlights follows Bakhtin's thoughts on dialogue and also coincides with Bakhtin's theories on the development of the Self. According to Bakhtin, "[t]he most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness" (*Problems* 287). In other words, the creation of a Self is reliant on its connection with Others. This contact can be considered a form of dialogue, in which two consciousnesses, or voices, come into contact while maintaining the essential differences between the two. There is, however, a danger to this. As Prater notes, the contact facilitated by the two magics

is “not always represented positively” (27). There is also the possibility for the magics to “deprive a subject of their agency” (Prater 26). For example, the Skill is often used to influence the minds of others, or even to issue commands the subject finds are impossible to disobey. These are also examples of the monologic potential of the magic, as they are used to force or change a perspective rather than to facilitate a mutually enriching dialogue. Prater’s work identifies both dialogue and monologue in the function of Hobb’s two magics, without using the terminology provided by Bakhtin. Below I highlight the ways in which the Skill and the Wit interact with Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogue and monologue, before discussing their opposition and eventual monological resolution.

The primary operation of the Wit and the Skill is to facilitate communication. By creating a magic system that is fundamentally concerned with telepathic communication, Hobb places the interaction between alternative consciousnesses at the centre of the text. This concern with communication is also seen in the interactions between characters themselves, as a great deal of the plot is concerned with the inability to communicate and what happens when communication fails. This is most prominently seen in Fitz’s interactions with Molly, his love interest throughout the trilogy, who is endangered by Fitz’s enemies and activities as an assassin. Fitz cannot tell Molly the truth of his identity and so most of their interactions revolve around what Fitz does not, or cannot, say: “I told myself that I clenched my lips shut because it was the nobler thing to do, to keep these secrets to myself was better than to let the truth destroy her” (*Royal* 280). These lies

eventually end their relationship: “‘Lies,’ she said, more to herself than me. ‘Lies, all lies ... I was so stupid. If a man hits you once, he’ll hit you again, they say. And the same is true for lying’” (*Royal* 630). Fitz fakes his death at the end of the second book. Believing that Fitz is truly dead, Molly declares “his lies never sounded like love to me”, putting an end to their relationship (*Quest* 786). While Fitz intends to return to her after he completes his quest to find Verity, Molly’s belief that he is dead leads her to move on with her life. Fitz is later reminded that his relationship with Molly was not perfect and that there was “fully as many quarrels and tears” as there was “love-making and kisses” (*Quest* 773). These conflicts are always the result of Fitz’s conflicting loyalties and need to lie about his activities. This erodes Molly’s trust in him to the point that when he does finally reveal his role as an assassin, she cannot believe him (*Royal* 630). This relationship could be seen as doomed from the very beginning, as Fitz begins lying from the first moment he meets Molly. When he spends time with her and the other children of the town, he writes: “They probably thought me an errand boy, for the keep had many of those, only slightly older than I” (*Apprentice* 36). Fitz values his time with her precisely because she does not know who he is. Their relationship, therefore, begins and ends with a lack of communication. They first come to care for each other with Fitz lying about his identity, and their relationship ends when Molly believes the lie of his death.

A similar example of the importance of communication in the trilogy can be seen in Fitz’s relationship with Burrich, his guardian. Burrich is tasked with taking care of

Fitz after he is abandoned by his maternal family and his father, the Prince, abdicates. As such, Burrich is an extremely important figure in Fitz's life, although their relationship is often turbulent. Fitz continues to use the Wit even after Burrich tries to force him to stop, due to the magic being considered taboo. This culminates at one point with Burrich cutting Fitz out of his life, refusing to speak with him any more than is necessary: "Burrich had meant what he said. He had nothing more to do with me. I was no longer welcome down at the stables" (*Apprentice* 335). In this example, Fitz's inability to communicate is a punishment enacted by Burrich, due to his continued refusal to engage with Fitz. As a result, no dialogue can take place between their opposed perspectives on the Wit, leading to their mutual isolation from each other. A final example of the centrality of communication can be seen in Fitz's unstable ability with the Skill. Fitz's Skill abilities are made unreliable due to repeated attacks by his enemies. After resisting torture and attempts to magically invade his mind, Fitz asks himself "[d]id they know they had succeeded at un-Skilling me?", revealing the extent of the damage done to his magical ability (*Quest* 67). Fitz eventually does regain some ability to use the Skill, but throughout the series the temperamental nature of his use of this magic often restricts his ability to contact others telepathically and drives much of the plot. For instance, when Prince Verity is declared dead after beginning his quest to find the Elderlings, Fitz is unable to follow through with Burrich's suggestion to contact him. "But can't you Skill out to him, now that things are calm? Renew the link?" asks Burrich, to which Fitz replies "No. I can't. I don't have the Skill that way" (*Royal* 577). Fitz's inability to reliably contact Verity is the cause of the main conflict in the second book, eventually resulting in the death of King Shrewd and Fitz's torture and execution at the hands

of Regal. Thus, communication, and the inability to communicate, is central to the plot of the entire trilogy.

While there are other abilities associated with both magics, the Wit and the Skill's central relationship to communication is made clear throughout the trilogy, particularly in the case of the Skill. In the first book, a group of Skill-users are trained, and Prince Verity posts them in watchtowers along the coastline where their primary purpose is to facilitate contact between Verity and the forces under his command. One character explains this plan to Fitz, saying: "[Verity] uses them to convey warnings to his soldiers, and to receive from them sightings of ships" (*Apprentice* 339). The link between the Skill and communication is made explicit by Verity, who explains to Fitz that "[t]he Skill is like language ... I need not shout at you to let you know what I want. I can ask politely, or hint, or let you know my wish with a nod and a smile" (*Apprentice* 348). The Wit is similarly closely related to communication. Communication takes different forms for each magic. For example, the Wit is generally tied to a certain kind of animal for each person and this communication is not exactly a form of telepathic speech. As Fitz explains, the Wit "goes beyond feelings and it's never really words" (*Quest* 543). Nevertheless, within the text, communication with the Wit is represented by italics. The Skill is normally also represented through italics, but this is not always the case. In the following excerpt, Verity questions Fitz after he begins waiting on the prince during his time focusing on the Skill:

"And blankets and cushions, and pots of sweet flowers?"

“My own doing, my prince. No man should live in such a desert as this.” And in that moment, I realised we were not speaking aloud, and sat bolt upright and looked at him. (*Apprentice* 347)

In this passage, Fitz uses the Skill to converse with Verity without realising. The fact that italics are not used here shows how close the Skill can be to regular speech, to the point that Fitz is sometimes unable to distinguish between the magic and a more mundane conversation. However, while the Skill can be used as a form of straightforward communication, this is considered one of its minor uses, as seen in Verity’s reaction to the poorly trained Skill-users intended to help him fight the Raiders: “they are trained, as monkeys and parrots are taught to mimic men, with no understanding of what they do” (*Apprentice* 348). This example shows that there is a hierarchy in the use of the Skill, with the ‘parrotting’ of information at the lower end of this scale. It is eventually revealed that Skill-users loyal to the crown would traditionally be grouped into ‘coteries’. When working together, these coteries could become more powerful than the sum of their parts. Verity is particularly dismissive of the Skill-users intended to help him, saying: “They are like horses and bullocks and donkeys, all harnessed together. Not a true coterie at all. They lack the singleness of mind” (*Apprentice* 352). Verity repeatedly links these Skill-users to trained animals, implying that there is more to the Skill than the simple repetition of information. Nevertheless, both the repetition of information and the ‘higher’ uses of the Skill show that the magic is used to facilitate the interaction between independent identities.

A key element of dialogue, according to Bakhtin, is in the preservation of the essential difference between the voices involved, or what could be called consciousnesses in the case of the Wit or the Skill. The Skill is shown to facilitate this kind of interaction, bringing Fitz into direct contact with other perspectives while preserving the individuality of all involved. At the beginning of *Royal Assassin*, Fitz is left to recover after the events of the first book, following a near-fatal poisoning, beating, and attempted drowning by Regal. He is still young, but his long recuperation leaves him feeling frustrated, and he suffers seizures almost every time he exerts himself. Fitz later remembers this experience, writing: "At fifteen years old, an age when most were coming into their full strength, I could no longer trust my body to perform the simplest task" (*Royal* 8). This quote foreshadows Fitz's bitterness over what he sees as his failing body. Fitz further laments: "I should not mind an old man's body if the years had earned it for me. But I can't go on like this" (*Royal* 9). He sees his body as broken and compares his experience to growing old before his time. At this point Fitz accidentally uses the Skill to contact his grandfather, King Shrewd, which allows him to compare his own condition with actual old age: "For a moment I looked down at my withered hand, at the royal signet ring that clung to a bony finger behind a swollen knuckle" (*Royal* 23). Rather than simple communication, this more advanced use of the Skill allows Fitz to, in a sense, become King Shrewd. This can be seen in the way the narrative perspective shifts from one body to another, while remaining in Fitz's voice. This experience allows Fitz to feel what it would be like to exist in the body of his grandfather, contrasted with his own body during a time of recovery. He reflects: "This is what it really feels like to be old. Not sick, where one might get better. Old. When each day

can only be more difficult, each month is another burden to the body" (*Royal* 32). When he returns to his own body, Fitz's writes: "I moved slowly, cautiously, as I rose. Like an old man? No. Like a young man whose health was still mending. I knew the difference now" (*Royal* 35). Thus, Fitz's experience allows him to understand Shrewd's condition, and his own, more clearly. His new perspective is illustrative of the dialogic power of the Skill. It is through the interaction between different perspectives that Fitz gains a greater understanding of his own and Shrewd's positions: he now knows the difference between his long recuperation and his grandfather's slow decline.

As Gary Morson and Caryl Emmerson argue in *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of Prosaics* (1990), while dialogue can be defined as the interaction with alterity, the goal of that interaction is not to disrupt or erase difference, but rather for each side to gain greater understanding about itself and the other, while maintaining the distinction between the two (55). In this interaction, while the two identities of Fitz and Shrewd come into contact, plurality is maintained. Fitz's interaction with Shrewd does not fully change his perspective; he is still sick, and he still wishes it were otherwise. After his interaction with Shrewd and on his journey back to the Six Duchies, he remains frustrated with his slow recovery and continued seizures. At one point, he observes that "[i]t was only the second time [Burrich] had to steady me in the last hour or so. One of my better evenings, I told myself bitterly" (*Royal* 39). Nevertheless, he does now understand that he will eventually recover, and that there is still a great deal for him to do in his young life, creating new possibilities

through the interaction between alternate perspectives. This is not a simple exchange of words, but a profound understanding of alterity which, for Fitz, allows him to better understand both himself and Shrewd.

The Wit similarly offers the possibility of interacting with an alterity in a process that goes beyond simple communication, and which facilitates a dialogic contact with another identity. Primarily used by Fitz to communicate with Nigteyes, a wolf he meets and bonds with in the second book, the Wit is also a kind of 'sixth sense'. This magic can be used to sense the life around Fitz, tapping him into a network of connections between living beings. The Wit has a profound impact on the user, and the connection it facilitates between a human and an animal appears to influence both parties. At one point Fitz meets a more experienced user of the Wit who describes it in the following way:

You are not a man as ordinary men are. They think they have a right to all beasts; to hunt them and eat them, or to subjugate them and rule their lives. You know you have no such right to mastery ... You have a deeper sense of yourself in the world. You believe you have a right, not to rule it, but to be part of it. (*Quest 147*)

Fitz's ability to communicate with animals changes his perspective of himself in the world. As with true dialogue, the interaction between Fitz and Nigteyes impacts their understanding of both themselves and each other, while their individuality is maintained. This can be seen in the essential difference in how they think, as when Nigteyes is able to see the solution to a puzzle when Fitz is not. Fitz further clarifies

the essential difference between him and Nighteyes saying “if a thing intrigues [Nighteyes], he thinks on it, in his own way. As a wolf, usually, but sometimes almost as anyone might” (*Quest* 542). Fitz stresses that he and Nighteyes are different identities, who see things independently. Thus, while their connection fundamentally impacts the way they exist in the world, one of the central benefits of that connection is their ability to access an alternate perspective.

The above are a few examples of dialogic contact through Hobb’s magic system. However, there is also a monological tendency that runs through the series. This monological tendency, which I will explain below, reveals that the Skill and the Wit have the potential to create both dialogue and monologue. The monological potential of Hobb’s two magics can be seen throughout the series alongside their dialogical uses. Verity is seen to use the Skill on multiple occasions throughout the text, mostly in an effort to defend the Six Duchies from the Red Ship Raiders. The text describes how “[Verity] would have to Skill for hours every day, keeping watch for Raiders off our coast, and using tricks of his mind to set them astray” (*Royal* 252). These ‘tricks of the mind’ are explained in greater detail by Verity himself, who tells Fitz of how he pushes the Raiders off course: “Convince them they’ve taken a sighting already and their course is true when really they are steering into a cross-current. Convince them they’ve passed a point they haven’t sighted yet” (*Apprentice* 349). In this particular example, Verity is able to disrupt an alternate perspective for his own gain, which essentially amounts to commanding another person’s perspective. Here the Skill is used to “violate the interiority of the other”

rather than “generating an understanding of otherness” (Prater 23). Rather than an interaction with alterity, this example shows one voice overpowering another. This is monological as it involves one single perspective overcoming and changing the other, whereas maintaining the uniqueness of individual perspectives is an essential element of dialogue. Furthermore, this use of the Skill aligns closely with Bakhtin’s theory of monologue, which he argues “pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons” (85). In this passage, Verity denies the perspective of the Raider captains and imposes his own control over their point of view, pretending to be what Bakhtin calls the ‘ultimate word’.

In other cases, the Wit also carries the possibility of monologisation. At the end of the second book Fitz must fake his death to escape Regal’s dungeon and does so by ‘leaving’ his body for Nighteyes’. This scene will be discussed in more detail below, as it is highly illustrative of Becker’s theories on the animal self. However, it is also a good example of the monological potential of the Wit. During his time in Nighteyes’ body, Fitz merges with the wolf, to become a new being altogether. This shift in identity is reflected in the narrative. However, where Fitz’s contact with Shrewd saw his identity preserved while ‘occupying’ a different body, in this case both identity and body are changed. This is seen in the shift from first-person, as in the following quote: “We ran alone, we the Wolf, and we lacked for nothing” (*Royal* 745). This fusion of their two identities creates a single, monological, voice, rather than the dialogical contact between two alterities. Instead of a productive interaction between alternate perspectives, this illustrates a dialectical fusion of the two, in

which the new being risks erasing their individuality. The experience has a profound impact on Fitz, who must relearn how to be human after returning to his body, showing how his own individuality nearly disappears in the process. This erasure of difference is fundamentally monological, hence Bakhtin's argument that Dostoevsky, whose work Bakhtin considers the epitome of dialogue, is hostile "to those world views which see the final goal in a merging, in a dissolution of consciousnesses in one consciousness" (*Problems* 288). The fusion of Fitz and Nightheaves is precisely the 'dissolution' of two consciousnesses into a single being, and therefore an example of monologue.

The Skill and the Wit are both magics of communication. As such they carry the possibility for that communication to be dialogical or monological depending on their use. The fact that the potential for both monologue and dialogue exist for the Wit and the Skill is an important factor in the conclusion of the trilogy, where both magics are used together to achieve immortality. Despite their similar functions, the two magics are nonetheless opposed throughout the trilogy. For example, Burrich at one point says to Fitz "If you hadn't meddled with the Wit ... you'd have been able to learn the Skill", implying that the two magics are mutually exclusive, with one disrupting the other (*Apprentice* 328). Seemingly in support of this, Fitz's quest to find Verity in the third book leads him to travel along a road that was made using the Skill and seems to have the power to dull his Wit, momentarily losing his ability to communicate with Nightheaves: "He pressed closer against me as if pleading. I scratched him behind the ears, thinking that might be what he wanted. It was

terrible not to know” (*Quest 559*). In this moment, the magics are so fundamentally opposed that they even disrupt each other. At one point on his quest, Nighteyes says that Fitz is “*moving ever farther from my side to the other side. I fear you will go too far and be unable to return*”, referring to Fitz moving toward the Skill and away from the Wit (*Quest 562*). The suggestion that the two magics are so fundamentally opposed that they are mutually exclusive runs throughout the trilogy. This is complicated, however, by the fact that Fitz does possess ability in both the Wit and the Skill. The opposition between the two magics is further undercut by the similarities in their operation, both being used for communication. In the next section, I will argue that this unexplained opposition between two very similar magics follows Becker’s theory of the symbolic and animal selves, which helps to clarify the way the Wit and the Skill are ultimately fused together.

## Animal and Symbolic Selves: Understanding *The Farseer* Through the Work of Ernest Becker

The opposition between the Skill and the Wit is stressed throughout the trilogy, despite the many similarities in their operation, as detailed above. In order to analyse this opposition, I will use the terminology created by Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death* (1973), which I believe provides the tools to better understand it. Becker’s book is an attempt to understand how the knowledge, and fear, of death influences human nature and activity. In order to do this, he argues, it is necessary to combine both psychoanalytical and theosophical understandings of human

beings. In the preface to his book, Becker describes his theory as a “synthesis that covers the best thought in many fields, from the human sciences to religion” (xviii). In Becker’s own words, the basis for *The Denial of Death* is to argue “for a merger of psychology and mythico-religious perspective” (xix). Becker further identifies a major aim of his work as “the closure of psychoanalysis on religion” (xxii). As such, he includes in his text an extended analysis of the work of both Søren Kierkegaard and Sigmund Freud, as well as numerous references to Otto Rank. As Daniel Liechty explains in his introduction to *Death and Denial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Legacy of Ernest Becker* (2002): “Because Becker pursued his ideas across disciplinary boundaries, he almost inadvertently produced a sweeping and scholarly synthesis of anthropological, sociological, psychiatric, psychoanalytic, and theological material” (xii). While there are many areas that have been influenced, and continue to be influenced, by Becker’s theories, he has not been utilised within literary studies to the same extent that the many authors he cites have been, particularly the works of major psychoanalysts such as Freud or Carl Jung. Becker’s theory revolves around the conflict between the symbolic and animal self, which he sees as an essential element of the human experience. This conflict, according to Becker, is the result of humanity’s nature as both a mortal creature (the animal self) and a creature capable of rational thought (the symbolic self). These two sides of human nature, Becker argues, can never be reconciled due to the fact of death.

At the core of *The Denial of Death* is the idea that all human beings are essentially split into two parts, which formulates the basis for Becker’s discussion throughout

his book. On the one side is the animal, a creature like any other that has a physical and finite existence. This is the part of humanity that is shared with all other animals, and like other animals, humanity has an innate fear of death “in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation” (Becker 16). In other words, humans share the basic drives towards self-preservation seen in animals which results in an instinctive fear of death. However, Becker observes “something peculiar about man, something deep down that ... set[s] him apart from the other animals” (25). This peculiarity, Becker explains, is the symbolic identity of humanity: “He is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history ... with a mind that soars out to speculate about atoms and infinity ... this self-consciousness gives to man literally the status of a small god in nature” (26). The conflict between the symbolic and animal selves is what Becker calls the existential paradox of mankind, or “the condition of individuality within finitude” (26). The symbolic self may have the status and powers of a small god, but it is still trapped in a body which will inevitably decay and die. To put it more simply, according to Becker, the fear of death is something we share with all animals, but the knowledge of death is unique to humanity. Because the symbolic self has knowledge of man’s mortality, it has an antagonistic relationship towards the body, the constant reminder of eventual death. For Becker, “[t]he body, then, is one’s animal fate that has to be struggled against” (Becker 44). Because humans can contemplate death, and because of their animal instinct to fear it, Becker argues that it is natural for humans to make denying death the central existential problem of their lives. This forms the basis of Becker’s discussion in *The Denial of Death* and will also be central to my discussion of the Skill and the Wit.

Before continuing, it is important to clarify Becker's occasional use of the word 'body' to refer to the animal self, as for the purposes of my argument the animal self is considered to contain both material and non-material elements. Becker's division between the symbolic and animal self is very similar to Cartesian dualism, the division between mind and body put forward primarily by René Descartes in *Discourse on the Method* (1637). It is easy to equate Becker's 'symbolic' and 'animal' self to the Cartesian 'mind' and 'body', and in many ways the concepts do overlap. For example, at times Becker refers to his "two dimensions of human existence" as "the body and the self" rather than the animal and the symbolic, suggesting a connection between the animal self and the material body (29). The symbolic is, essentially, immaterial, and Becker often uses terms like "self-consciousness" to highlight the separation between human beings and non-human animals who do not have a symbolic self (26). In fact, Becker's view of non-human animals shares some key elements with Descartes'. For instance, Becker writes: "They [non-human animals] merely act and move reflexively as they are driven by their instincts. If they pause at all, it is only a physical pause; inside they are anonymous, and even their faces have no name" (26). Similar to Becker's view, Descartes' view of non-human animals has been described as "reflex-driven machines, with no intellectual capacities" (Allen). For Descartes the essential difference between humans and animals revolves around the capacity to speak; he argues that their inability to form a language "proves not only that the brutes have less reason than man, but they have none at all" (Part III). Thus, for Descartes, the thing which separates human beings from animals is "rational thought and

understanding”, which closely aligns with Becker’s symbolic self (Allen). While the non-human animal, in Descartes’ theory, lacks some of the immaterial qualities he sees in humans (self-consciousness, imagination, reflection, amongst others), he does argue that non-human animals are not exclusively physical beings, due to their ability to perceive through the senses and to experience sensations. Becker similarly associates the animal self with some immaterial elements, writing that the human body: “offers experiences and sensations, concrete pleasure that the inner symbolic world lacks” (44). While Becker’s animal self is the physical body, it is also something more than just the physical material which contains the symbolic self. It is immaterial in its association with the sensations that the body experiences, which give the symbolic self awareness of the world, alongside instincts such as the inherent drive towards self-preservation, which Becker equates with the fear of death.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, I will use the terms animal and symbolic self, rather than mind and body, in order to take into consideration the non-material elements of the animal self, alongside the physical matter. Moving forward, I understand the animal self as referring to both the physical body and the senses and perceptions of the

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<sup>19</sup> Becker contradicts himself on the subject of instincts. At one point he writes that the fear of death, which human beings experience, is due to the “normal biological functioning of our instinct of self-preservation” (17). But later he suggests that part of humanity’s existential dilemma stems from the fact that they do not have instincts like the “lower animals” to protect them from the full experience of reality (50). Becker’s second use of ‘instinct’ appears to have a different meaning from the former, as he seems to see non-human animal instincts as a natural limitation in the range of perception, writing “[a]nimals are not moved by what they cannot react to” (50). This does not fully resolve this contradiction, but further analysis goes beyond the scope of this study. Moving forward I understand instincts as associated with the animal self.

physical body. This is in contrast with the purely immaterial elements of the symbolic self, which is associated with self-consciousness, imagination, and a perception of existing in time.

In Becker's theory, while the animal and symbolic selves exist in all human beings, the two aspects are fundamentally opposed due to the inevitability of death. This leads Becker to conclude that self-repression is essential for human beings to live their lives. According to Becker, this self-repression essentially puts the pursuit of a symbolic immortality at the core of all human experience, which allows human beings to function on a daily basis without the constant fear of death. In support of his argument, Becker recasts some basic psychoanalytic ideas in the early chapters of his book. Primarily, he questions the idea of mental stability, arguing that all human beings must repress their knowledge of death in order to function. There is no way for humanity to "live a whole lifetime with the fate of death haunting one's dreams" (27). The only response is to repress this knowledge and deny the fact of one's death, effectively living life in a state of constant repression and self-delusion. As Becker writes: "everything that man does in his symbolic world is an attempt to deny and overcome [death]" (27). While truly overcoming death is, of course, an impossibility, it is possible to symbolically defeat death. A hero, according to Becker, is someone who can symbolically defeat death by engaging in what he calls "cultural hero-systems" (4-7). According to him, this is the central goal for all human beings: the desire to no longer fear dying. The only way for a human being to do this is to make himself "stand out, be a hero, make the biggest possible contribution to world

life, show that he counts more than anything or anyone else" (4). If a person can create something of worth then they will "outlive or outshine death", achieving a kind of symbolic immortality for themselves (5). By engaging in these hero-systems, human beings can be convinced that they are unique, and thus will be in some sense spared from death.

To summarise Becker's theory, the symbolic self is associated with rational thought and self-reflection and is opposed to the animal self in its inherent physicality and its association with death. According to Becker, this opposition between the symbolic and animal selves is inevitable, and human beings create 'hero systems' to repress their knowledge of the inevitability of death. Becker's ideas around heroism have particular relevance to fantasy literature, as many have argued that fantasy is the primary mode in which ideas around heroism are explored in modern literature (Petzold). The centrality of death to Becker's theory links it even more closely to the Skill and the Wit, as the final climax of Hobb's series sees both magics used together to achieve immortality. The symbolic and animal selves are useful terms for analysing the opposition between the Skill and the Wit in *The Farseer Trilogy*. The Skill and the Wit appear to be opposed along the same lines as those proposed by Becker in relation to the symbolic and animal selves. However, where the symbolic and animal selves can never be reconciled due to the inevitability of death, in Hobb's text a form of immortality is possible. This offers the possibility for the Skill and the Wit to represent the resolution of this opposition in a way the symbolic and animal selves, according to Becker, could not. Understanding Becker's symbolic and

animal selves, and their relationship to death, is therefore essential in understanding the resolution of the wit/skill binary at the end of *The Farseer Trilogy*, which ultimately results in a form of immortality.

In Hobb's series, achieving immortality is directly tied to the salvation of the Six Duchies and the defeat of the Red Ship Raiders. This immortality can only be achieved through both the Skill and the Wit working together, two magics that are considered to be opposed to each other in the text. As I show in my analysis below, I believe this illustrates a synthesis between the animal and symbolic selves resulting in the monological resolution of the Wit/Skill binary. The connection between Hobb's magics and Becker's theory is reinforced throughout the series when seen through the lens of death. Below I highlight the ways in which the opposition between Hobb's magics can be linked to the opposition between Becker's animal and symbolic selves, before this opposition is resolved in the monological achievement of immortality.

### *The Symbolic/Animal and Skill/Wit Binaries in Hobb's Narrative*

Having clarified my understanding of Becker's theory of the symbolic and animal selves, I will now highlight how it appears in Hobb's trilogy. I argue that the Wit and the Skill can be seen as representing the animal and symbolic selves, and that the opposition between Becker's terms can helpfully clarify the opposition between the two magics in Hobb's narrative. The opposition between the Skill and the Wit is

maintained throughout the series, up until the final pages. It is stated on multiple occasions, and from very early on in the text, that the Wit and the Skill are opposed. At one point a character explicitly states that they are opposites: “He had spoken of [the Skill] as the opposite of whatever was the sense I shared with animals [the Wit]” (*Apprentice* 225). Later in the trilogy, Fitz writes that “[t]he Wit and the Skill were two different things, as unlike as reading and singing, or swimming and riding a horse” (*Royal* 685). Even the names of the two different magics have been seen to contribute to this opposition by evoking a stereotypical gender-coded binary. According to Prater, “the name ‘the Skill’ implies learning and culture where ‘the Wit’ ... is associated with feminine-coded attributes such as cunning and intuition” (24). The fact that the Wit perceives humans and non-human animals in the same way indicates that it taps into the elements they share, which Becker calls the animal self. This is in contrast to the Skill, which can only influence humans, implying that there is something unique to human beings that the Skill can influence: the symbolic self. Becker’s theory offers important insight into precisely how this opposition is constructed in the series and how this relates to the monological resolution of that binary. Because of the trilogy’s concern with both monologue and dialogue, this monological ending is associated with the loss of plurality and the possibility of communication. As such, while immortality is necessary for the salvation of the Six Duchies, it is nonetheless represented as tragic. Below I highlight the connections between the Skill and the Wit, and Becker’s symbolic and animal selves, seen throughout the trilogy, before finally illustrating how the resolution of this binary in the final pages of the series is monological.

The Skill is the first magic mentioned in the trilogy and its initial introduction links it to Becker's theory on the development of consciousness. This introduction of the Skill emphasises its opposition to the Wit, and further links it to Becker's theory of the symbolic self. According to Becker, the knowledge of mortality, a key attribute of the symbolic self, is developed in childhood when the child links the anxiety of separation from the caregiver to that of non-existence, which Daniel Liechty argues takes place around the age of seven (*Reaction* 50). This separation from the caregiver and its link to the symbolic self is present in Hobb's trilogy too. *The Farseer Trilogy* is told entirely from Fitz's perspective, using the frame of a much older Fitz writing down his own life story, beginning as far back as he can remember. The first memory Fitz retells is of his introduction to his father's family, the Farseers, after his maternal grandfather abandons him with the royal family. Fitz tells the reader: "Before that, there is nothing, only a blank gulf no exercise of my mind has ever been able to pierce" (*Apprentice* 2). This is the first anxiety for Fitz, the first separation from his caregiver. He has no memories before this time, as if it is this first hint at his own mortality that grants the level of self-consciousness required for him to remember and contemplate his own position in the world. If the similarity in age was not enough, the fact that this earliest memory is one of separation is a further connection to the development of the symbolic self. Fitz's anxiety over his separation from his mother is the first hint at the inevitability of death which Becker suggests must be repressed for a person to function. The fact that Fitz remembers nothing before the age of six is remarked upon many times in the text, and it is later implied that this is the result of a repression of his own memories, as another character is able to deduce by using the Skill: "You say you

cannot recall her. Actually, you cannot forgive her. But she is there, with you, in your memories” (*Quest 772*). Fitz’s repression of his earliest memories can be linked to the development of the symbolic self, due to his sudden understanding of death symbolised by separation from his caregiver.

While Fitz’s repression of his earliest memories is associated with the development of his symbolic self, the same moment in the text is directly linked to his innate ability in the Skill. This can be seen in the detail of the first memory he does recall:

Sometimes I wonder about that grip. The hand was hard and rough, trapping mine within it. And yet it was warm, and not unkind, as it held mine. Only firm. It did not let me slip on the icy streets, but it did not let me escape my fate, either. (*Apprentice 3*)

The clarity with which Fitz recounts this memory is directly linked to his ability with the Skill, as he asks himself: “Is the detail the result of a six-year-old’s open absorption of all that goes on around him? Or could the completeness of the memory be the bright overlay of the Skill” (*Apprentice 2*). Fitz’s ability to consciously reflect on the world and his position in it, his symbolic self, appears to be linked to the moment of separation. The clarity of his memory after this moment of separation is then explicitly related to his ability with the Skill. This introduction suggests that Fitz’s ability with the Skill is directly associated with the development of his symbolic self. It is also significant that this moment is when he is placed in the care of his paternal family, as the Farseers are the primary Skill-users seen

throughout the series, and it is through his father that Fitz inherits his ability with this magic.

It is not long after this scene that the text also introduces the Wit, with its connection to Becker's animal self. The sharp, anxiety-ridden entrance into self-consciousness is contrasted with Fitz's first recounting of his ability with the Wit, which happens soon after his maternal grandfather leaves him behind. After being presented to his uncle, Verity, Fitz is left in the charge of his father's stablemaster, Burrich. Burrich places the young Fitz with the dogs in the stables to keep him safe until something can be done with him, saying: "That's right, you cuddle up to Vixen, there. She'll take you in, and give a good slash to any that think to bother you" (*Apprentice* 13). What follows is the first use of the Wit seen directly in the series where the reader is offered no explanation of what is happening. Fitz describes the moment thus: "I drifted into [the dog's] mind and shared his dim dreams of an endless chase, pursuing quarry I never saw, but whose scent dragged me onward through nettle, bramble and scree" (*Apprentice* 14). The lack of explanation and the frankness of this statement emphasises the ease with which Fitz uses the Wit without any training. This fact will later further oppose the two magics, as the Skill is revealed to require significant training to use. But in this scene, the clarity of Fitz's first moments of self-consciousness is contrasted with the dreamlike quality of his instinctive use of the Wit. He writes: "And with the hound's dream, the precision of the memory wavers like the bright colours and sharp edges of a drug dream. Certainly the days that follow that first night have no such clarity in my mind"

(*Apprentice 14*). These examples are taken from the opening of the first book and reinforce the connection between the Skill and the separation anxiety, but also stress the Skill's opposition to the Wit. The fading of memory soon after this use of the Wit is contrasted to the Skill's clarity that 'overlays' Fitz's first memory. It is also significant that this moment offers Fitz a new caregiver to rely on: "Burrich was a constant in those days, giving me the same care he gave to Chivalry's beasts"

(*Apprentice 15*). In this moment, Burrich becomes Fitz's new guardian, easing his separation anxiety. Significantly, this new caregiver is himself a Wit-user, although Burrich represses his own ability due to his belief that the magic is evil. The easing of his separation anxiety allows Fitz to reconnect with his animal self and, therefore, the Wit. This is in contrast to the Skill, which was associated with Fitz being abandoned with his paternal family, linking the anxiety of the first separation with his connection to the magic of the royal family.

A further link between the Wit and the animal self can be seen in its association with the senses. The Wit is the magic the reader is made most familiar with, particularly in the early sections of the first book, before the Skill is properly introduced. For most of the series, Fitz uses the Wit without any real training or thought, relying on it as a simple extension of his senses. The reader's understanding of the Wit is developed over time and relies as much on Fitz's assumptions as it does on any concrete explanation. In fact, it is only much later in the series that Fitz meets other Wit-users and realises the Wit can be developed through training. The reader is told that "[t]he Wit allows awareness of all animals",

including humans (*Royal* 80); it is an extra sense that allows Fitz to detect any form of animal life around him. Throughout the trilogy, he refers to it as his 'Wit-sense', a name which further links it to the senses of the body and therefore the animal self. Later in the trilogy, when Fitz is encouraged to meditate using his Wit-sense, he says: "I felt it all ... every speck of life, that was not and never had been a speck, but had always been a node on the web of life" (*Royal* 231). Much as Becker's animal self gives the symbolic self access to reality through the senses, so too does the Wit allow Fitz to sense the life around him. Furthermore, the Wit can be used to supplement Fitz's natural senses. When Fitz bonds with Nosy, a dog, he describes his experience of their close connection: "Nosy drank it all in, every scent, every sight, every sound. The doubled sensory impact dizzied me" (*Apprentice* 30). The Wit is not only a sixth sense, but it is also associated with the natural senses of the human body. In this example, Fitz shares the senses of the puppy, merging their understanding of their physical surroundings. His supplemented senses help Fitz in a variety of circumstances, saving his life on more than one occasion, showing the benefits of Fitz's close association with the Wit.

For much of the first book Fitz does not even understand that what he can do with the Wit is unusual and, when he realises this, the narrative creates an explicit connection between the Wit and the senses. The Forged ones he meets in his journey seemingly cannot be sensed with the Wit, marking them apart from any other living thing Fitz has ever encountered. When Fitz first meets victims of the Red Ship Raiders, it is the first time in his life that he cannot sense something with

his Wit, leading him to a profound realisation: “I was different from everyone else I knew. Imagine a seeing child growing up in a blind village, where no one else even suspects the possibility of such a sense” (*Apprentice* 188). This comparison of the Wit with sight is repeated later, when Fitz is sent to poison groups of Forged ones in the countryside: “all my life I had been accustomed to relying on my Wit to let me know when others were about. To me, it was tantamount to having to work without using my eyes” (*Apprentice* 342). This repeated connection between the Wit and the senses emphasises the magic’s relation to Becker’s understanding of the animal self. For Becker, the senses are not themselves immaterial, but rather form a bridge between the immaterial and material. The senses, while associated with the body and therefore the animal self, are what allow the symbolic self to access and understand reality beyond the physical body. Similarly, when Fitz forms a Wit bond with an animal, it supplements his understanding of the physical world, giving him a further sensory avenue through which he can interact with reality. Thus, the Wit is closely associated with the immaterial elements of Becker’s animal self, providing a link for the symbolic self to understand the world around it.

The Wit is associated with the senses of the physical body, and therefore works to embed its user in reality. The Skill, however, is often shown to transcend reality, and the physical world. While the Skill is predominantly a magic of communication, it does have a number of other uses which align it closely to the symbolic self. In the third book of the series, Fitz is told by Chade and Kettricken that the only way to save the Six Duchies is to pretend Fitz’s illegitimate daughter is the rightful heir to

the throne. However, Fitz sees this as the ultimate betrayal, as it ends his hope of one day living a normal life with his child: "Of all the things I had ever had to give up simply by virtue of the blood I carried, that was the dearest" (*Quest 486*). It is through his use of the Skill that Fitz is able to overcome his anger at his friends and see the necessity of this plan. The symbolic self, according to Becker, is linked with the imaginative power of humanity, the ability to consider something different to present reality. Becker describes how the symbolic self allows a person to "place himself imaginatively at a point in space and contemplate bemusedly his own planet" (26). James Hardie-Bick, in his article "Transcendence, Symbolic Immortality and Evil" (2012), explains further, and connects the symbolic self to the "unique ability the human animal has to transcend and look beyond their current situation" (416). This description of the symbolic self seems to align closely to Hobb's Skill magic. The magic allows him to observe events from afar. This can be seen after Fitz objects to the plan to present his daughter as the true heir, and he is drawn towards the missing Prince Verity through the Skill. Fitz explains: "I was not there in any physical sense. Yet he smiled at me and lifted one terrible gleaming hand to cup my face" (*Quest 476*). He goes on to write that, through the use of the Skill, "[e]verything suddenly stood out clearly, and I saw all the hidden reasons and purposes for what we did, and I understood with a painful purity of enlightenment why it was necessary I follow the path before me" (*Quest 476*). He is also able to come to terms with the plan for his daughter, understanding that "there was no malice" in the plan, that Chade and Kettricken "believed in the morality of what they did" (*Quest 477-478*). Fitz explicitly describes this moment as an objective view, saying: "I had briefly seen, not only my child, but the entire situation from all

possible views" (*Quest 477*). Despite his strong feelings on the matter, Fitz' experience with the Skill means he can "no longer deny entirely the sense" of the plan (*Quest 478*). Thus, Fitz's experience with the Skill leads him to see things from an alternate perspective. This ability to transcend the body further opposes the Skill to the animal self and the Wit, which embeds the user in physical reality through the senses of the body.

The strong association of the Wit with the physical body may explain its rejection by the wider society of Hobb's world, offering another link to Becker's animal self. Becker suggests that the physical body, as an aspect of the animal self, is a constant reminder of the inevitability of death. The symbolic self, therefore, develops a highly antagonistic relationship with the body and bodily processes. By way of example, Becker offers "all the various taboos surrounding menstruation", arguing "it is obvious that man seeks to control the mysterious processes of nature as they manifest themselves within his own body" (32). As Becker explains: "The guilt that [a human being] feels over bodily processes and urges is 'pure' guilt" (35). Fitz is similarly taught to feel guilt over his use of this magic, despite its otherwise 'natural' associations. The Wit is treated as a taboo by the society of Hobb's world. Most consider the Wit unnatural and shameful, as Burrich explicitly states: "Fitz, this is wrong ... It's unnatural ... It makes a man less than a man" (*Apprentice 42*). Burrich attempts to force Fitz to stop using the Wit begin early on, leading him to separate Fitz from his early Wit-partner, Nosy: "He lifted the pup bodily, and carried him, not roughly, to the door ... There was a sudden flash of red pain, and Nosy was gone"

(*Apprentice* 45-46). Burrich views the magic with disgust, leading to his violent reaction in the above quote. The sense of shame that Burrich tries to instil in Fitz is reinforced when he senses Fitz conversing with Nighteyes: "I'd rather you rode with your hand in your pants than that you did that constantly in my presence. It offends me" (*Royal* 573). Burrich's reaction explicitly ties the Wit to sexuality, and this connection is further reinforced by the way it connects Fitz to the concept of 'queerness', as discussed by both Lenise Prater and Peter Melville. The fact that the Wit apparently makes Fitz 'less than a man' ties the prejudice against Wit-users to the way in which homosexuality has been treated in Western cultures.<sup>20</sup> Melville argues that while Fitz is not strictly identified as homosexual, his "closeted experiences as a young boy at risk, yearning for an illicit, even criminalized, form of companionship for which he is taught to feel great shame" merits his identification as a "queer (or queer-relatable) character" (284). While the Wit is not a direct analogue for homosexuality, the violent reaction towards Wit-users in Hobb's world recalls the real-world persecution of homosexuality. Furthermore, the association with shame creates a direct link between the animal self and the Wit. Just as the symbolic self feels guilt over the natural processes of the physical body, so too is Fitz taught to feel shame over his use of the Wit.

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<sup>20</sup> See particularly Peter Melville's "Queerness and Homophobia in Robin Hobb's Farseer Trilogies" (2018).

This association between the Wit and sexuality can be further linked to Becker's arguments around the symbolic self's rejection of the body. Becker argues that sex and procreation remind people of death in two ways. One is the "philosophical-biological" level which understands simply that "[a]nimals who procreate, die ... Nature conquers death not by creating eternal organism but by making it possible for ephemeral ones to procreate" (163). On another level, sex itself reduces individuality due to its association with what Becker calls "species consciousness", therefore sex reminds someone that "he is nothing himself but a link in the chain of being" (163). Becker further argues that "sexuality has from the beginning been under taboos; it had to be lifted from the plane of physical fertilization to a spiritual one" (231). Thus, according to Becker, mankind develops rituals and taboos associated with sex as a form of control because of the inherent need to resist anything associated with death. The Wit is similarly rejected because of its association with animals and physicality, and according to critics, as a displaced reference to queerness. The Wit is a reminder of the connection human beings share with non-human animals and thus also associated with a number of taboos and rituals in Hobb's world. Anyone associated with the magic is ritually killed by being "[h]ung over water and burned" (*Quest* 456) and Fitz notes a number of items commonly, and incorrectly, thought to provide protection against Wit-users: "you need not wear wolfsbane" (*Royal* 668). Thus, the vilification of the Wit in the wider society of Hobb's world can be read as a result of its association with the physical body, and therefore death. This is a reflection of the way Becker suggests sexuality and sex must be controlled for the same reasons.

Where the Wit is linked to illicit forms of sexuality, the Skill is associated with attempts to control sexuality and the body more generally. The way in which the Skill is taught to Fitz provides a clear example of its opposition to both the Wit and the animal self, particularly in regard to the symbolic self's rejection of the physical body. The Skill is not usually taught to illegitimate royals, but Fitz is trained regardless in response to the threat of the Red Ship Raiders, and the urgent need for a way to defend the Six Duchies. The details of this training reveal that, while the Wit is associated with the body, including the physical desire for sex, the Skill is very explicitly shown as the exact opposite. The fact that the Skill requires training at all highlights its opposition to the Wit which, like the animal self, is associated with instinct rather than intellectual learning. Fitz is trained by Galen, the Skillmaster to the royal family. A key element of Galen's teaching is a strict mastery over the body. He forces his students to maintain a strict regimen and lifestyle while under his tutelage:

To master the Skill, he must first teach us to master ourselves. Physical deprivation was his key. Tomorrow, we were to arrive before the sun was over the horizon. We were not to wear shoes, socks, cloaks, nor any woollen garment ... We would avoid meat, sweet fruits, seasoned dishes, milk, and 'frivolous foods' ... We would avoid all unnecessary conversation, especially with those of the other sex. He counselled us long against any sort of 'sensual' longings, in which he included desiring food, sleep or warmth.

*(Apprentice 258)*

The body is to be deprived of 'food', 'sleep', and 'warmth', and the mention of conversation with the 'other sex' is a clear reference to resisting sexual desire. Galen himself even ignores his female students rather than break his own 'self-control': "He totally ignored the five or so women of our group. Not once did his eyes turn towards them. The exclusion was so obvious that I wondered how they had offended him" (*Apprentice* 257). This training sets the Skill in complete opposition to the physical body and makes resisting the drives and instincts of the animal self a requirement in learning this magic. As Becker writes, anything that is associated with the animal self, including the physical body, serves as a reminder of the inevitability of death. Thus, Galen's commitment to 'mastering' the drives of the human body can be seen to symbolise a desire to master death. His rejection of any temptation associated with physical necessities or urges can be linked to the symbolic self's attitude toward the animal self. While the animal self is rejected due to its association with death, the link between the Wit and the animal self results in a similar rejection. This rejection is seen in the Skill as well, as any of the body's natural drives are rejected in order to master the self.

Galen's emphasis on mastering and controlling the drives of the physical body offers an explanation for his particular hatred of Fitz. Fitz receives the bulk of Galen's beatings, and from the beginning of his training he appears to be a target: "In humiliation I took the welts he dealt me. He berated me as each fell, telling the others that the old rules against teaching the Skill to a bastard had been to prevent such a thing as this" (*Apprentice* 263). Galen even goes so far as to leave Fitz

bedridden for a time after a particularly harsh beating. It is eventually revealed that Galen was uncannily devoted to Fitz's father, due to an accident involving the Skill.

Thus, for Galen, Fitz is a symbol of Prince Chivalry's legacy:

You shame your father's name by existing ... I do not know how you came to exist. That a man such as your father could fall to such depth as lying with something<sup>21</sup> and letting you become is beyond my mind to imagine.

*(Apprentice 306)*

For Galen, Fitz represents Prince Chivalry's lack of self-control, or his surrender to the drives of the physical body. Thus, Galen hates Fitz as he represents the downfall of the prince he was previously devoted to. This explains Galen's resistance to teaching the Skill to a 'bastard', as by definition they represent a failure to control sexual desire. After he fails to learn the Skill, Fitz is magically forced into agreeing with Galen's beliefs around illegitimacy. As Fitz later explains to Burrich: "I believe there is a reason the Skill is not taught to bastards. There is a taint in me, a fatal weakness" (*Apprentice 278*). This creates another link between Hobb's magics and Becker's theories. As quoted earlier, Becker argues that the taboos that surround sexual intercourse are a way of controlling the physical body. Fitz, and any illegitimate child, would represent the breaking of these taboos, and thus they are inherently unsuitable for training in the Skill, further opposing the Skill to the physical body and the animal self.

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<sup>21</sup> It is worth pointing out the complete dehumanisation of Fitz's biological mother by Galen, indicating his 'evil' in similar terms to those discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis.

Galen's attempt to 'master' bodily desire is explained in the text as a way of training Skill-users to resist the addictive pleasure of the Skill. The reader is told of the addictive nature of the Skill many times, as well as the danger of being swept away by the pleasure of its use. This addictive pleasure provides a further link between the Skill and Becker's theory, as he argues there is a danger in the unrepressed imaginative power of the symbolic self. Fitz writes that the Skill is so addictive it can even "distract a man from taking his next breath" (*Apprentice* 265). Here, the Skill disrupts the instinctive fear of death associated with the animal self. In this example, a person is so distracted by the Skill that it even overcomes the animal self's instinct for self-preservation, and the basic bodily process of breathing. Fitz writes that when using the Skill "the user feels a keenness of life, an uplifting of being" (*Assassin* 265). But this 'keenness of life' is specifically not a physical pleasure, as Fitz further explains that 'pleasure' is the wrong word entirely: "Pleasure is too physical a word to describe what I felt. It had nothing to do with the skin or body" (*Apprentice* 273). The addictive experience of using the Skill, therefore, is separate from bodily sensations, which is associated with the animal self. This pleasure provides a link between Hobb's magic and the danger that Becker describes in an unrepressed symbolic self. According to Becker, the symbolic self is an essential problem for human beings, as it results in "the appalling burden that man bears, the *experiential* burden" (51). Because of the imaginative power of the symbolic self, it allows human beings to contemplate the "an overwhelmingly miraculous and incomprehensible world, a world so full of beauty, majesty, and terror that if animals perceived it all they would be paralyzed to act" (Becker 50).

Without a certain level of self-repression, human beings would have no protection from the “primary miraculousness of creation” (Becker 50). Similarly, when a character gives in to the full pleasure of the Skill, they feel an intense elation. However, this elation is too much for a human being to withstand. As Fitz writes: “Such a man dies raving, but it is also true he dies raving of his joy” (*Apprentice* 265). Just like the symbolic self, the danger of the Skill is in its fully unrepressed use. In Hobb’s world, rather than simply leave the person paralyzed to act, as Becker suggests, this fully unrepressed use of the Skill can result in death, as the elation and joy of the Skill disrupts the instinct for self-preservation associated with the animal self.

The Skill too is often shown to be actively hostile towards the body. According to Becker, the body is itself alien to the symbolic self, which cannot understand the nature of the physical self nor the way it “aches and bleeds and will decay and die” (Becker 26). As a result, the symbolic self is hostile towards the body, being a constant reminder of the inevitability of death. The Skill is associated with a similar attitude towards the body. While recovering from his injuries sustained at the end of the first book, Fitz describes his physical body as follows: “It was damaged, and I rejected it fiercely. I felt savagely vindictive toward the flesh and bone that enclosed me” (*Royal* 8). Fitz’s rejection of his body leads him to accessing the Skill, allowing him to make contact with Shrewd and experience living in an older body. Fitz’s hostile attitude towards his body grants him access to the Skill, linking the magic with a rejection of the body. The addictive nature of the Skill also highlights the

magic's ability to actively harm the body, and prolonged use is shown to cause the body to waste away. The harmful nature of the Skill is most clearly seen in Prince Verity, after he uses the Skill almost constantly in an effort to defend against the Raiders. Fitz is shocked to see the prince after his long-term use of the Skill: "I looked at the sallow, fleshless man who shared the King's breakfast table and wondered if this were the bluff, hearty prince from my childhood" (*Apprentice* 354). Verity soon begins to eat less, telling Fitz that: "Eating takes energy. Odd to realize that. I have none extra to give to that just now" (*Apprentice* 351). Later, Verity explains that "[t]he Skill kills all other appetites" (*Apprentice* 358). This prolonged use of the Skill appears to disrupt basic bodily urges.

In other cases, a command given through the Skill is shown to override the animal self's instinct for self-preservation. As discussed above, during his training in the Skill, Fitz is compelled to take his own life by the Skillmaster Galen: "'Die' he said, but I did not hear the words. I felt them" (*Apprentice* 273). Galen's attempt to magically force Fitz to suicide almost succeeds. Fitz recalls the moment, after Galen's command, when he is left at the top of the tower where training takes place: "I thought that I could drag myself up onto a bench, and from there to the top of the wall. And from there. Down. End it" (*Apprentice* 275). Galen not only magically commands Fitz to attempt suicide, but also implants in him a deep sense of shame which affects him for a long time. It is only after Smithy, Fitz's wit-partner at this time, contacts Fitz that he finds the strength to resist. Fitz senses Smithy's affection as a "warmth and light", realising: "It loved me. Loved me even if I

couldn't, wouldn't, didn't love myself. Loved me even if I hated it. It set its tiny teeth in my soul and braced and held so that I couldn't crawl any further" (*Apprentice* 275). Smithy's intervention not only prevents Fitz's suicide, but also helps in his recovery. Fitz writes: "Every scent and sight he relayed to me with an intensity that, despite my bleakness, renewed in me the wonder I had first felt when I'd plunged into Burrich's world" (*Apprentice* 281). He later adds: "Were it not for Smithy, I'd have dashed my life out at the base of the tower that night" (*Apprentice* 350). The intensity of Smithy's senses, his unique perspective, renews Fitz's desire to live. Thus, the Wit, or animal self, is associated in this example with the will to live or reinforcing the drive for self-preservation. A similar example can be seen in Fitz's relationship to the wolf, Nighteyes. At one point, Fitz is nearly killed by Forged ones, and the wolf comes to his rescue: "[Nighteyes] came, slashing teeth and weight hitting our tangled struggle like a battering ram ... My head cleared, and suddenly I had heart to fight again, to ignore pain and damage, to fight!" (*Royal* 242). Nighteyes' sudden appearance reinforces Fitz's will to live, helping him to continue fighting for his life. While the Skill is occasionally associated with the ability to override the self-preservation instinct, the Wit has the opposite effect, and reinforces the body's will to live.

On the one hand, the examples above suggest that the Skill has the ability to overwrite the animal self's instinctive fear of death. On the other hand, the Wit offers the chance to erase the symbolic self altogether. On a number of occasions in the trilogy, Fitz's closeness to Nighteyes is implied to be dangerous, and the

narrative occasionally blurs the two identities. The moment in which Fitz is fully merged into Nighteyes as the composite called Wolf has already been discussed, but other examples occur throughout the trilogy. At one point, for instance, Fitz is attacked by Forged ones, and almost loses his symbolic self in the struggle. He explains: "I know that I knew when [Nighteyes'] jaws closed in his throat. I felt that death rattle in my own jaws and the swift, spurting blood that drenched my muzzle and flowed out over my jowls" (*Royal* 242). Here, the first-person narrative blurs the line between Fitz and Nighteyes by showing Fitz's confusion over who killed the Forged one. This event is later used as evidence of Fitz's use of the Wit and therefore justification for his execution. A witness of the incident testifies against Fitz, saying: "It is common talk, too, that he had been seen with blood on his mouth after he has fought. That he becomes one of the animals that he was raised with. He is Witted" (*Royal* 704). The danger of this blurring of the identities is most clear during Fitz's time merged as Wolf. After he returns to his body, it is clear that the experience has profoundly affected him. Burrich almost regrets helping him survive, saying: "After those first few weeks, I was sickened at what we had done. Put a wolf's soul in a man's body, it seemed to me" (*Quest* 30). Fitz later describes the choice he faces after returning to his own body: "Be a wolf, with no past, no future, only today. Or a man, twisted by his past, whose heart pumped fear with his blood" (*Quest* 37). This is significant, as this timeless existence is the complete antithesis of Becker's symbolic self. A defining attribute of the symbolic self is the possession of a "name and a life history" (Becker 26). When merged with Nighteyes, Fitz is no longer referred to by his own name, but nor is he called Nighteyes. For Fitz to remain as Wolf is to have no past or future, as during this period "time had no

meaning”, in other words he would have no life history (*Royal* 745). While Fitz does eventually commit to remaining a human, his closeness to Nigtheeyes is consistently shown to endanger his symbolic self. Thus, the use of the Wit is shown to disrupt the symbolic self, similar to the way the Skill was shown to reject the animal self, reinforcing the opposition of the two magics and their link to Becker’s theory.

Fitz is unique in Hobb’s world in that he possesses both forms of magic, which serves as a source of internal conflict for him throughout the series. Similarly, Becker suggests the opposition between the symbolic and animal selves is the source of the existential dilemma of all human beings. The Wit, through its association with the instincts, the bodily senses, and the emphasis on physicality, is closely aligned with Becker’s animal self. On the other hand, the Skill is linked to the mind, imagination, and the ability to think objectively, all associated with the symbolic self. Thus, the opposition of the two magics follows Becker’s theory on the opposition between the symbolic and animal selves. The magics are further opposed within the plot of the series. The Skill is the magic of the royal family, and Fitz primarily associates it with his duty to that family and the societal obligations he is under. In contrast, the Wit seemingly offers Fitz a potential escape, the ability to run away and live as a ‘Wolf’, free of those obligations. But it becomes clear that both of these opposed choices lead, ultimately, to death. It is not through either the Skill or the Wit that Fitz successfully fulfils his quest and saves the Six Duchies. It is only through his use of both magics, and through the fusion of the animal and symbolic, that death can truly be denied, immortality achieved, and the kingdom

saved. In the section that follows, I explain how the strict oppositions between the two magics is ultimately questioned, culminating in the ending where both magics are used to achieve immortality.

### *The Link Between the Skill and the Wit: The Nature of the Forged Ones*

Above I have used Becker's terminology to better understand how the Wit and the Skill are opposed in the early part of Hobb's trilogy. It is not until the final part of *The Farseer Trilogy* that these oppositions are resolved, revealing that the solution to save the Six Duchies, and achieve immortality, lies in the fusion of the Wit and the Skill and, therefore, the symbolic and animal selves. In contrast to Becker's theory, which is based on the premise that such a union is impossible, in Hobb's narrative the animal and symbolic selves become a whole, unrepressed self, represented by the stone dragons revealed in the final book. It is important to note that, while the fusion of opposites occurs only in the final pages, hints that the Wit and the Skill can in fact be brought together are seen from the beginning of the trilogy. Below I highlight some of these hints to show that there is more than a straightforward opposition between the Skill and the Wit, although this is only presented as a potential before.

Examples of the Wit and the Skill being used in combination can sometimes be seen throughout the series before their final fusion in the conclusion. One ability that blurs the line between the Wit and the Skill is what Fitz calls 'repelling'. Fitz first

uses this ability as a child when he was frightened by a tradesman curious about the 'royal bastard': "'NO!' I shouted, and *repelled* at him, while crabbing sideways along the wall. I saw him stagger a step backwards, losing his grip on his cask" (*Apprentice* 26). Repelling seems to be a physical force, as seen in the physical impact it has on its target. Fitz later gives a fuller explanation of the ability: "It was something I had always known how to do, as instinctively as one knows to pull the finger back from the flame ... I put force into it, the mental repulsing becoming almost a physical thing as he recoiled from me" (*Royal* 238-239). In this example, Fitz refers to the ability as mental, rather than physical, but does acknowledge its physical impact. Fitz later describes using repelling a target "with every bit of Wit" he has, showing that this ability is directly associated with that magic, rather than the Skill (*Royal* 239). The Wit has already been discussed in terms of combining the material and immaterial, and its ability to sense human lives as well as animals. However, this is one of the few times the Wit is seen directly impacting a human, rather than a non-human animal. What is most interesting about Fitz's repelling, however, is when it is used in conjunction with the Skill. In some instances, Nighteyes seems able to use the Wit while Fitz uses the Skill, defending him against Skill attacks. In one example, when Fitz is assaulted by two Skill-users, Nighteyes intervenes, as described by Fitz: "A familiar snarl, and then Nighteyes *repelled* through me ... when they were linked to me by the Skill, they must be vulnerable to this other magic" (*Royal* 685). Fitz has no idea this is possible and can only theorise as to what happened:

It was a hybrid magic, Nighteyes using the Wit through a bridge the Skill had created. He attacked Justin's body from within Justin's mind. Justin's hands

flew to his throat, fighting jaws he could not seize. Claws shredded skin and raised red welts on the skin beneath Justin's fine tunic. (*Royal* 500)

The effect of this hybrid magic is physical, as seen in its impact on the target, but it relies on a mental connection created by the Skill. This is one of the few instances when the Skill and the Wit are seen to operate together. One other example is when Verity accidentally compels Fitz to abandon his pursuit of Regal and instead find him on his quest for the Elderlings. This command, magically imprinted as a compulsion through the Skill, not only affects Fitz but also Nigteyes. Fitz explains the situation to Nigteyes as follows: "*You and I, we share the Wit. Verity and I share the Skill. How could this Skill-sending have gone through me to seize you?*" (*Quest* 341). Similar examples of the Wit and Skill being used in conjunction occur in the trilogy and foreshadow the conclusion of the text which sees the Skill and the Wit come together to achieve immortality. These examples serve to prime the reader to question the fundamental opposition, which is otherwise reinforced throughout the series.

While the Skill and the Wit can occasionally be used together, this does not initially resolve the corresponding opposition between the animal and symbolic selves. Indeed, as discussed above, the operation of the Skill is seen to reject the animal self, even as the Wit disrupts the presence of the symbolic self. It is also worth noting that the Wit and Skill are not completely interchangeable with the symbolic and animal selves. Nevertheless, further analysis of the Forged ones reveals a strong connection between the two magics and Becker's theory. In order to understand

this, however, it is important to first clarify an important point about the nature of the Wit and the Skill and the human beings of Hobb's world. While these magics are somewhat rare in characters of the trilogy, at one point Fitz does theorise that *"every human has at least some capacity"* suggesting that these magics exist on a spectrum and relate to something fundamental within the people of Hobb's world (Royal 80). Fitz goes on to speculate that the small amount of Wit a person may have could manifest as an *"affinity for certain animals"* which may be expressed *"in a crest or in the names they bestow upon their children"* (Royal 80). In addition to this small manifestation of the Wit, Fitz observes that he has *"seen women rise abruptly from their tasks, to go into an adjacent room where an infant is just beginning to wake"*, arguing that this is a form of the Skill (Royal 80). While Fitz may initially seem to be unique in his possession of both magics, in fact all people in Hobb's world seem to have at least some access to both.<sup>22</sup> This will later become a crucial element in the way Verity achieves immortality, which requires both magics despite the fact that he is only able to use the Skill. However, this also highlights an important point when discussing the Forged ones. The Forged ones appear to have lost both their symbolic and animal selves, which is the source of their inhuman violence. Accordingly, their access to both the Wit and the Skill is also disrupted. The Forged ones therefore illustrate the reliance between both magics, and both opposed sides of the human Self, in the formation of a fully functioning human being. The mutual reliance of opposed alterities will ultimately lead to the

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<sup>22</sup> This point will be further supported by the addition of new characters in later texts which actively use both the Skill and the Wit, most notably Prince Dutiful, and Fitz's own daughter, Bee.

achievement of immortality, which requires both Wit and Skill, and animal and symbolic selves, to come together.

Fitz's observation that all people have some amount of the Wit and the Skill is illustrated several times throughout the series, but most notably when Fitz joins the crew of a ship sent out to combat the Raiders: "I felt the leap of the heating anger igniting and spreading. It was a Wit thing, a surging of heart on the animal level that flooded us with hate" (*Royal* 368). In this example, the link between a group of people committed to a single goal can be sensed with the Wit, suggesting a relationship between the magic and community. The Forged ones, on the other hand, appear to have lost any connection to community. For most of the series it is unknown what causes the change in the Raiders captives. Chade, Fitz's assassin mentor, conducts a study of the Forged ones in an effort to find a cure, but is unable to reach a conclusion: "*I could not learn if something had been added to her or taken away to Forge her. I did not know if it was a thing consumed or smelled or heard or seen*" (*Apprentice* 334). However, Fitz, due to his use of the Wit, is uniquely able to sense that something magical has happened to these people. In describing his first encounter with the Forged ones he realises that: "All the threads that run back and forth between folk, that twine from mother to child, from man to woman ... all were gone" (*Apprentice* 188). Fitz explicitly links the horror of the Forged ones to their lack of connections to others. The Forged ones show varying levels of violence in the trilogy, but they all display a disregard for family, community, and societal norms: "They stole without remorse, even from their own children, and

squandered coin and gobbled food like gluttons. No joy they gave to anyone, not even a kind word" (*Apprentice* 200). Just as they are unable to reconnect with a sense of community, so too is Fitz unable to sense the Forged ones with the Wit, with Nigteyes referring to them as "[t]he senseless ones" (*Royal* 265). Thus, a defining attribute of the Forged ones is their lack of connection to others, and this is explicitly tied to their loss of the Wit, suggesting that the ability for human beings to form a community is tied to this particular magic.

However, the Forged ones also seem to have some sense of their Skill disrupted as well. Fitz recalls at one point that the Forged ones always seemed to converge on Buckkeep, where Verity used the Skill daily: "Perhaps ... the outreaching of that feeling in Skill touched something in [the Forged ones] and reminded them of all they had lost" (*Quest* 78). Similarly, more experienced Wit-users tell Fitz that the Forged ones seem to track people who use the Wit, and that whatever is done to create them "leaves an emptiness in them ... [Wit-users] are more likely to be followed and attacked by Forged ones" (*Quest* 142). The Skill and the Wit, therefore, both seem to represent something the Forged ones have lost, and this loss leads them to seek out and attack Wit or Skill-users. Alongside their loss of access to the Skill, the Forged ones also seem to have lost many of the qualities associated with the symbolic self. Chade's study of the Forged ones shows that they appear to have lost all sense of time: "*She seemed to have little sense of the time that had passed since her Forging. She could give good account of her earlier life ... but of the days since her Forging, all was as one long 'yesterday' to her*" (*Apprentice*

334). As Becker suggests, 'life history' is a defining element of the presence of a symbolic self. Much like Fitz during his time as Wolf, the Forged ones appear to have no symbolic self, rendering time meaningless. Thus, the removal of the Skill simultaneously appears to remove the symbolic self. Furthermore, this illustrates the point that all human beings possess at least some small amount of both the Skill and the Wit, and both magics are essential for their ability to function in the world and as part of a community.

There are further connections between Fitz's loss of symbolic self during his time as Wolf and the Forged ones: "My clothing was caked with dirt and old blood, and my trousers tattered off into rags below my knees. With a shudder, I recalled the Forged ones and their ragged garments" (*Quest 63*). Fitz writes: "As soon as Burrich left me here, alone, I reverted to something less than an animal. No time, no cleanliness, no goals, no awareness of anything save eating or sleeping" (*Quest 63*). In this example, the disruption to his symbolic self sees Fitz behaving less like a human, but neither does he behave like an animal, as was also the case of the Forged ones investigated by Chade:

*She had lost not only the habits of a woman, but even the good sense of an animal. She would eat to satiation ... and then let fall to the floor whatever was excess ... Even most animals soil only one area of their dens.* (Apprentice 333)

Like Fitz in his time as Wolf, the Forged ones do not live as animals with no symbolic self. Rather, they become something less than an animal, with neither a symbolic

nor an animal self. Similarly, when Fitz's symbolic self is almost lost it should lead him to existing in a purely animal-like state, still instinctively fearing death but no longer contemplating or needing to repress this fear. However, the text suggests that his time in this state is not like an animal. In Hobb's world, the symbolic and animal selves are not simply opposed but also rely on each other for the normal functioning of both human beings and animals. However, the reader only fully understands that both the symbolic and animal self is disrupted in the Forged ones at the very end of the text when the Skill, the Wit, and the process of creating the Forged ones are all connected to the attainment of immortality. The Forged ones, it is eventually revealed, are a by-product of the leader of the Raiders' attempt to become immortal. In the final pages of the trilogy, Verity successfully achieves immortality, simultaneously illustrating the fusion of the Wit and the Skill, and the resolution of the opposition between the symbolic and animal selves.

## Achieving Immortality Through Monologue: The Tragic Carving of the Dragon

The final achievement of immortality is related to both the Skill and the Wit in Hobb's world, as is evidenced by the conclusion of the trilogy. Because the central concern of Becker's theory is the conflict within human beings over the fact of death, the achievement of immortality in Hobb's text is particularly interesting when viewed through the lens of Becker's animal and symbolic selves. The specific mechanics of immortality in Hobb's world both reveal the interdependence of the

symbolic and animal selves and illustrate the monological fusion of the two. Below I analyse the end of the trilogy. By using both the Wit and the Skill to achieve immortality, Becker's animal and symbolic selves are also finally brought together. By erasing the fact of death, the two sides of the human self can finally be reconciled, but only at the cost of the individual's sense of self.

The actual moment in which Verity becomes immortal shares several connections with Becker's theory of how humans cope with the inevitability of death. What Becker calls hero-systems are ways of providing a symbolic immortality to human beings so as to ease anxiety over the fact of death. The purpose of hero-systems, according to Becker, is to illustrate the value or importance of human beings. He offers a number of examples: "building an edifice that reflects human value: a temple, a cathedral, a totem pole, a sky-scraper, a family that spans three generations" (5). While it is impossible for human beings to truly defeat death, Becker argues that the achievements he lists above can offer a symbolic immortality. The end of the third book is essentially concerned with Verity's hero-system. Where Hobb's text differs from Becker's theory, is that Verity's hero-system grants him both symbolic and actual immortality. Verity initially set out to petition the Elderlings for aid, but on failing to wake the statues his only recourse is to become one himself. While this will result in his becoming immortal, this is not his central motivation for undergoing the process. Furthermore, this emphasis in the text is on the tragic loss associated with this form of immortality. It is revealed that

the Elderlings are in fact dragon statues made from a magical stone.<sup>23</sup> This stone can store the life and memories of a person to animate the statue. The carving of the statue in the novel, the creation of a monument that will outlast many human lives, is a physical reminder of Verity's life, preserving his memory for generations. This is reminiscent of a form of symbolic immortality which Becker suggests is available to mankind. Furthermore, this stone statue literally secures Verity's legacy by saving his kingdom. For Becker, this symbolic immortality would be an illusion meant to ease the knowledge of inevitable death. But in the world Hobb has created, as with fantasy in general, the symbolic is made real, and Verity is able to achieve a real immortality by investing his monument with his own life. Crucially, this immortality is created through what Becker would also consider an impossibility: the fusion of the animal and symbolic selves, as represented by the Wit and the Skill.

The method of achieving immortality is explicitly related to both magics, and this is alluded to even before Fitz catches up with Verity. On the quest to find the missing prince, Fitz and his allies come across a garden of stone dragons, unaware that

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<sup>23</sup> Throughout later additions to Hobb's trilogy it is eventually revealed that not all these statues are considered 'true' Elderlings. Rather, the original Elderlings were humans transformed through a close connection to dragons, who eventually crafted dragon bodies of their own in the form of the stone dragons. Later, coteries of Skill-users from the Six Duchies continued this practice themselves, and over time the nuance of this distinction was lost. As a result, by the time Verity attempts to create his own dragon he understands all the dragon statues to be Elderlings, and this argument will follow this understanding for simplicity.

these are the legendary Elderlings. It is clear, at least to Fitz, that they are not simply mundane sculptures. Upon finding the statues Fitz writes: "I sensed life, but there was only cold stone under my hand" (*Quest* 642). Fitz is able to sense the statues with his Wit, suggesting that they are in some way alive. This creates an interesting contrast with Fitz's understanding of the Forged ones. In contrast to the dragon statues, Fitz could not sense the Forged ones with his Wit and when he first encountered them it was as if he "watched stones rise up from the earth and quarrel and mutter at one another" (*Apprentice* 189). Where the Forged ones appeared to Fitz's Wit like animated stones, these statues are stone that seems almost alive. This connection is later reinforced when it is revealed that the Forged ones are created through a similar process as the magical dragon statues. Having found these dragon statues, Fitz and his allies finally discover Verity, and the true purpose of his quest, and the identity of the Elderlings, is made clear: "The dragons are the Elderlings ... But Verity could not wake them. So he carves his own dragon, and when it is finished, he will awaken it, and then he will go forth to fight the Red Ships. Alone" (*Quest* 711). Fitz's ability to sense the life in the dragon statues implies a connection to the Wit. The method to create these dragons, however, is more complex than it first appears, and directly involves both of Hobb's magics.

The carving of the dragon is, initially, related only to the Skill. When he is finally found, Verity is strangely distant and seems to feel no emotional connection to Fitz or his allies and is obsessed with carving a dragon out of a strange stone. Verity explains: "I have feelings. But I have put them into the dragon" (*Quest* 775).

Eventually Kestrel,<sup>24</sup> an ally of Fitz revealed to be an ancient Skill-user, explains the process in more detail: “[Verity] has been carving a dragon, and storing all his memories in it. That is part of why he seems so vague” (*Quest 703*). In order to store his memories in the dragon, Verity coated his “hands and arms in a magic river, and walked away laden with power”, a power which appears to be the pure essence of the Skill itself (*Quest 560*). Verity explicitly connects the process of infusing his memories into the dragon with the Skill to the Forged ones, saying: “I wonder if this is what it feels like to be Forged. To be able to recall what one once felt, but unable to feel it anymore. My loves, my fears, my sorrows. All have gone into the dragon” (*Quest 778*). Furthermore, like other victims of Forging, Verity appears to have lost his sense of time, as when asked how long it has been since he ate, he is only able to reply “A ... long time” (*Quest 700*). In using the Skill in this manner, Verity appears to be storing parts of his symbolic self in the stone dragon. His memories and emotions can be equated with what Becker calls a person’s life history, which he associates with the symbolic self. This offers an explanation for Verity’s strange behaviour, as part of his symbolic self is now stored in the dragon statue through his use of the Skill.

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<sup>24</sup> For most of the third book Kestrel goes by the name Kettle, in order to keep her identity secret. She only reveals her true name later in text. Throughout this thesis I refer to her as Kestrel to avoid confusion.

Over the course of the last few chapters of the trilogy, Verity is shown to place his memories and emotions into the dragon, but the reader is not immediately told what this will mean for Verity. Ultimately it is revealed that, for the dragon to awaken, Verity must sacrifice his whole Self. At first, Fitz has difficulty understanding this. Despite his repeated requests, Verity refuses to allow Fitz to join. Eventually, Verity shows Fitz the exact process in order to dissuade him: “I felt the kiss of his Skill. My anger was snatched from me, flayed whole from my soul and swept away ... I felt wretchedly ill. My anger was gone, replaced by a weary numbness” (*Quest 774*). This is a small hint of what Verity does to himself in order to finish the dragon and shows that the Skill is integral to the process. As Kestrel reveals, however, the symbolic self alone is not enough: “A whole life, willingly given. That is what it takes to make a dragon rise” (*Quest 771*). Fitz’s Wit further reveals this truth, and he explains: “When I quested towards [Verity] with the Wit, I found his life flickering between himself and the stone dragon. And of late, it seemed to burn brighter within the dragon, not Verity” (*Quest 775*). Verity’s lifeforce is eventually fully absorbed by the dragon, alongside his physical body. Crucially, Fitz uses both the Wit and the Skill to make sense of this moment, saying: “To my Wit and my Skill they disappeared as completely as if they had been Forged. For an unnerving instant, I saw Verity’s empty body. Then he flowed into the dragon” (*Quest 802*). This quote highlights that it is through both the Wit and the Skill that Fitz is able to understand what happens to Verity, because it is both the symbolic and animal selves that are required to complete the dragon. This is further supported by Verity’s physical body being used in the process, in addition to his symbolic self. While he may primarily use the Skill to infuse his symbolic self into the

magical stone, his Wit-life is also required to complete the dragon. Fitz is able to sense this through the Wit when he notes that Verity's lifeforce seems to be inside both the stone dragon and Verity's own body. The requirement for both the Wit and the Skill to complete the dragon supports Fitz's suggestion, noted earlier, that all people have some amount of both magics. Although Verity's capacity to use the Wit may be less than Fitz's, it is still necessary for the final completion of the dragon as evidenced by Fitz's unique perspective in witnessing this event with his access to both magics.

While Verity's physical body disappears, this is not the same as death, as he explains: "I will go on. As the dragon" (*Quest 774*). Verity becomes the dragon completely, achieving immortality in another form. For Becker, the fact of death means these two sides of human nature can never be reconciled. One is the very thing that will die, the other is constantly aware of this death and fears it. But in Hobb's trilogy this no longer applies. The animal and symbolic selves are no longer opposed, and immortality can be achieved. Verity will live on as a dragon forever, ready to help the Six Duchies should the need ever arise. Because the one thing holding the physical and symbolic selves apart is removed, that being the fact of death, the two can come together to create one whole, unrepressed being, represented by the dragon. Thus, the animal and symbolic selves cease to exist individually, and are monologically fused together.

The particular form of immortality in *The Farseer Trilogy* is monological as it involves the fusion not only of the animal and symbolic selves, but also the fusion of different identities. It is revealed by Kestrel that it is not just one life that is required to complete a dragon, but rather many: “those dragons that were made by Six Duchies hands were most often made by an entire coterie working together, not a single person” (*Quest* 728-729). Verity’s dragon cannot be completed by one life alone, and he must fuse his own identity with Kestrel in order to complete it. In fact, the text illustrates that there are dire consequences to attempting to retain individuality, as seen in the tragic figure of Girl-on-a-Dragon, the name given to an incomplete carving, which features a separate human figure riding the dragon. Kestrel explains: “She persisted in trying to keep her human shape, and thus she held back from filling her dragon. There she is and there she is likely to remain for all time” (*Quest* 754). Because one member of the group tried to retain her individuality, the carving ultimately failed, leaving the statue partially trapped in stone forever, and unable to fly. When Fitz does manage to awaken this statue, the attempt to retain a sense of individuality within the dragon remains unsuccessful: “Perhaps her eyes saw, but she was no more separate from the dragon than its tail or wing; merely another appendage” (*Quest* 806-807). This reveals the true sacrifice that Verity has to make in order to finish his dragon. While he may become immortal, he will no longer truly be Verity, but rather a fusion of his own and Kestrel’s identities. Like the animal and symbolic selves, the individual consciousnesses of Verity and Kestrel cease to exist after the dragon is completed. This can be seen as a monological fusion, or synthesis, of their two identities.

The achievement of immortality ends the conflict between the symbolic and animal self, as the cause of that conflict, the fact of death, no longer applies. However, as Becker argues, the problem of death is a defining attribute of humanity. It makes sense, then, that the form of immortality seen in Hobb's series also disrupts Verity's nature as a human being. Verity knows that Fitz does not understand the sacrifice that he must make to complete the dragon, hence his refusal to allow him to join. It is Kestrel who eventually explains to Fitz: "[Verity] says you love your life too much, he will not take it from you. That you have already laid down too much of it for a king who has returned you only pain and hardship" (*Quest 772*). Kestrel reveals that Verity views this sacrifice as too great for Fitz to undertake. What is not revealed until after Verity becomes a dragon, however, is that he not only gives up his individuality but also his humanity. After Verity's dragon is completed and flies to the Six Duchies to defeat the Raiders, Fitz is left alone to fight against the forces of Prince Regal, who have come to kill Verity and secure the quarry of magical stone. It is then that Fitz discovers how to awaken the rest of the dragons by using his Wit and an offering of blood. However, it seems that their time in the forms of dragons has deeply influenced their nature, as Fitz realises when trying to communicate with one in particular: "there was little human left about him. Stone and souls had merged, to become dragons in truth" (*Quest 817*). These beings are no longer human, revealing what will eventually be Verity's fate. Fitz explains how he relates to the dragons: "We understood one another as carnivores do. They had hunted as a pack before" (*Quest 817*). While the Skill may be the primary magic involved in the creation of the dragons, it is through the Wit that Fitz is able to communicate with them, because the Skill has only been shown to work between human minds. This

further highlights the link between the dragons and both forms of magic, not just the Skill. In the immortal dragons, the symbolic self no longer needs to fear the animal self and its inevitable death, and so the two merge into one single unrepressed self that can no longer be considered truly human. Thus, Verity's sacrifice is complete. Not only does he lose his individual identity, but he also loses his humanity. While the achievement of immortality does result in the salvation of the Six Duchies, it is nonetheless strongly associated with sacrifice and tragedy. This tragedy, I argue, is related to the inherently monological nature of this process, and the loss of individuality, and humanity, it requires.

In *The Farseer Trilogy*, while immortality is associated with the successful resolution of the plot and the saving of the Six Duchies, there is also an inherent loss or tragedy associated with it. Anna Vaninskaya argues that a central element of William Morris' romances, foundational texts for the fantasy genre, is the "honourable death of the individual to ensure the continuation of life for the community" (10). Verity does make this sacrifice for the good of his kingdom, but rather than death, the sacrifice is immortality. In many ways this draws Hobb closer to Tolkien's writing which concerns "the weariness of life attendant upon endless existence" (Vaninskaya 8). While the reader is not privy to Verity's feelings after he becomes a dragon, his endless non-human existence is represented as tragic for those he leaves behind. Thus, Verity's immortality is not simply the successful end of the plot but a sacrifice he must make for the greater good of his kingdom. The

tragedy of Verity's immortality is fundamentally due to his inability to engage in dialogue once he becomes the dragon. Verity's sacrifice is explained by Kestrel:

He leaves behind his throne, his pretty, loving wife, his love of doing things with his hands. He leaves behind riding a fine horse, hunting stags, walking amongst his own people. Oh, I feel them all within the dragon already ... It is hard for him. But he does it, and the pain it costs him is one more thing he puts into the dragon. (*Quest 772*)

While Verity does become immortal he leaves a great deal behind in the process, particularly his connection to his loved ones. This is made clear in the epilogue when Fitz, many years after the events of the trilogy, attempts to contact Verity with the Skill: "I even reached for Verity-as-Dragon, imploring him to hear me and answer. He did not." (*Quest 837*). With Verity gone, Fitz is no longer able to converse with another practicing Skill-user. He explains that the "torment" of reaching out with the Skill "is that no one ever reaches back" (*Quest 837*). For Fitz, Verity's immortality represents the loss of his one connection through the Skill, as well as an uncle he had come to love. The tragedy of being unable to communicate with Verity is shared by all of his loved ones, including his wife and unborn child. Thus, a primary source of the tragedy associated with Verity's immortality is related to the inability to communicate with others.

While his loved ones experience the tragedy of being unable to contact Verity, the primary loss that he personally experiences is his own subjectivity. Bakhtin considers the preservation of plurality a defining element of dialogue, making

dialectics explicitly monological: “If we ... erase the divisions between voices ..., which is possible at the extreme (Hegel’s monological dialectic), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill)” (*Speech Genres*, 162). Verity’s transformation into a dragon requires him to merge his identity with Kestrel and can be seen as a “dissolution of consciousnesses into one consciousness ... the removal of individuation” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 288). For Bakhtin, this process is inherently monological, as it reduces plurality and erases any possibility of further dialogue between alterities. Thus, the tragedy of Hobb’s representation of immortality is fundamentally related to the issue of dialogue. By resisting the possibility of communicating with his loved ones, and erasing Verity’s subjectivity, this form of immortality precludes any possibility of dialogical contact.

To conclude, in the final scenes of *The Farseer Trilogy*, both the Wit and the Skill are used together to create the dragon and overcome death. After Verity becomes a dragon, he flies back to his kingdom and defeats the Red Ship Raiders, thus overcoming not only his own death, but that of the Six Duchies as well. Throughout the books the Wit and Skill are presented as inherently opposed alongside the same lines as the symbolic and animal selves. The fusion of these two seeming opposites is essential for achieving immortality, but this immortality comes at a price. The monologue this creates reduces individuality. It erases the distinction between the symbolic and animal selves as well as the distinction between the individuals fused into the dragon itself. The resolution to the Wit/Skill and animal/symbolic

opposition is, therefore, monological, and this is seen as a tragedy within the context of Hobb's text. The cost of immortality is the same as that of monologue, which according to Bakhtin is the reduction of plurality. Hobb's text is interesting because it makes use of both dialogue and monologue throughout. Comparing this process to the other two texts studied is therefore valuable in understanding their own relationship to immortality and monologue.

### Achieving Immortality in *Mistborn* and *The Broken Earth*

From the origin of fantasy as a distinct genre in the 1960s, the problem of death and immortality has been a central theme.<sup>25</sup> It is no surprise, then, that immortality is an important element in all three texts studied here. While the central opposition in *The Farseer Trilogy* is between the animal and symbolic selves, as represented by the Wit and the Skill, the result of this resolution is immortality. Below I discuss the other two texts in conjunction with Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy*, to compare their respective representations of immortality. I argue that there are a number of similarities between the three texts but, nevertheless, the respective concern of each text with dialogue or monologue manifests in several key differences in the way they portray immortality. I begin with Sanderson's *Mistborn* series, highlighting how immortality is achieved through a monological process, similar to that seen in

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<sup>25</sup> For more on this history, see Anna Vaninskaya's *Fantasies of Time and Death* (2020).

*The Farseer Trilogy*. While the route to immortality is very similar in both series, *The Farseer Trilogy* highlights the tragedy of Verity's immortality in a way not seen in *Mistborn*. As a result, while immortality itself is monological in Sanderson's text, dialogue remains possible after it is achieved. After this, I analyse Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy, in which the route to immortality is dialogical. In this latter example, dialogue is central to the process for attaining immortality, and remains a possibility after it is achieved.

In *Mistborn*, as in *The Farseer Trilogy*, immortality is achieved through monologue. However, unlike Hobbs' series, *Mistborn* does not see immortality as tragic. Rather, it portrays immortality as a relatively straightforward culmination of the central plot. Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy contains a number of characters who wield the power of a god, and in so doing achieve a form of immortality. True immortality is not seen until the end of the text, however, when Sazed takes on the power of both Ruin and Preservation. As discussed in chapter one, this process is inherently monological due to the dialectical nature of fusing two oppositions into a synthesis. Where *The Farseer Trilogy* focused on the sense of loss surrounding Verity's immortality, Sazed's apotheosis is more concerned with his renewed faith. While Sazed's immortality is a result of his apotheosis, it is interesting to note his initial lack of faith in the final book of the trilogy. Throughout *The Hero of Ages*, Sazed struggles with his beliefs, particularly with his task of preserving religions deemed heretical by the Final Empire. After witnessing the deaths of his friends and allies in the second book, he begins to question the purpose of these religions: "All the

religions in his collection were alike in one respect; they had failed. The people who'd followed them had died, been conquered, their religions stamped out" (*Hero* 273). Sazed spends much of the third book categorising every religion he has collected in an effort to find one that is true, discarding any with obvious contradictions or that otherwise failed. At the end of the text, despite Vin's defeat of Ruin, the damage to the world has already been done and the world will soon end anyway. It is only after gaining access to the powers of both Ruin and Preservation, that Sazed realises the true value of the many religions he has collected:

And, in that moment of transcendence, he understood it all. He saw the patterns, the clues, the secrets. Men had believed and worshipped for as long as they had existed, and within those beliefs, Sazed found the answers he needed. (*Hero* 716).

Sazed's apotheosis is directly linked with his renewed faith, as he explains: "*The religions in my portfolio weren't useless after all, he thought ... They weren't all true. But they all had truth*" (*Hero* 717). In the final pages of *Mistborn*, every religion Sazed preserved gives him a clue to repairing the damage done to the world. Where Hobb's text emphasised the things Verity sacrifices in order to gain immortality, *Mistborn* links Sazed's apotheosis with the renewal of his faith. His discovery that the collected beliefs have value allow him to restore the world, save humanity, and become a god himself.

Sazed's apotheosis is represented as a complete transcendence of the physical world. This is particularly clear when considering the effect that this form of immortality has on the physical body. The moment Sazed becomes immortal is described thus: "He drew them [Ruin and Preservation] in, feeling them infuse his body, making him burn. His flesh and bones evaporated" (*Hero 715*). Sazed's form of immortality sees him lose his physical form altogether when he fully embraces the power of Ruin and Preservation. Unlike Verity, Sazed retains no physical presence after his ascension to godhood, rather he exists as a disembodied force. While this may be considered a form of loss, the text instead focuses on the benefits of this existence, as it fulfils the prophecy at the centre of the series:

It wasn't until that moment that Sazed understood the term Hero of Ages.  
Not a Hero that came once in the ages. But a Hero that would span the ages.  
A Hero who would preserve mankind throughout all its lives and times.  
(*Hero 718*)

Rather than emphasising Sazed's separation from the world and his loved ones, as was seen in Verity's case, this passage emphasises the benefits of Sazed's disembodied existence, namely, his ability to protect the world for all time. Verity is similarly represented as an eternal protector of his realm, falling asleep in his dragon form to be woken when the need arises. However, the text makes clear that this state prevents him from interacting with his loved ones, and the loss of his human body is considered tragic. For Verity, interaction with others becomes an impossibility, due both to the erasure of his individual identity and his long sleep following the events of the book. For Sazed, although monologue is central to the

way he becomes immortal, dialogue remains a possibility after he does so, as he is able to continue interacting with the world.

The sacrifices that Verity must make to achieve immortality are all inherently related to the loss of the ability to engage in dialogue. In contrast, Sazed remains able to engage in dialogue, and so his apotheosis is represented as purely beneficial, without the tragic sacrifice seen in Hobb's trilogy. Sazed's continued ability to communicate is emphasised at the end of the *Mistborn* trilogy, in direct contrast to Hobb's series. The moment Sazed takes up the power of Ruin and Preservation is also the moment he discovers the bodies of Elend and Vin, killed in their battle against the forces of Ruin. The death of these two protagonists is certainly tragic, but this tragedy is not directly related to the process of becoming a god.

Furthermore, the tragedy of these deaths is undercut by Sazed's ability to continue to communicate with them. After he ascends and saves the world, Sazed leaves instructions for the survivors of the final events of the series. He writes: "*be assured that I have spoken with our friends [Vin and Elend], and they are quite happy where they are. They deserve a rest, I think*" (Hero 723). Where Verity's immortality is defined by what he loses, specifically his connection to others, Sazed can continue to speak with the spirits of his fallen friends and communicate with his still living allies. Thus, immortality in Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy is never related to any of the tragic sacrifices which are a requirement of Verity's immortal.

Both *Mistborn* and *The Farseer Trilogy* portray immortality monologically, in that the process involves the complete fusion of opposites. However, the representation of the result of that process is quite different between the two trilogies. Hobb's trilogy consistently shows the possibility of both dialogue and monologue, particularly in the operation of the Skill and the Wit. While both of these magics come together monologically to achieve immortality, dialogue remains central to the way characters, particularly Fitz, interact with each other. Thus, Verity's immortality is tragic precisely because it denies him the possibility of dialogue. Verity can no longer engage in dialogue because 'Verity', as an individual, no longer exists. Furthermore, the dragon that Verity becomes similarly cannot engage in dialogue, because it falls into a long sleep following the fulfilment of its duty. On the other hand, *Mistborn* allows dialogue to continue after immortality is achieved, even when immortality is itself achieved through a monologic synthesis. Sazed's continued interaction with the world, and his ability to communicate with loved ones both alive and dead, result in a more positive representation of the achievement of immortality.

Where both *Mistborn* and *The Farseer Trilogy* represented immortality monologically, through the dialectical synthesis of oppositions or individualities, *The Broken Earth* trilogy portrays immortality dialogically, providing a contrast to the other two texts studied. The representation of immortality in *The Broken Earth* is associated with tragedy but is not as restricting as seen in *The Farseer Trilogy*. By the end of *The Broken Earth* trilogy, due to repeated use of powerful magic, Essun

has slowly begun turning into stone. This is revealed to be the first step in the irreversible process of becoming an immortal stone eater. Stone eaters are powerful and mysterious beings, taking the appearance of humanoid statues. The process to transform Essun into a stone eater is completed by Hoa, Essun's stone eater ally, who is also revealed to be the narrator of the trilogy. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, the form of the second-person narrative used throughout *The Broken Earth* is revealed to be part of this process of attaining immortality. In order to ensure that the immortal Essun can retain something of her personality, Hoa recounts her life story during the transformation into a stone eater: "I have told you this story, primed what remains of you, to retain as much as possible of who you were" (*Stone* 397). The specific way in which he constructs her identity follows Bakhtin's thoughts on dialogue, which he defines as "a special form of interaction among autonomous ... consciousnesses" (284). Throughout the trilogy the narrator, Hoa, repeatedly places great emphasis on Essun's interaction with others because, he explains, "a person is herself, and others. Relationships chisel the final shape of one's being" (*Obelisk* 1). The use of the term 'chisel' is significant, as much like Verity, Essun's particular form of immortality involves her turning to stone. Thus, Hoa's explanation highlights the importance of Essun's dialogical interaction with others as essential in the final outcome of her form of immortality.

While dialogue is essential for Essun to achieve immortality, there are tragic elements of this process which are directly related to the inability to communicate with loved ones. This tragedy is complex, however, and Essun's separation from her

daughter also comes at the moment the two characters are able to reconcile. In *Mistborn* the deaths of the protagonists occur in conjunction with the process of achieving immortality but are not essential elements in that process. In contrast, Essun must explicitly choose to die before she can become a stone eater, and thus her immortality is directly linked to the separation from her loved ones. In the climax of *The Broken Earth*, Essun's decision to complete her transformation into stone comes at the same moment she effectively 'dies' to save her daughter. Both characters find themselves on opposite sides of the conflict over the fate of the world. The final scene sees them confront one another to try and magically enact their opposed plans. They are evenly matched, but as Hoa explains: "To keep fighting will kill you both. The only way to win, then, is not to fight anymore" (*Stone* 385). Rather than see her daughter die, Essun instead "dragged all of the terrible transforming curls of magic toward [her]self", choosing to allow herself to be turned to stone rather than her daughter (*Stone* 385-386). This begins the process by which Hoa completes her transformation, and her achievement of immortality. However, for Essun's daughter, Nassun, she truly dies. The tragedy of this moment is enhanced by the fact that Nassun blames herself: "she has killed her mother ... the world just takes and takes and takes from her and leaves *nothing*" (*Stone* 387). However, this is also the moment in which Nassun begins to forgive her mother, as explained by Hoa: "even as you died, you were reaching for the Moon. And for her" (*Stone* 387). In this moment Nassun understands that, despite everything the world had done to her, her mother was still fighting to save humanity and her daughter. In Hobb's trilogy, the tragedy of Verity's transformation is linked to his separation from those he leaves behind. Similarly, in *The Broken Earth*, Essun's immortality is

directly linked to her separation from her daughter. However, this moment is also seen as a reconciliation between Essun and Nassun, whose inability to communicate almost results in the death of humanity. Nassun's choice to continue with Essun's plan to save humanity symbolises her willingness to forgive her mother. While the text ends with the two characters unable to interact, Essun's achievement of immortality is nonetheless associated with a final dialogical interaction in which she and her daughter are able to understand each other for the first time.

Dialogue is not only important for Essun to become immortal but continues to be possible afterwards. Essun and Verity's forms of immortality share a relationship to materiality. Unlike Sazed, they both retain a material form as beings made of stone. However, Essun's stone form, while distancing her from her previous humanity, is nonetheless represented positively, and unlike Verity she is not prevented from engaging in dialogue. Hoa reveals that the transformation into a stone eater is not perfect and there is "always loss, with change" (*Stone* 397). Stone eaters are described as uncanny figures, with great emphasis placed on their physical appearance: "the gray granite of its flesh, the undifferentiated slick of its hair, the slightly greater polish of its eyes. Carefully sculpted length and weight of jaw, and its torso finely carved with male human musculature" (*Obelisk* 250). While they are humanoid, they are not human, and the uncanny nature of their presence is revealed through the geologically inflected language that is often used to describe them. After her transformation Essun is described using similar language: "Locs of roped jasper. Skin of striated ocher marble that suggests laugh lines at eyes and

mouth, and stratified layers of clothing” (*Stone* 397). Nevertheless, this form is described as “beautiful” by Hoa, and his success at finally transforming her into a stone eater leads him to regret his “inability to leap into the air and whoop for joy” (*Stone* 397-8). This final scene is, therefore, represented in a much more joyful manner than was seen in *The Farseer Trilogy*. Furthermore, Essun’s immortal stone body allows her to continue her interaction with the world, and retains her individuality, unlike Verity who must sacrifice both. Like Sazed, after she becomes immortal, Essun is free to continue interacting with the world and commits to making it a better place, despite the length of time such a project might take:

“It might take some time.”

“I don’t think I’m very patient.” But you take my hand.

Don’t be patient. Don’t ever be. This is the way a new world begins.

“Neither am I,” I say. “So let’s get to it.” (*Stone* 398)

These are the final lines of the trilogy, and they serve to highlight the fact that Essun will continue to exist and live outside the events of the text. Unlike Verity, who must sleep as a dragon with no way of communicating with the world, Essun’s story potentially goes on. This possibility of continuing communication is essential in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue as he writes that “dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end” (*Problems* 252). This is reinforced by Hoa’s commitment to not limit Essun’s personality through his narration. During her transformation he explains to Essun that he is retelling her own story “[n]ot to force [her] into a particular shape” (*Stone* 397). He further explains: “From here on, you may become whomever you wish. It’s just that you need to know where you’ve

come from to know where you're going" (*Stone* 397). Unlike Verity, Essun is free to continue changing and interacting with the world even in her immortal state, offering the possibility of growth despite the tragedy associated with gaining immortality. The immortal Essun remains capable of interacting with others and forming new relationships. In other words, dialogue continues to be possible.

In both *The Farseer Trilogy* and *Mistborn*, immortality is represented monologically, through the synthesis of alterities. While they portray the method of achieving immortality in similar ways, these two texts differ in the effect this immortality has on the individual. For Hobb, this monological immortality is a tragic necessity. As such, the emphasis lies on what Verity gives up. Verity loses his individuality and his ability to interact with his loved ones. In contrast, Sazed remains able to communicate. While immortality is achieved monologically in *Mistborn*, dialogue remains possible afterwards. Becker links the idea of immortality to a monument that will outlast an individual life, thus achieving a form of symbolic immortality. Interestingly, both Essun and Verity achieve immortality through a process linked to stone and materiality. Verity carves a literal monument, a dragon, and infuses it with his identity. Essun essentially becomes a monument herself, living forever as an animated stone statue. However, the specific route to this immortality is different. Essun's immortality is dialogical, and linked to a process of identity formation which relies on her interactions with others. This interaction is able to continue after she becomes a stone eater, reflecting the essential unfinalisability that Bakhtin argues is inherent in dialogue. While Essun does lose her former life as

a human, and her connection to her daughter, she is able to continue interacting with the world and trying to make it a better place. Like Verity, Essun must sacrifice her connections to her loved ones, specifically her daughter, in order to become immortal. However, like for Sazed, the possibility of further dialogue remains.



## Chapter Three – Self and Other in N.K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* Trilogy: The Dialogical Self and Second-Person Narration

### Introduction

N.K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* trilogy has received a great deal of critical, popular, and academic acclaim, being one of the few fantasy series of recent years to achieve such widespread regard. In so doing, the series has inspired a number of debates, particularly over how the legacy of slavery and environmental disaster are represented in fantasy fiction.<sup>26</sup> One prominent aspect of the text, which this chapter analyses, is how the series illustrates the process of identity formation and how this is related to the seemingly clear opposition between Self and Other. This element of the text is expressed through Jemisin’s particular use of second-person narration, and the degree to which the reader is encouraged to become immersed in, and participate with, the series. Ultimately, Jemisin’s text illustrates a specifically dialogical view of the formation of the Self, which can be read through Bakhtin’s theories of the subject as understood through Dialogical Self Theory (DST).

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<sup>26</sup> For recent work on Jemisin’s series see Kathleen Murphey’s “Science Fiction/Fantasy Takes on Slavery: N.K. Jemisin and Tomi Adeyemi” (2018), the chapter “Geological Insurrections: Politics of Planetary Weirding from China Miéville to N.K. Jemisin” by Moritz Ingwersen in *Spaces and Fictions of the Weird and the Fantastic* (2019), or Kim Wickham’s “Identity, Memory, Slavery: Second-Person Narration in N.K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* Trilogy” (2019).

*The Broken Earth* is primarily written in the second person, interspersed with some third- and, later, first-person sections. The story follows Essun who, as an orogene, must hide her powerful magical abilities to avoid persecution. Orogenes are capable of sensing and manipulating seismic activity in Jemisin's world. They are essential for their ability to suppress the world's extremely common seismic events, but are also feared for their destructive potential. Over the course of the series the reader is presented with the brutal ways in which orogenes are treated in this world. Orogenes are confined to institutions responsible for training and housing them, occasionally being sent out on assignments. However, these institutions are extremely controlling and often violent. Essun, at the beginning of the series, has escaped one of these institutions and is living as a 'normal' human. Over the course of the trilogy, she is forced to confront her traumatic history after her son is beaten to death by her husband, who discovers him using orogenic abilities. Essun sets out to find her husband who has left with their daughter, Nassun, in an attempt to 'cure' her of her own orogenic powers. She soon meets Hoa, a young child alone in the world after the start of a fifth season, which refers to a cycle of catastrophic events which result in a period of extreme hardship and scarcity. While searching for her daughter, Essun discovers more about the nature of the world she lives in and becomes involved in a conflict over the fate of humanity. The climax of the series sees Essun reunited with her daughter, only to discover they are on two different sides of this conflict. Over the course of the trilogy, it is revealed that Essun has lived as different identities throughout her past, under the names Damaya and Syenite, in an effort to cope with the trauma she has experienced. A central aspect of her story is the need to come to terms with this trauma and her

previous identities, and this is later linked to the overall plot of saving the world and ending the cycle of destruction. Ultimately, the reader learns that the narrator has been Hoa all along, revealed to be an immortal creature called a stone eater. Hoa's narration is an attempt to guide Essun through the process that will transform her into a stone eater as well, and to ensure that some of her identity survives the process by retelling the events of her life. This element of identity creation through narration is the central aspect that my analysis focuses on.

The particular form of identity formation in *The Broken Earth* promotes a dialogical view of the Self, particularly in the representation of the relationship between the Self and the Other. The process of identity formation seen in the series includes the character Essun, her former identities, the narrator, and the reader, in a complex process that blurs the line between Self and Other and questions the idea of an immutable Self. This complex process can be best understood through Dialogical Self Theory (DST), which will highlight the inherently dialogical nature of the Self represented in *The Broken Earth*. The importance of identity formation in the series is related to the trilogy's connection to what has been called the contemporary novel of slavery. Below I present some of the key concepts from DST in order to understand the particular form of identity formation found in Jemisin's trilogy. I then argue that this form of identity formation is particularly significant in the text due to the series' connection to Arlene Keizer's notion of the contemporary novel of slavery. I then present the concepts of participation and immersion as a way of explaining how the text not only describes a dialogical process of identity formation,

but also includes the reader in that process. Finally, I analyse how identity formation appears in the text itself, paying particular attention to the way the text resolves the opposition between Self and Other. Ultimately, I argue that the concerns of the contemporary novel of slavery and Jemisin's complex narrative structure come together to present a specifically dialogical view of the Self, following the work of Bakhtin and DST.

### *Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and the Idea of the Unified Self*

Where previous chapters discussed dialogue in relation to oppositions between 'good' and 'evil' and divisions within the Self, this chapter is concerned with the relationship to the Other both within and outside the Self. As such, it is more closely associated with Bakhtin's original concept of dialogue. DST was originally developed by Hubert Hermans and his colleagues, who brought together Bakhtin's theory of dialogue with recent developments in theories of the Self. In his discussion of Dostoevsky's work, Bakhtin states that: "What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world*" (6). For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the preeminent example of dialogue in literature. This is the basis of Bakhtin's theory of the polyphonic novel, a novel in which dialogue can take place because of the multitude of different 'voices' within it. The voices in a polyphonic novel do not exist as elements of the author's storytelling tools, or simple methods of delivering plot.

Rather, they are true individuals who the protagonist must interact with, all the while having their own identities, goals, and desires. Similarly, DST views the Self not as a single immutable whole but rather as a multitude of different positions which interact through dialogue. The Self is, according to DST, the result of this dialogue. Below I introduce some key concepts from DST, before discussing its connection to the contemporary novel of slavery and *The Broken Earth* trilogy.

A key element of DST is the view that the Self is not a self-contained whole. Rather, DST sees the Self as a “dynamic multiplicity of I-positions each of which can be endowed with a voice” (Bertau xii). The term ‘I-positions’ fuses the two aspects of the self that DST is interested in, multiplicity and unity: “by attributing an ‘I,’ ‘me,’ or ‘mine’ imprint to different and even contradictory positions in the self” (Hermans, *Positioning* 9). Thus, while the Self appears to be a singular whole, for DST the ‘unified’ Self is formed through the interaction, or dialogue, between different I-positions: “the self only exists as it relates to other selves, who exist as they relate to other selves, and so on” (Bertau xiii). These different I-positions can be voiced so that “dialogical exchanges can develop” between them, which results in a “complex, narratively structured self” (Hermans, *Handbook* 15). DST is inspired by Bakhtin’s concept of the polyphonic novel, which, according to him, is the result of “not a single author at work ... but *several* authors or thinkers, represented by characters” (Hermans, *Handbook* 18). The polyphonic novel, for Bakhtin, is created through the interaction of these independent characters. Similarly, DST views the Self as constructed from the interaction of independent I-positions within the Self.

This is inspired by further work from Bakhtin, who also wrote about “the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness”, further arguing that “I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself” (*Problems* 287). In the same way that Bakhtin argued for the centrality of the Other in relation to the formation of the Self, for DST the Self is created through the interaction between different I-positions “both within the self and between self and perceived or imagined others” (Hermans, *Handbook* 15). Thus, both Bakhtin and DST take a dialogical view of the Self as created through the interaction between different positions, rather than existing as a monological whole.

While DST is directly inspired by Bakhtin’s work on the polyphonic novel, Hermans’ theory moves beyond the field of literary analysis into psychology. Nevertheless, DST’s connection to Bakhtin, and its particular resonance with the way identity is portrayed in *The Broken Earth*, make this theory useful in understanding Jemisin’s trilogy. Where Bakhtin exclusively wrote regarding different characters within a text, DST sees different I-positions both internal and external to the Self. Internal I-positions are illustrated in the trilogy through the inclusion of Damaya and Syenite. As has been observed, Damaya and Syenite are two of Essun’s former identities. Initially, these characters are presented as entirely separate from Essun. The reader is not aware that they are in fact the same person. The characters are treated in an entirely different way to Essun, with their story being related in the third person rather than second person, separating them narratively. Over the course of the

series the reader learns that these identities were created as a way of helping Essun cope with traumatic events. This illustrates a central tenet of DST, that being the idea that a person takes on different I-positions over time that change as a result of their interaction with other I-positions, both in themselves and their external environment. As a result of her traumatic experiences Essun's identity fragments, she literally takes on different I-positions. Due to its relation to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue, and its explicit interest in the Self as constructed through dialogue, DST can offer a particular insight into Jemisin's text, in which the formation of Essun's Self is tied to her relationship to external and internal I-positions.

DST is, at its core, a real-world psychological theory regarding the structure of the human Self. There is an important distinction that should be made between DST and the way I use it in my analysis. There are, of course, many ways in which the trilogy diverges from DST's view of the development of the Self. For example, DST does have a developmental element, with some theories suggesting that dialogicality can be observed soon after birth: "with 24-hour-old babies, newborns appear to discriminate between self- and non-self-stimulation" (Hermans, *Handbook* 72). Other studies even suggest that this development begins prenatally, suggesting that dialogicality is an essential element of the fundamental formation of the Self (Hermans, *Handbook* 71). The question of whether dialogicality is developed post- or pre-birth is an important debate within DST itself, but one which does not appear in *The Broken Earth*. Within Jemisin's trilogy the reader only sees the fragmentation of Essun's Self after she experiences trauma as a young girl, as if

before this point the Self is a unified whole. Essun's fragmentary Self, and different I-positions, are illustrated in the creation of new identities in the face of traumatic events. This allows her to cope with the trauma, but also becomes an obstacle, as she cannot fully unify her identity until she can reconcile these different I-positions. DST would suggest this fragmentation is already present and an element of the normal operation of the Self. Nevertheless, this 'pre-fragmentary' Self seen in the beginning of the trilogy does give way to a dialogically formed Self by the end of the series. Thus, the conclusion of *The Broken Earth* does suggest that the 'unified' Self is in fact the result of the dialogue between different I-positions, following the central thesis of DST. While there are important distinctions between the Self in *The Broken Earth* trilogy and in DST, DST nonetheless offers useful terminology to understand how Jemisin's series resolves the fragmentation of Essun's Self.

In my analysis of the text, I will use the term 'I-positions' to refer to both Essun's previous identities and the other characters she interacts with on her journey. I argue that *The Broken Earth* follows her attempt to reform her identity which fractured due to traumatic experiences. Following DST, it is Essun's interaction, or dialogue, with these different I-positions which results in the formation of her Self. This concern with the formation of identity links Jemisin's series to Keizer's concept of the contemporary novel of slavery. Below I introduce Keizer's work and explain how Jemisin's series relates to it. This is primarily seen in the central concern the trilogy has with post-trauma identity, and informs the thematic interests of the text and the specific type of identity formation it portrays.

## *The Self in Neo-Slave Narratives*

While Jemisin's trilogy is a fantasy and does not directly represent the real-world experiences of enslaved people, it is inspired by these experiences and the legacy of slavery, a fact which Jemisin has addressed directly: "I think it's pretty obvious that I'm drawing on the human history of structural oppression, as well as my feelings about this moment in American history" (qtd. in Cunningham). As Kim Wickham points out, orogeny does not seem to be tied to race in Jemisin's world, but the texts are nonetheless "clearly concerned with the legacy of slavery and marginalization, and they resonate with the project of Black identity formation" (392). In this way *The Broken Earth* engages with the concerns of the contemporary novel of slavery as defined by Arlene Keizer, who iterates on the previous work of Bernard Bell and Ashraf Rushdy.<sup>27</sup> This is not the first study to connect the series to neo-slave narratives and the project of identity formation. Kim Wickham, in "Identity, Memory, Slavery: Second-Person Narration in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth Trilogy*" (2019), uses Keizer's definition of the contemporary novel of slavery

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<sup>27</sup> The term 'neoslave narrative' was coined by Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Traditions* (1987), and the definition was refined by Ashraf Rushdy in *Neo-Slave Narratives* (1999). Arlene Keizer uses the term 'contemporary novel of slavery' to encompass as wide a number of texts as possible, and to create a distinction between the strict definition of neo-slave narrative and the texts she studies. The nuances of this debate go beyond the scope of this chapter. I use both 'contemporary novel of slavery' and 'neo-slave narrative' interchangeably, as both are concerned with identity formation in the face of trauma which is the main subject of this analysis. For more on this distinction see the introduction to Keizer's *Black Subjects* (2004).

to describe Jemisin's trilogy, specifically in relation to its representation of identity formation (392). However, this is the first study to make use of terminology from DST to understand this process, particularly in relation to the dialogical view of the Self that the text proposes. Below I highlight the connections between Jemisin's series and the contemporary novel of slavery in relation to the project of identity formation. This connection, I argue, explains the primary concern of the trilogy with the process of identity formation, which further explains the complex narrative system utilised by Jemisin to engage the reader in the process as well.

The neo-slave narrative, according to Joan Anim-Addo and Helena Lima in "The Power of the Neo-Slave Narrative Genre" (2018), is in part a response to the slave narratives of the abolitionist movement during the transatlantic slave trade. These accounts appeared towards the end of the eighteenth century and detailed the lives of former enslaved peoples from all across the "Black Atlantic – that fluid geographical area encompassing the West African littoral, Britain, British America, eastern Canada, and the Caribbean" (Gould 11). Slave narratives, however, changed and adapted in response to the different abolitionist movements throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, becoming an "increasingly popular and effective political means of fighting slavery" (Gould 11).<sup>28</sup> These narratives

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the history of the slave narrative, see "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative" by Philip Gould in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (2007) edited by Audrey Fisch.

necessarily contained gaps in their accounts, which Keizer refers to as “speaking silences” (3). Toni Morrison, whose writing is central to the neo-slave narrative genre, explains these silences:

As determined as these black writers were to persuade the reader of the evil of slavery, they also complimented him by assuming his nobility of heart and his high-mindedness. They tried to summon up his finer nature in order to encourage him to employ it. (68)

Essentially, the premise for these abolitionist slave narratives was the assumption that the (white) reader could be convinced of the evils of slavery and therefore would be morally obligated to help end it. However, in an effort to treat these readers as noble, morally superior people, these slave narratives were obliged to omit the more graphic elements of an enslaved person’s experience so as not to risk offending their readers by “being too angry, or by showing too much outrage, or by calling the reader names” (Morrison 67). Anim-Addo and Lima support this by arguing that these ‘silences’ are “due to authorial compromises to white audiences” but also serve the purpose of protecting the authors themselves by “self-masking from a painful past” (1-2). Morrison goes on to discuss the negative impacts of this approach on those authors: “In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they ‘forgot’ many other things” (70). One concern that Morrison highlights is the fact that current generations no longer have access “to the unwritten interior life of these people” (71). These ‘speaking silences’, the danger of forgetting, and the

recovery of memory are also all central aspects of the form of identity formation found in the neo-slave narrative and *The Broken Earth* trilogy.

It is important to note that I do not argue that *The Broken Earth* is a slave narrative, nor is the purpose of this analysis to determine the trilogy's classification as a contemporary novel of slavery or a neo-slave narrative. Nevertheless, there are connections between the series and the concerns of neo-slave narratives, and the trilogy is certainly inspired by the real-world history and legacy of slavery. This inspiration can be seen at a number of points throughout *The Broken Earth*. At one point Syenite describes orogenes explicitly as "slaves" (*Fifth* 348). Furthermore, the dominant society in Jemisin's world officially considers orogenes as non-human: "any degree of orogenic ability must be assumed to negate its corresponding personhood. [Orogenes] are rightfully to be held and regarded as an inferior and dependent species" (*Obelisk* 258). This reflects the language of scientific racism used during the Enlightenment that sought to justify the system of slavery. As Andrew Curran writes in *The Anatomy of Blackness* (2011), during the eighteenth century "the black African's presumed natural alterity ... replaced theological and even economic justifications as the most compelling rationale for African chattel slavery" (168). In Jemisin's trilogy, the official designation of orogenes as non-human justifies their cruel treatment, in much the same way as seen in the real-world history of slavery. These are just a few examples of the way the history and legacy of slavery can be seen as integral elements of *The Broken Earth*, even if the trilogy does not directly recount real experiences of enslaved peoples. In describing

the contemporary novel of slavery Keizer observes that, while many authors write novels that “explicitly reference nineteenth-century, first-person, literate slave testimony”, other writers “move so far beyond the traditional narratives that their works are not bound by that frame of reference” (3). Jemisin’s trilogy is an example of a text which moves beyond the traditional narratives, not only due to its nature as a fantasy series but also as a result of the way the text plays with narrative perspective. In this way *The Broken Earth* represents a text at the ‘border’ of the neo-slave narrative, as Jeffery Tucker puts it, who identifies works that participate in genres like fantasy to “prompt reconsiderations of what contemporary writing about slavery can do” (250). While there are direct references to the real history of slavery in the trilogy, the connection to neo-slave narratives is more correctly seen in its concern with post-trauma identity formation.

The project of contemporary novels of slavery, Keizer argues, is to recover ‘speaking silences’ by representing “the nature and formation of black subjects ... by using slave characters and the condition of slavery as focal points” (1). Keizer further identifies two central elements of the contemporary novel of slavery:

- (1) that the text is explicitly concerned with subjectivity/subject formation,
- and (2) that the text examines subjectivity/subject formation in a sustained fashion, such that one can argue convincingly that the work has an identifiable approach to identity and the means by which it is achieved. (12)

This offers a useful definition of the contemporary novel of slavery which, I argue, does apply to *The Broken Earth*. The centrality of identity formation in the text will

become clear through my analysis of the text below, and the identifiable approach to identity comes in the form of DST, which further cements dialogicality as a central concern of the trilogy. Keizer also states that “black identity in the Americas, from slavery to the present, has never been a fixed essence ... but instead consistently marked by fragmentation and differentiation” (11). *The Broken Earth* trilogy, I will argue, is explicitly concerned with identity formation and the particular form this takes is closely tied to the concepts of fragmentation and the ‘speaking silences’ described above.

Both fragmentation and ‘speaking silences’ are central to the way in which Essun deals with the trauma she experiences throughout the trilogy. The theme of fragmented identity is present in the narrative structure of the text itself and is indicated in the first few pages of *The Broken Earth*. The series opens with an unnamed narrator speaking about an unnamed ‘she’: “There is a thing she will think over and over in the days to come, as she imagines how her son died and tries to make sense of something so innately senseless” (*Fifth* 1). Soon the reader learns that this retelling has an audience, a third unnamed character ‘you’: “But you need context” (*Fifth* 1). Thus, the fragmentation of identity is present in the complex relationship between narrator, narratee, and audience created by the use of the second person. Furthermore, Essun is herself fragmented into her former identities, Damaya and Syenite. For Essun and the reader, the oppressive conditions that result in Essun’s identity fragmentation are initially hidden, reflecting the lost history of enslaved people which Morrison identifies. Indeed, the fact that these

different identities are former versions of Essun is not made clear until later in the text. The connection between these different I-positions, to use the terminology of DST, is only revealed in the moments these identities are created in order to cope with extreme trauma. Essun's previous identities essentially block the traumatic memories from her mind, an example of 'self-masking' from painful memories as described by Anim-Addo and Lima above. The reader sees this self-masking in action after Essun finds the body of her son, Uche, who was beaten to death by her husband after being caught using orogeny: "Still, it's easier than getting Uche dressed; at least this boy doesn't wiggle – You stop. You go away for a bit." (*Fifth* 112). Essun's 'going away' implies a lapse into a catatonic state, as she is unable to process the trauma she has experienced and is an example of Jemisin's text initially engaging in the 'speaking silences' Keizer identifies in neo-slave narratives. The problem that Anim-Addo and Lima identify, that "part of the history of slavery is irretrievable", allows the fantastic to play a role in this process (2). While Toni Morrison, herself a prominent author in the neo-slave narrative genre, writes that she is "uncomfortable" with labels such as "fantastic, or mythic, or magical", she does acknowledge the influence of the imagination, or the imaginative, in her work (72). Jemisin's series, being a fantasy trilogy, creates the possibility of both representing and retrieving these 'speaking silences' to be incorporated into the process of identity formation. These silences are later recovered as the reader learns more about Essun's past, particularly in relation to the formation of the identities of Damaya and Syenite. Jemisin's text works to represent both the dangers of this lost history, and the process of post-trauma identity formation. This process can be directly related to DST, and reveals an important connection

between DST, the contemporary novel of slavery, and Jemisin's use of second-person narration.

Identity formation in *The Broken Earth* is strongly reliant on community, which provides another link between the text and the neo-slave narrative genre. A core element of DST is the theory that the Self is not singular but rather plural, and the result of the interaction between different I-positions both within and outside the Self. *The Broken Earth* trilogy, accordingly, creates a number of unstable, fluid voices that must ultimately be reincorporated into a single Self. Essun's own identity is itself fluid, having changed multiple times throughout her life. But Essun must not only deal with her own internal I-positions (Damaya and Syenite), but also the I-positions of the external Others she meets along the way, suggesting a dialogical and social understanding of the Self. These disparate voices within the narrative contribute to the project of identity formation and can also be linked to Morrison's own strategy to overcome the challenge of the hidden internal world of black enslaved people, where she must "trust [her] own recollections" but "must also depend heavily on the recollections of others" (71). The importance of both individual and communal perspectives aligns closely to what is seen in Jemisin's text, as Hoa says in the second book: "a person is herself, and others" (*Obelisk 1*). This communal sense of the Self could be tapping into an understanding of the particular experience of black enslaved women put forward by thinkers such as Angela Davis. Davis suggests that black enslaved women's work for her surrounding community, which often took the form of domestic labour for the family, not only

“laid the foundation for some degree of autonomy” for the enslaved community, but was also “essential to the *survival* of the community” (Davis 7). Stephanie Li observes that escape was more difficult for black enslaved women than men, as they “were less likely to acquire skills that allowed them to be hired out”, reducing opportunities to run away unseen and restricting their knowledge of the surrounding area (24). As a result of this, and the gender roles assigned to them, female resistance was manifested “through and within relationships” (24). Li goes on to say that:

In this formulation, liberty has no meaning without a network of personal support and emotional attachments. This model offers a notion of freedom that is principally located not in an autonomous and independent “I,” but rather in the strength and dedication to a “we.” (24)

The importance of community is embodied in what Rembowska-Płuciennik calls “the ‘we-mode’ of cognition”, created by second-person narration (167). Jemisin’s particular use of the second person throughout the series, I argue, encourages the reader to take an active role in Essun’s project of identity formation. Thus, not only is identity portrayed as plural in the text, as in the different Others that interact to form Essun’s identity, but the text also encourages the reader to engage in this process as well.

The element of communal identity formation, and the importance of relationships in this process, is seen in the plot of the text too. Essun’s journey throughout the trilogy is primarily motivated by her desire to find her daughter, and her attempt to

restore a connection that would otherwise be destroyed by the legacy of trauma. Li notes that slave narratives written by women tend to contrast with those written by men, by presenting “freedom not as a condition of individual liberty, but rather as the ability to provide for and protect one’s children” (29). This is a central concern for Essun throughout the series as she tries to find her last living child, Nassun, and reconnect with her. But this relationship is endangered by the lasting impact of trauma and the obstacle this poses to dialogue. This illustrates the importance of building a community, and interacting with others, to Essun’s project of identity formation. As the trilogy progresses Essun builds a community around her, staying with them through a difficult journey even though Hoa could bring her to safety: “I could have taken you from the desert. You did not have to suffer as they did. And yet ... they have become part of you, the people of this [community]. Your friends. Your fellows” (*Stone* 230). This is also reflected in the narrative by the use of the plural ‘you’ when referring to the community Essun joins, making Essun a part of a collective: “Castrima cannot possibly guard the city’s walls. The city is simply too big, and there are too few of you” (*Stone* 277). The importance of community and relationship to Essun’s identity formation is an important link between the text and neo-slave narratives. This link is integral to understanding how immersion and participation work in Jemisin’s text. The multiple perspectives and voices that create Essun’s identity not only encourage the reader to participate in the process of identity formation but also further highlight the inherent instability of any strict division between Self and Other in Jemisin’s text.

The importance of identity formation in *The Broken Earth* is a direct link between the trilogy and the contemporary novel of slavery that Keizer describes. It also forms the basis of my analysis of the trilogy. The particular way in which identity is understood in the series is closely related to the form of the narrative itself, and the way the second-person narrative promotes both immersion and participation in the reader. One of the central concerns of the neo-slave narrative genre, identified by Anim-Addo and Lima, is to tell the story “in such a way that it becomes real, embodied, lived through the storyteller’s mediation” (2). Crucially, Anim-Addo and Lima identify a very specific impact of this kind of retelling: “In such an approach to retelling history, one is forced to relive the past by becoming immersed in it” (2). The reader is introduced to Essun before learning about the events of her past, and it is only through the narrative retelling and immersion into her story that they come to understand the trauma she has experienced. This immersion, I argue, is related to Jemisin’s use of second-person narration throughout the series and in fact relates to another form of reader engagement: participation. By using the second person and encouraging the reader to participate in the process of identity formation, Jemisin also portrays the importance of community that characterises the resistance of black enslaved women described above. It is through Jemisin’s mediation that the reader not only understands Essun’s history but is immersed in it and participates in her journey of identity formation, in much the same way that Anim-Addo and Lima identify in neo-slave narratives. Below I explain the impact Jemisin’s use of the second person has on the way the reader engages with the text, and how this relates to the process of identity formation in the series.

## Representing the Opposition Between Self and Other in *The Broken Earth*

### *The Self Through Second-Person Narration: Immersion and Participation*

As discussed above, the relationship between *The Broken Earth* trilogy and contemporary novels of slavery can be seen in their mutual concern with the process of identity formation. This process is an essential element of *The Broken Earth* trilogy, and the particular form of the second-person narrative is integral to it. As a result of Jemisin's particular narrative strategy, the reader not only follows the process of Essun's post-trauma identity formation, but also participates in that process. The narrative structure of Jemisin's trilogy is extremely complex, with chapters alternating between second and third person, alongside the inclusion of multiple focalizers whose relationship to each other is not initially made clear. Furthermore, the inclusion of the reader in the process of identity formation creates a greater link between the trilogy and DST. Jemisin's text does not just illustrate the process of dialogical identity formation but includes the reader in it through immersion and participation. In order to understand these terms, I turn to the work of Marie-Laure Ryan and James Phelan. I argue that Jemisin's particular use of the second person encourages both immersion and participation on the part of the reader.

Before discussing the way in which the reader's engagement with the text is influenced by immersion and participation, it is necessary to first clearly define the terms. Ryan, in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2003), defines immersion as the degree of "absorption in the act of reading" (98). She sees immersion as the clear "mental representation" of the textual-world, or the 'realness' of the setting, plot, or characters of a given work (121). Immersion in a text, according to Ryan, carries with it a number of effects. 'Spatio-temporal' immersion describes the "sense of being there" a reader feels, as if they were in the time and place of the narrated events (130). 'Emotional immersion', on the other hand, is the phenomenon by which a reader can have a real emotional reaction to fictional events because the "simulation makes it temporarily true and present" (156). According to Ryan, emotional immersion relies on the "vividness of [the reader's] mental representation of the scene", or how 'real' the scene is in the reader's mind (156). In other words, should the reader have a clear mental representation of the textual world (they are immersed), then they can have a real emotional reaction to the fictional events.<sup>29</sup> Ryan notes that second-person narration is particularly powerful when it comes to creating immersion, but also observes that "[t]he immersive power of the second person is often a short-lived effect" owing to its tendency, when sustained, to be read "like a third-person narrative" (138). Rembowska-Płuciennik, in "Second-Person Narration as a Joint Action" (2018), follows Ryan's work and also notes the "great obstacle [second-person narration] poses to

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the philosophical ramifications of this phenomenon see Ryan's 'Immersive Paradoxes' from *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2003).

immersion mechanisms” (163). She further argues that sustained second-person narrative in fact activates a different kind of reader engagement altogether: participation. One of the key attributes of second-person narration that Rembowska-Płuciennik identifies is that it “does not fit stable models of narrative agency” and that readers “may experience difficulty as they try to keep track of the fluid system of narrative roles” (161). According to her, second-person narration blurs the boundaries between narrator and addressee, creating a “cognitive ‘me-and-you’ dyad” in which the reader is placed (164). This is further supported by Darlene Hantzis, who argues that “[s]econd person point of view texts use the ‘you’ to refer to the narrator, actant, and narratee(s) of a text simultaneously” (122). This is what allows participation to take place in a narrative, as the separation of the ‘I’ and the ‘you’, the Self and Other, is ultimately collapsed into a ‘we’ (Rembowska-Płuciennik 162). The ambiguity around the ‘you’ of second-person results in the reader being encouraged to participate with the action of the text. A link can be seen between Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel and the use of second person, as Hantzis argues that the “multiple subjectivity in second person texts resists the impulse to locate a single authorized textual voice, or indeed, textual vision” (5). This multiple subjectivity results in what Bakhtin calls polyphony, and is an essential element in the formation of identity as seen in *The Broken Earth* trilogy.

Kim Wickham uses the concept of participation specifically in relation to *The Broken Earth* trilogy to understand the way the reader interacts with the process of identity

formation.<sup>30</sup> Wickham argues that participation should be seen as distinct from immersion (400). However, I suggest that both immersion and participation are crucial elements of the reader's engagement with the process of identity formation in *The Broken Earth*. According to Wickham, Jemisin's trilogy requires the reader to "engage with ... the second-person narration" in order to simulate the work the protagonist must do to come to terms with her trauma and reconstitute her fragmented identity (399). In other words, *The Broken Earth* does not simply illustrate the process of identity formation but also encourages the reader to participate in this process. As Wickham argues, "Jemisin's second-person narrative connects the addressee, the reader, and the speaker to the project of not only remembering but also piecing together a self that has been fragmented by the trauma of slavery" (395-396). While Essun contends with the different former identities that make up her Self, the reader must simultaneously try to untangle the fluid narrative roles created by the second-person narration. In this way, the actual act of reading the text mirrors the action in the text. James Phelan argues that the addressee of second-person narrative can actually be seen as two separate narrative roles: the narrative audience (a reader immersed in the 'reality' of the textual world) and the narratee (the character to whom the second-person narrative is addressed). Phelan observes that a key variable in narrative discourse is the degree to which the narratee and narrative audience overlap, and that this is particularly important in understanding second-person narrative ('Self-Help' 357).

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<sup>30</sup> Wickham uses the terms 'involvement' and 'participation' interchangeably. I have opted to use the term 'participation' for clarity, and as it more closely relates to Rembowska-Pluciennik's description.

This overlap is what I understand as participation, as “the ‘you’ address also invites us to project ourselves – as narrative audience ... – into the narratee’s subject position” (‘Self-Help’ 361). By encouraging the reader to project themselves into Essun’s subject position they are actively engaged in the same process of identity formation that Essun is throughout the trilogy. Thus, in order to encourage participation on the part of the reader, Jemisin must also promote immersion. The importance of both immersion and participation explains the complex narrative structure found in *The Broken Earth* trilogy, which relates the reader directly to the process of identity formation.

The two central techniques that Jemisin uses to promote immersion, and which I argue simultaneously promote participation, are second-person narration and the use of the present tense. Ryan mentions these techniques specifically in her discussion of immersion in narrative. She writes that “the present is inherently more immersive than the past” due to its “association ... with the idea of co-occurrence” (136). In *The Broken Earth* this is combined with second-person narration, which Ryan also argues has a particular influence on immersion, saying that it plays “on our instinctive reaction to think *me* when we hear *you*, and to feel personally concerned by the textual utterance” (138). When combined, the second-person narration encourages the reader to closely identify with Essun while the present tense gives the impression that the events are happening in real time. In the trilogy, chapters focusing on Essun are entirely in the second person and the present tense which promote high levels of immersion in the reader and draws

them into close identification with Essun: “You look around, though visibility in the ashfall is iffy past twenty feet or so. There’s no sign that anyone else is nearby, and you can’t hear any other sounds from the area around the roadhouse” (*Fifth* 175). The above passage illustrates the initial immersive power of the second person, closely aligning the reader with the perspective of Essun, the narratee, particularly in regard to the sensory nature of this scene. However, as Ryan tells us, while second-person narration does have an initial immersive pull, it is short lived and cannot be sustained. Once the reader becomes used to the second person it tends to be read in the same way as third-person “and *you* becomes the identifying label, almost the proper name, of a regular character” (Ryan 138). Furthermore, the present tense suffers from a similar flaw “when the present invades the whole text and becomes the standard narrative tense” (Ryan 137). Both the present tense and second-person narrative see their impact lessened when they are the only narrative technique used: “Continuous presence becomes habit, habit leads to invisibility, and invisibility is as good as absence” (Ryan 137). The process of identity formation in *The Broken Earth* relies heavily on maintaining immersion and participation on the part of the reader, so this tendency towards ‘invisibility’ could become a major obstacle for Jemisin’s narrative. But Ryan also suggests a technique to avoid this: “For immersion to maintain its intensity, it needs a contrast of narrative modes, a constantly renegotiated distance from the narrative scene” (137). Jemisin does not simply utilise the second person to create as immersive a text as possible. Rather, she varies the narrative distance in order to maintain this immersion.

This variation in narrative distance is seen in the alternation between third- and second-person sections throughout the trilogy. The alternation not only maintains the immersive power of the second person, but further promotes participation by creating a more complex system of narrative voices for the reader to navigate, reflecting Essun's process of identity formation. In the first book, *The Fifth Season*, Essun's story alternates with chapters dedicated to Damaya and Syenite. These chapters are written in the third person, in contrast to Essun's second-person narrative. The change from second to third person is highlighted by the chapter titles; Syenite and Damaya's chapters have titles such as 'Syenite, cut and polished' or 'Damaya, in winters past'. Meanwhile, Essun's chapters have the second-person narrative displayed prominently from the beginning, priming the reader for this change with titles such as 'you at the end', or 'you walk beside the beast'. This alternation continues in the later texts through the introduction of chapters focalized by Essun's missing daughter, Nassun, which are again narrated in the third person. By alternating between second- and third-person narration, Jemisin constantly changes the perspective from which the events are narrated, varying the narrative distance, and providing contrast so the immersive power of the second person can be maintained. The constant changing of narrative distance not only maintains immersion but further promotes participation in the project of identity formation by creating a complex network of narrative voices for the reader to navigate. According to Rembowska-Płuciennik, second-person narration alone "requires the increased mental effort of taking multiple perspectives and making rapid perceptual adjustments" (161). Combining second with third person throughout the text further confuses the multiple perspectives, requiring even

greater effort on the part of the reader. This effort, Wickham argues, reflects the work Essun herself must do in coming to terms with her fragmented past. The reader participates in Essun's particular project of identity formation through the actual act of reading and navigating a text that fuses a number of different narrative voices. But because the reader is also immersed in Essun's character this participation occurs from Essun's particular I-position. In other words, the reader and Essun are aligned, or to put it in terms of DST the reader assumes the I-position of the referent as their own. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that the reader takes on the identity of the narratee. Rather I suggest that, through the combination of immersion and participation, the reader treats that character's I-positions as their own in reference to other I-positions the character interacts with inside the fiction. Furthermore, treating the stories of Damaya and Syenite differently to Essun's on the textual level creates a further link to the concepts in DST. The relationship between Essun, Damaya, and Syenite can be described as the Self interacting with the "other-in-the-self", as Hermans puts it, and in Jemisin's series they are separated on a narrative level as represented through the use of second- and third-person narration (*Positioning 7*). The moment the reader sees the traumatic events that cause Essun's identity to fragment, they also learn the truth of how these identities are connected. It is in these moments that the Self and the internal Other both separate and come together, illustrating the process of identity formation that is central to the plot of *The Broken Earth*.

Immersion and participation are essential elements of the way identity formation features in Jemisin's trilogy. Identity in *The Broken Earth* is seen as plural, as highlighted by the relationship between Essun and her former identities. These former identities are treated completely differently in the text, and the reader's task is to navigate these different identities, reflecting Essun's challenge of reconstituting her fractured identity. In the following section, I analyse *The Broken Earth* in relation to Essun's project of identity formation. The process of identity formation in the trilogy sees Essun interacting with the Other in many different forms, and this interaction results in the reformation of her identity. Essun does not just interact with I-positions outside her Self, *The Broken Earth* also illustrates how I-positions within the Self also impact identity formation. First, I discuss how her character must come to terms with her previous identities and how this represents the fundamental plurality of the Self. I relate this to the DST concept of the 'other-in-the-self', or the internal elements of Essun's identity which are considered as 'Other' within the narrative. Then I discuss Essun in relation to the other characters she meets on her journey, relating this to Bakhtin's theory of polyphony and, again, to DST. This will be shown to highlight how the Other cannot be separated from the Self, and rather forms an essential aspect of identity formation. Finally, I discuss the Self/Other binary in relation to the other two trilogies studied.

*The Other-in-the-Self: Essun, Syenite, Damaya*

According to DST, the Self interacts with the Other in two ways. There is the external Other, and the 'other-in-the-self'. As Hermans writes, this kind of Other "is not outside the self but rather an intrinsic part of it. There is not only the actual other outside the self, but also the imagined other who is entrenched as the other-in-the-self" (*Positioning* 7). While Bakhtin's original theory of polyphony referred to the voices of separate characters, the other-in-the-self describes the multitude of internal I-positions which form a unified Self. This is the clearest way in which Essun, and the reader, contend with the opposition between Self and Other in *The Broken Earth*: through the introduction of Essun's other previous identities or I-positions. Damaya and Syenite both feature in their own chapters which are made distinct through the use of the third person. The traumatic events Essun experiences throughout her life are the cause of this fragmentation, revealing the different I-positions that make up her Self. The characters themselves are different personalities, and this difference, combined with the changes in narrative voice, obscures the fact they are all the same person. The fact that the identities are initially presented as separate and independent further links them to Bakhtin's theory of polyphony by showcasing their individuality in relation to Essun. It is only later that the reader does come to understand how these different identities were formed, and in these moments the idea of a singular Self is collapsed. The moments when this is made clear to the reader are the same moments in which the identities are created, moments of extreme trauma that cause the identity of the protagonist to fracture. Below I analyse these specific instances, to highlight how the

fragmentation and reformation of identity are represented in *The Broken Earth* trilogy. The stories of Syenite and Damaya are told out of chronological order, initially being presented to the reader as if they occur concurrently, which further obscures their connection. Because the focus of this analysis is on the moments of trauma which result in the fragmentation of Essun's identity I discuss them in chronological order, beginning with Essun's 'original' identity, Damaya, before moving on to Syenite and, finally, Essun herself. Ultimately the successful resolution of the plot relies on Essun accepting these former identities and all the memories of trauma that go with them, reinforcing the connection between the series and DST's dialogical understanding of the Self.

The traumatic events that cause Essun to create her alternate identities are a result of the brutal treatment of orogenes in Jemisin's world. As Wickham observes, "[w]hile orogenic ability does not seem tied to race", the treatment of orogenes carries clear parallels with the transatlantic slave trade, particularly in relation to bodily autonomy and personal freedoms (392). It is this treatment that causes Essun's identity to fragment, and it is shown that this process began at a very early stage in her life. She was born with the name Damaya, but after discovering her orogenic abilities when she was just a child her parents rejected her, locking her in a barn until they could safely get rid of her:

Mother had raged, her face streaked with tears, while Father just sat there, silent and white-lipped. Damaya had hidden it from them, Mother said, hidden everything, pretended to be a child when she was really a monster,

that was what monsters *did*, she had always known there was something *wrong* with Damaya, she'd always been such a little *liar*-. (*Fifth* 31)

Following this scene Damaya is taken away from her family and placed in the care of the Guardian Schaffa, a member of the group charged with watching over orogenes. While the Guardians protect orogenes from the rest of the population, they are also in charge of controlling, imprisoning, and when necessary, executing them. Schaffa takes on the role of Damaya's protector and guard, taking her away to the Fulcrum where she will be trained and controlled. Damaya quickly attaches herself to Schaffa, believing he is the "only person who cares about her in all the world" (*Fifth* 86). This relationship is deeply abusive, however, as shown when Schaffa breaks Damaya's hand to test her control over her abilities:

Schaffa lifts her broken hand, adjusting his grip so that she can see the damage. She keeps screaming, mostly from the sheer horror of seeing *her hand* bent in a way it should not be, the skin tenting and purpled in three places like another set of knuckles, the fingers already stiffening in spasm. (*Fifth* 97-98)

Despite this violent act, Schaffa assures Damaya that he does love her: "I hate doing this to you. I hate that it's necessary. But please understand: I have hurt you so that you will hurt no one else" (*Fifth* 99-100). This scene is a prime example of the techniques Jemisin employs to maintain immersion. The present tense gives the impression of events happening in real time and describing Damaya's physical reactions, particularly with the visceral language used in this scene, results in close identification with the character. This sets the scene for Damaya's eventual break

and the creation of her next identity, Syenite. But it also serves as an example of the narrative techniques that initially separate these identities. Damaya is first introduced in the second chapter, and the transition to third-person narration is unexplained. As a result, the reader is led to believe that Damaya, Syenite, and Essun are entirely separate characters, with their connection only being revealed much later in the text. Beyond introducing the narrative shifts which will be common throughout the series, this scene also stresses the way in which orogenes are treated in this world. As they are considered an inherent danger, they no longer have the right to freedom. Instead, they are isolated in the Fulcrum, the institution responsible for housing and training them. The Fulcrum offers orogenes protection from the rest of the world. However, this protection comes at the cost of their freedom.

The narrative moves over a number of events in Damaya's life. Her continued connection to Schaffa, and the environment of the Fulcrum, are all factors in her continued experience of trauma during this period. After years of training at the Fulcrum, Damaya must pass a test to prove she can be useful to society and not simply a danger. Upon succeeding she chooses a new name, Syenite, symbolically accepting the life of a trained orogene. This is the first new identity she takes on, adopting the persona required by the Fulcrum in order to survive. After revealing the name she has chosen, at the same time making it clear that the two characters are in fact the same, Damaya is touched by Schaffa's approval and begins to cry: "She fights off the tears, and makes her decision. Crying is weakness. Crying was a

thing Damaya did. Syenite will be stronger. 'I'll do it,' Syenite says, softly" (*Fifth* 331). The moment Damaya becomes Syenite is indicated by the narrator using the latter name in relation to the spoken line. The subtle change maintains the immersive power of this scene, providing a smooth transition from one voice (Damaya) to the next (Syenite). At the same time the narrator relegates Damaya to the past, using the past tense to refer to her and future to refer to Syenite. This marks the transition from her previous life as Damaya to her new life as Syenite, but it also highlights that the creation of a new identity is necessarily an act of narration. Damaya creates a new identity so that she can be 'stronger', and this creation occurs across three short sentences from 'Crying is weakness' to 'Syenite will be stronger'. This reflects the greater narrative project as the narrator attempts to maintain Essun's identity during her eventual transformation into a stone eater.

The subtle transition from Damaya to Syenite reflects the long-term trauma that Damaya/Syenite has experienced, and her own choice to become a new identity, or I-position. Unlike the dramatic single event that causes the second fragmentation, which will be discussed later, this fragmentation is the result of Damaya being abandoned by her family alongside many years of emotional abuse, creating a deeply problematic bond between Damaya/Syenite and Schaffa. Not only this, but it is also a reaction to the extremely harsh standards and level of obedience the Fulcrum requires from her, ostensibly to ensure her own protection. Syenite, therefore, becomes a perfectly obedient orogene for her own survival and in an effort to succeed in the system society has created for her. The moment in which

Damaya becomes Syenite is an example of what Hermans calls self-criticism, which is when “we compare our acts with particular standards set by ourselves or others” (*Positioning* 123). Within DST this is understood as two opposing I-positions interacting within a single Self (*Positioning* 120). In this case, Syenite views Damaya as weak because she is crying, with the new identity promising to be stronger. The identity of Damaya is essentially found to be lacking, and Syenite takes over as she is stronger and more capable of survival. This reveals the inherent instability of the Self within Jemisin’s text. Rather than an immutable Self opposed to the pluralistic Other, Jemisin’s text reveals the fragmentary nature of the Self, collapsing an important distinction between the two categories. In this scene, the two I-positions within the Self are so completely opposed that Syenite is able to criticise Damaya’s behaviour despite the fact that they are both facets of the same person. Syenite is created as an I-position because Damaya’s situation was so dangerous, and she needed a stronger identity to survive. Because chapters in *The Broken Earth* are not presented in chronological order, the reader is already familiar with Syenite at this point. As such, this scene serves to end Damaya’s story while simultaneously providing more details of Syenite’s past, linking the two characters, and the third-person chapters, into one continuous whole. This effectively reconfigures what the reader already knows about Syenite (and later Essun), meaning the reader also participates in the process of identity formation by reconciling these different identities. This participation continues when Syenite’s identity fragments further, this time as a result of a single traumatic event that serves as the beginning of Essun’s story.

Unlike the long-term trauma at the hands of the Fulcrum and Schaffa that culminates in the creation of Syenite's identity, Essun's identity is the result of a single traumatic event. This is an event that occurs only after Syenite escapes the Fulcrum. Having progressed through the ranks at the Fulcrum, and proven herself to be talented and obedient, Syenite is assigned to breed with Alabaster as part of a programme to create increasingly powerful and useful orogenes. Despite the comparative safety the Fulcrum provides, Syenite soon realises that: "she is a slave, that all [orogenes] are slaves, that the security and sense of self-worth that the Fulcrum offers is wrapped in the chain of her right to live, and even the right to control her own body" (*Fifth* 348). Alabaster is a high ranking orogene of exceptional power and control and afforded certain freedoms accordingly. But during their time together Syenite comes to understand that even Alabaster is controlled by the Fulcrum, and ultimately neither of them will ever be considered as more than "a useful monster" (*Fifth* 143). While their relationship is generally hostile, the two do come to an understanding, and they eventually escape the Fulcrum and settle on an island with a community of pirates who agree to protect them. During this time, Syenite and Alabaster both begin a relationship with Innon, captain of the pirates' raiding parties, and a free orogene. Syenite soon realises she is pregnant with Alabaster's child, which she names Corundum. Eventually the Fulcrum discovers where they have been hiding and sends a fleet, led by Guardians including Schaffa, to recover them. Syenite witnesses Schaffa kill Innon, and faced with the threat of her own capture, and her child being forced into the same brutality she has lived through, she is forced to make a terrible, traumatic decision:

She puts her hand over his mouth and nose, to silence him, to comfort him. She will keep him safe. She will not let them take him, enslave him, turn his body into a tool and his mind into a weapon and his life into a travesty of freedom ... Better a child never have lived at all than live as a slave. Better that he die. (*Fifth* 441)

In this moment, Syenite decides it is better that Corundum die than be subjected to the treatment that she herself suffered, and the resulting trauma causes her identity to fracture once again. This scene is also an example of a direct link between the trilogy and the slave narrative, and more specifically the experience of black enslaved women. As Lamonte Aidoo observes “[s]lavery throughout the Americas was made, reproduced, and immortalised in black women’s bodies” (40). Because children “inherited the mother’s status ... each childbirth was in fact giving birth to slavery” (40). Because this reproduction was so essential to the maintenance of the slave trade, one act of resistance available to enslaved women was infanticide, and there are a number of accounts telling how some enslaved women “would rather see [their] children dead than have them live as slaves” (41).<sup>31</sup> By focusing on Syenite/Essun’s direct experience of identity fragmentation Jemisin not only represents the character’s interior world, a key element of contemporary novels of slavery, but does so in the face of extreme trauma.

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<sup>31</sup> For more on infanticide and slave narratives see Lamonte Aidoo’s “Genealogies of Horror: three stories of slave-women, motherhood, and murder in the Americas” (2018), or the chapter “Intra-Independence: Reconceptualising Freedom and Resistance to Bondage” from Stephanie Li’s *Something akin to Freedom* (2010).

This scene also gives the reader a unique and direct perspective into the process of identity fragmentation as a result of Jemisin's particular use of participation and immersion. Jemisin's description of this moment is shocking, made more so by the second person leading to the overlap of narrative audience and narratee. In this moment, Syenite's identity collapses, marking the end of Syenite's third-person narrative and the beginning of Essun's second-person narrative. It is only here that the reader can finally link the third- and second-person narratives. The fragmentation of the Self is also reflected by the fragmentation of the narrative itself. By swapping between second- and third person, marked by asterisks, Jemisin forces the reader to reconcile the two narrative perspectives at once:

There are moments when everything changes, you understand.

\*\*\*

Coru's wailing, terrified, and perhaps he even understands, somehow, what has happened to his fathers. Syenite cannot console him.

\*\*\*

Even the hardest stone can fracture. It just takes the right force, applied at the right juncture of angles. A *fulcrum* of pressure and weakness.

\*\*\*

*Promise*, Alabaster had said.

Do whatever you have to, Innon had tried to say.

And Syenite says: “No, you fucker.”

...

\*\*\*

You understand these moments, I think, instinctively. It is our nature. (*Fifth*  
440-441)

The switch between narrative perspectives creates confusion and forces the reader to try and reconcile the two, seemingly separate, narratives. This reflects the work Essun herself must eventually do to reintegrate her former identities into her Self. Her previous identities are treated in the third person, as if they are entirely separate from her Self. It is when these two narratives collide that the reader can see that these previous identities are others-in-the-self. They are both entirely separate personalities and integral parts of Essun’s Self. For Essun, this is the moment her personality fractures due to the extreme trauma of what happens to her. But for the reader, paradoxically, it is the moment when the personalities come together, seen in the fusion of the second- and third-person narratives that were previously separated. At this point the reader also learns the narrator’s identity: “I introduced myself to her eventually, finally, ten years later, ... I told her that I was called Hoa” (443). The child that Essun has been travelling with has been the narrator all along, the mysterious ‘I’ which has remained unidentified throughout most of the first book. By forcing the reader to reconcile the different voices in this scene, the text serves to reflect the inherent multiplicity of voices within the Self as described by DST. Rather than a Self that is an immutable and single voice, Essun is

the amalgamation of a number of I-positions, revealing the inherent plurality of the Self.

The change from Syenite to Essun is the last new identity the character creates in their life. The reader is introduced to Essun at the very beginning of the series, but at this point her previous fragmentation has already occurred. As the series progresses the reader becomes more familiar with Essun's previous identities. At the beginning of the text, however, Essun has experienced the trauma of finding her own son beaten to death and considers changing her identity once more: "You're still trying to decide who to be. The self you've been lately doesn't make sense anymore; that woman died with Uche" (*Fifth* 42). As discussed above, previous trauma has resulted in the fragmentation of Essun's identity as a way of coping with her experiences, but in this instance she resists this fragmentation: "But you still don't know where Nassun is buried ... Until you've said farewell to your daughter, you have to remain the mother that she loved" (*Fifth* 42). Rather than manifesting a new internal I-position, Essun resists due to her connection with an external I-position: her daughter Nassun. This is reinforced after she discovers her daughter is still alive: "You could become someone new, maybe ... But. Only one you is Nassun's mother" (*Fifth* 172). By the time Essun sets out to find Nassun, her strategy of fragmentation in the face of trauma can no longer work, due to her desire to maintain a connection with her missing daughter. As such, Essun is left to deal with her trauma in a different way, by incorporating the previous elements of her identity. Near the end of the series Essun finally clarifies these previous identities,

incorporating them into her Self as separate I-positions and begins to engage in this dialogue: “this is one of the taller buildings of the city, though it’s only six or seven stories altogether (*Only*, sneers Syenite. *Only?* Thinks Damaya, in wonder. *Yes, only*, you snap at both, to shut them up) (*Stone* 279). This example highlights the interaction between the different I-positions within Essun’s Self. They are maintained as separate voices in this process, but it is through their interaction that Essun’s Self is fully expressed. Thus, Essun’s complete Self follows DST in its expression through the interaction between internal I-positions. Essun’s previous fragmentation can be seen as a denial of these different I-positions, but here she has successfully integrated them as valid aspects of her own Self.

In Jemisin’s text, the Self can no longer be considered stable or immutable. Rather the Self is a multiplicity of voices in dialogue. DST understands the Self as a constant dialogue between different I-positions, which change over the course of a person’s life. It is only after acknowledging and understanding the full history of her life that is contained by the identities of Damaya and Syenite, that Essun can successfully engage in this dialogue. DST is essential for this understanding of how the Self operates within *The Broken Earth* trilogy. By highlighting the fragmentary nature of the Self, the opposition between Self and Other is called into question. The project of integrating her previous identities is made necessary by Essun’s inability to become a new one, because she must maintain a connection with her missing daughter. This illustrates another important element of the Self as understood by DST: the interaction between the Self and the external Other.

*The External Other: Nassun, Schaffa, Hoa*

Essun's story highlights how the individual Self in Jemisin's text can be seen as polyphonic, made up of multiple I-positions, each with their own agenda and personality. But *The Broken Earth* also creates a more traditional form of polyphony, as seen in Essun's interactions with characters outside the Self. These characters are not simple facets of the storytelling process, or examples of the author's omnipotent control of the world of the story. Rather, they are individual, autonomous I-positions with their own identities. These external I-positions also have an influence on Essun's Self. The unusual narrative structure of *The Broken Earth* does more than simply highlight the multiplicity in Essun's own I-positions. A key aspect of DST is that "the dialogical self is explicitly formulated as an extended self" (Hermans, *Positioning* 127-128). In *The Broken Earth*, Essun's project of identity formation not only includes contending with her own internal I-positions, but the I-positions of the Others she meets along the way. These interactions illustrate the impact these different I-positions have on the formation of the Self in *The Broken Earth*, and further collapse the opposition between Self and Other.

An important element of Essun's story is the way she accepts external Others into her life. At first, she resists these connections, but by the end of the series the mutual reliance that grows between her and the community around her emphasises the essentially plural and extended nature of her Self. Over the course of the trilogy,

alongside her quest to find and rescue her daughter, Essun also meets a number of different characters. One of the first and most important relationships she creates is with the mysterious young child Hoa. As discussed above, Hoa is later revealed to be a stone eater, an immortal being seemingly made of stone and with unknown motivations. Hoa is also the narrator, the 'I' of the second-person narrative.

However, the I-You relationship that is created with second-person narration is more complex than it first appears. As Hoa says at one point: "*A dilemma: You are made of so many people you do not wish to be. Including me*" (*Obelisk* 75). Hoa's narration here reveals an expansion of the singular meaning of 'you', but this does not necessarily venture into a pluralistic meaning either. Rather, Hoa reveals that Essun is both a singular 'you', and a 'you' that encompasses a wider range of I-positions both internal and external, including himself. This slippage between a plural and singular 'you' is further expanded in relation to Essun's relationship with the community of Castrima, which takes her in during the events of the series.

Castrima is unusual in the world of *The Broken Earth* as "the people of this comm seem to *want* orogenes around" (*Stone* 276). Unlike any other community, or comm, this group tries to model a society in which orogenes and normal humans, called stills, can coexist. After Castrima adopts Essun they find themselves under siege by an army, and Essun must use her abilities to save the comm. She does defeat their enemies, destroying their home in the process, but Ykka, the orogene leader of Castrima, admonishes her regardless: "You didn't think about any of us while you were using those obelisks, did you? You thought about destroying your enemies" (*Stone* 71). Here Ykka is using the singular 'you', and significantly is opposing this 'you' to a collective 'us'. Despite spending time with Castrima, and

despite these enemies being a threat to both Essun and the community as a whole, at this point in the narrative Essun still does not see herself as part of the group. She holds herself apart almost to the very end of the text, in fact it is only in the final moments before she leaves to find her daughter and save the world that she realises her connection to the people of Castrima: “that brings the sounds of the city to your ears, and you are startled to catch laughter in the wing ... Which reminds you that you have *Castrima*, too, if you want it” (Stone 283). This brings with it a startling realisation: “This isn’t just about you, and it never has been. All things change in a Season – and some part of you is tired, finally, of the lonely, vengeful woman narrative” (Stone 285). Essun realises that her Self encompasses more than her own internal I-positions, or even her care for her daughter. Rather, Essun has come to realise the importance of the group and the individuals she has made a connection with along the way. This expansion of the narrative ‘you’ recognises the extended Self of DST and collapses the distinction between Self and Other. This extended Self is not an immutable whole, but rather an amalgamation of different internal I-positions. Furthermore, it is also not wholly separated from the Other, but rather the Other appears as essential to this extended Self. Essun’s realisation that the people of Castrima form an essential part of her Self comes along with the commitment to sacrifice her own life to save the world.

One of Essun’s most significant relationships in this series, and one which drives most of the plot, is with her daughter, Nassun. But when Nassun’s perspective is revealed to the reader it provides an entirely different understanding of Essun

herself, challenging the reader's preconceptions of the character and illustrating the importance of the external Other in the process of identity formation. By the end of the first book, Essun's former identities have had their stories told completely. But the importance of shifting the narrative distance and encouraging immersion and participation in the reader has not disappeared, so the alternation between second- and third-person chapters is maintained in the last two books of the trilogy. As a result, in the second and third books the third-person chapters revolve around Essun's daughter, Nassun, instead. The fact that these chapters take the place of the Syenite/Damaya chapters of the previous book reveals Nassun's importance to Essun's own identity. Essentially, Nassun is treated in the same way as Essun's internal I-positions of Syenite and Damaya within the narrative. The parallel storylines complement each other, with Nassun's third-person narrative serving the dual purpose of contrasting with Essun's second-person and providing an alternate perspective on Essun herself. The text makes it clear that Essun loves her daughter very much, leaving the safety of a community and venturing out to save her from her father. But from Nassun's point of view, this love is problematic: "Mama had said occasionally that she loves Nassun, but Nassun has never seen any proof of it" (*Obelisk* 78). Over the course of her journey Nassun meets and attaches herself to Schaffa, the Guardian who previously protected, and emotionally manipulated, Essun. When telling Schaffa about how her mother trained her as a child, Nassun reveals how afraid of discovery Essun was: "She got really quiet. Then she said, 'Are you sure you can control yourself?' And she took my hand ... She broke it" (*Obelisk* 153). This scene parallels Essun's first meeting with Schaffa and shows how Essun's unresolved trauma is transmitted through successive generations. Essun is so afraid

of what the world can do to orogenes that she resorts to the same violence in order to protect her daughter from discovery. By remaining silent about her own history, Essun risks alienating Nassun, and at the same time this leads Nassun into attaching herself to Schaffa, who caused that trauma in the first place. This history, at least initially, is equally hidden from the reader. It is only after the reader and Essun fully understand the story of her previous identities and the trauma that created them, that there is hope for her relationship with her daughter. Because this history remains hidden to Nassun, she cannot understand her mother's actions towards her, nor can she understand that Schaffa is, in part, the source of her mother's trauma. The reader knows from Damaya and Syenite's stories how abusive their relationship with Schaffa was, but Nassun sees Schaffa very differently: "To her, Schaffa is the man who protected her from raiders – and from her father ... He has helped her learn to love herself for what she is. Her mother? You. Have done none of these things" (*Stone* 373). This passage stresses the importance of seeing Schaffa from both Nassun and Essun's point of view, highlighting the differences in their perspectives. Furthermore, this requires the reader to change their understanding of Essun herself. Seeing Essun's actions from an external point of view requires the reader to reorient themselves in relation to the character, but, as will be shown, it also requires Essun herself to do the same.

The very fact that Nassun's chapters offer an entirely different perspective of Essun's actions, speaks to the polyphonic quality of the text. But *The Broken Earth* goes beyond simply infusing different characters with different perspectives and

personalities. A central aspect of DST is the idea of 'good dialogue'. Within DST good dialogue is defined as "an activity that is desirable and valuable when people want to learn from each other and from themselves in the service of a further development of self and society" (Hermans, *Positioning* 174). One element of good dialogue, identified by Hermans and Hermans-Kanopka, is that it "recognizes and incorporates [the] *alterity* not only of the other person but also of other positions in the self" (*Positioning* 10-11). This means that for good dialogue to take place, both parties must recognize the 'otherness' of the Other, and the impact of the Other within the Self. There is a fundamental conflict between Essun and Nassun which is not resolved for most of the trilogy. As discussed above, Nassun's understanding of her mother is very different from the one the reader receives from the second-person sections of the text. This is, in part, due to Essun's initial rejection of her internal I-positions. Without incorporating them fully into her Self and rejecting their memories, Essun cannot connect with Nassun, for whom Essun's violent behaviour is seemingly without reason. Furthermore, Essun's rejection of her past selves leads to her failure to understand that her violence is an extension of the violence that was previously done to her. Thus, good dialogue is not a possibility. This is the root of the central conflict at the climax of the trilogy, where their inability to engage in good dialogue almost results in Essun and Nassun's mutual deaths and the death of all human life.

While Essun firmly believes that her role is to rescue her daughter from Schaffa, Nassun believes herself to be perfectly safe. In fact, Nassun has discovered her own

quest to save the world, one which would see her sacrifice herself to save the dying Schaffa by transforming him, and every human being on the planet, into immortal stone eaters. Essun, meanwhile, has committed to a different plan. She learns that the Earth is sentient, and that the cause of its hostility to humanity is due to an ancient experiment that resulted in the loss of the Earth's 'child': the Moon. Essun's plan to end the war between humanity and the Earth is to restore the Moon to orbit as a peace offering. Nassun does not learn this history and is therefore unable to see her own position as part of a longer chain of events that stretches even further than her mother's history. Not only does this show the results of the inability to engage in DST's good dialogue, but it also highlights the centrality of dialogue in the text. The opposition between their two plans reflects a larger opposition between dialogue and monologue itself. Nassun's attempt to turn all of humanity into stone eaters is clearly aligned with monologue. As Hoa explains to Essun, some stone eaters "believe this world can safely bear only one people" (*Obelisk* 291). Thus, Nassun's plan represents a monologue which, if it succeeded, would result in "[a] world of only stone people" (*Obelisk* 291). Essun's plan, on the other hand, revolves around the attempt to open negotiations with the Earth, and thus places dialogue at the very core of her goals. Thus, the central conflict between Essun and Nassun is not just an issue of their understanding of the dialogical relationship between Self and Other, but also representative of the opposition between dialogue and monologue within the plot itself.

The moment Nassun and Essun meet emphasises the seemingly unbreachable gulf that exists between the two characters. They are fundamentally unable to engage in good dialogue, which is most easily seen in their completely different understandings of Schaffa: “She [Nassun] knows, intellectually, that the Schaffa you knew and the Schaffa she loves are wholly different people” (*Stone* 372). While also emphasising the multiplicity of the Self, this quote highlights the insurmountable difference between Essun and Nassun. The divide between the two characters is stated explicitly: “some [relationships] really are too broken to fix. Nothing to do but destroy them entirely, for mercy’s sake” (*Stone* 373). This is fundamentally an issue of dialogue. Nassun and her mother are incapable of what DST would define as good dialogue, because they are unable to accept the alterity within each other and themselves: “Words become irrelevant. Actions mean more. But what actions could possibly convey the morass of your feelings right now?” (*Stone* 374). The divide between them hampers even the most basic of exchanges: “‘What? You can’t.’ You’re thinking: *It will kill you.* Her jaw tightens. ‘I will.’ She’s thinking: *I don’t need your permission.*” (*Stone* 375). This quote highlights the breakdown of communication between the two characters. Where Essun is concerned for Nassun’s safety, Nassun believes Essun is refusing permission. The reader is made aware of the disconnect between what they say and what is understood, reinforcing the idea that good dialogue is impossible. Both of them try to enact their separate plans, Nassun to save Schaffa and Essun to prevent Nassun from killing herself in the process. But they reach a stalemate, and it becomes clear that continuing to compete will kill them both: “[Nassun] is prepared for the inevitability of her own death. You aren’t. Oh, Earth, you just can’t watch another of your children die.”

(*Stone* 385). In this moment, Essun makes the choice to give in, sacrificing her goals and her life so her daughter can live. Essun fully accepts her daughter as an individual, autonomous being, one that can exist independently of her: “You look up at her, and it strikes you. Your little girl. So big ... So powerful. So beautiful ... You are proud to lose to her strength” (*Stone* 386). At the same time Nassun similarly realises that she does not know her mother’s full story but recognises this otherness and accepts it: “Because the world took and took and took from you, too, after all. She knows this. And yet, for some reason that she does not think she’ll ever understand ... even as you die, you were reaching for the Moon” (*Stone* 387). The inability for the two characters to engage in good dialogue is a result of their fundamental misunderstanding of each other. It is only in these last moments that they are able to accept each other as wholly individual beings alongside the intrinsic connection they share. They can accept each other both as individual Selves and as the other-in-the-self. Because of this, while Essun does die, Nassun chooses to fulfil her wish. Without fully understanding why, Nassun decides to trust her mother’s goals, and returns the Moon to orbit around the Earth, essentially saving the world. Essun’s resistance to the idea that her daughter is capable of independence almost kills them both and dooms the world. It is only by letting go, by accepting that Nassun will not do as Essun demands, that Essun can succeed in saving her daughter and the world. The realisation that the Other is in itself a Self, and the understanding that one’s own Self is fundamentally reliant on interactions with the external Other, is essential to the fulfilment of the plot.

The coda to the series is titled 'me, and you', which fittingly reflects Rembowska-Płuciennik's theories about second-person narrative, highlighting the fluidity of narrative roles throughout this series. After sacrificing herself and being turned completely to stone, Essun's body is recovered by Hoa and taken deep into the Earth to begin the process that will transform her into a stone eater. It is here that the purpose of the complex narrative throughout the course of the series is finally made clear: "You'll lose some memory. There is always loss, with change. But I have told you this story, primed what remains of you, to retain as much as possible of who you were" (*Stone* 397). In order to keep as much of Essun's personality as possible, Hoa has been retelling the events of her life so as to save her memories and help her reform her own identity. Throughout the series, the second-person narrative has been Hoa speaking to the unconscious Essun while she slowly transforms into a stone eater, encouraging her to participate in her own, literal, identity formation. The narrative subject of the text, Essun, is literally a product of the narrator. The narrative of *The Broken Earth* is Hoa's attempt to narrate Essun into being. But this retelling includes more than just the events of Essun's own life. The first book also relates the story of Essun's previous identities, her internal I-positions, of Damaya and Syenite. They are, for all intents and purposes, separate characters. In the later texts Hoa also narrates the events of Nassun's life, in the third person, suggesting that these events are similarly essential for the formation of Essun's identity. When Nassun's narrative offers an entirely new perspective on Essun's behaviour, both the reader and Essun must incorporate this understanding into Essun's Self. Finally, the text reveals Essun's connection with the narrator, Hoa, who effectively forms Essun's identity by bringing all these aspects of her extended

Self together. Furthermore, the reader is implicated in this project as well. In the role of narrative audience the reader is immersed in Essun's story, and because of the particular impact of second-person narration and the action of the plot itself they also participate in the project of identity formation. The act of untangling the complex system of narrative voices in the text reflects Essun's task of remembering and reforming her own identity.

This final revelation in the text reinforces the connection between the process of identity formation illustrated in *The Broken Earth* and DST. Nevertheless, it is possible that this form of immortality might seem monological, owing to Hoa's act of narration to a passive audience. There is no clear indication that Hoa is an unreliable narrator, but it is made clear that he does exercise control over the narrative for his own personal ends. At one point he admits as much, glossing over the happy times of Essun's life:

There passes a time of happiness in your life, which I will not describe to you. It is not unimportant. Perhaps you think it wrong that I dwell so much on the horrors, the pain, but pain is what shapes us, after all. (*Fifth* 361)

This reveals a great deal about Hoa's own perspective on identity formation. For him, the essential element of Essun's life is pain, that is what shapes her. The reader learns that Hoa's experiences, before he was transformed into a stone eater, are very similar to Essun's. Over the course of the last book, it is revealed that Hoa, and the first stone eaters, were originally created as part of the experiment that resulted in the loss of the moon. Hoa explicitly ties his treatment to the racist ideas

his creators held about the people he was modelled after, the Niess: “Niespeople looked different, behaved differently, *were* different ... This was what made them not the same kind of human as everyone else. Eventually, not *as* human as everyone else. Finally: not human at all” (*Stone* 210). The ethical problem of Hoa’s narrative results from the fact that his ideal narratee, which Sarah Copland and James Phelan usefully define as the “narratee the narrator wishes they were addressing”, is not the same as his actual narratee (3). Hoa brings his own idea of Essun’s identity into his narrative project of recreating her identity, which is in turn impacted by his own history. However, understanding the full implications of the second person offers an alternative interpretation.

The use of the second person creates a “special intersubjectivity” by implicating “the narrator, actant, and narratee(s) of a text simultaneously” according to the work of Darlene Hantzis (122). Because of this intersubjectivity, as Hoa narrates Essun’s story to preserve her identity, he simultaneously recreates his own. Over the course of the series Hoa occasionally interrupts the second-person narrative with a first-person account of his own history. Interestingly, these accounts appear to become clearer to Hoa himself through the act of telling: “Fascinating. All of this grows easier to remember with the telling” (*Stone* 143). As Hantzis writes, with second-person narration, the role of narrator, actant, and narratee are “mutually co-existent and mutually dependent” (123). While Hoa’s attempt to create Essun’s identity through his manipulation of her narrative could be seen as appropriating her voice, this would fail to consider the inherent intersubjectivity of the second-

person form. Wickham's conclusion, that the text "asks us all to grapple with the legacy of slavery" is revealing, going on to write that "it is not only an imperative that Essun remembers, but the reader does as well" (408). The reader, narrator, and narratee all become part of an intersubjective network in which remembering and understanding the trauma of slavery is essential for all parties. Hoa is certainly in a position of power in that he has the ability to tell Essun's story, but what *The Broken Earth* reveals is that this act of narration is mutually changing. Hoa relies on Essun for his own identity, even as she relies on him.

To turn back to DST, the reveal of the purpose of Hoa's complex narration illustrates the essential nature of the Self as dialogically created. The Self is not isolated, but rather exists in relation to Others and to interactions with Others. Essun's Self cannot exist without Hoa's narrative recreation of it, and that narrative's inclusion of the many different Selves she has interacted with in her life. Equally, Hoa's Self is reformed and recreated along the way, relying on his narration of Essun's life to remember and reinterpret his own. Rather than seeing him as an ethically suspect narrator, Hoa can instead be seen as another victim of the legacy of racism and slavery in Jemisin's world, and his connection with Essun forges a link of mutual understanding and mutual healing. In this way, both Hoa and Essun are implicated in the project of post-trauma identity formation and must rely on each other to achieve this goal. It is important to note that Jemisin's text reminds the reader that the process of identity formation is endless. Hoa does not retell Essun's story for her to remain fixed forever: "Not to force you into a particular shape, mind you.

From here on, you may become whomever you wish. It's just that you need to know where you've come from to know where you're going" (*Stone* 397). It is only by understanding the entirety of her story that Essun can become free to forge her own identity, or identities, in the future. The act of going back, retelling those events, and incorporating them into Essun's identity, reflects one of the primary goals of the contemporary novel of slavery: to recover that lost history and the trauma that could not be recounted in the original slave narratives of the abolitionist period. Crucially, Jemisin's particular use of narrative techniques allows her to include the reader in this process as well. She combines second and third person in order to vary the narrative distance, creating contrast and preserving the immersive power of the former. The act of reading becomes a form of Self creation, and the reader is therefore implicated in this process as well. But this process of creation is also seen communally within the text. Hoa's narration not only serves to encourage Essun's own identity creation, but it is also seen to have a similar influence on him. Narration as identity formation is shown to be a two-way street, with Hoa recovering his own identity and coming to terms with his own past, even as he encourages Essun and the reader to do the same. The reader's involvement in the formation of Essun's identity is illustrative of the nature of the Self as envisioned in Jemisin's text. Following DST, the Self is not a singular, immutable identity. Rather it is the result of a network of relationships between I-positions, both within and outside the Self.

For DST, and Jemisin's text, the strict division between Self and Other does not exist. Rather, the Self is a communally structured identity. By highlighting a fragmented Self, and the inherent integration of the Other in the Self, Jemisin shows that what may appear to be a clear opposition is in fact far more complex. This complexity is closely related to the series' concerns as related to the neo-slave narrative genre and relies on the creation of both immersion and participation for the reader. This may be a unique resonance between the creation of reader participation/immersion and the project of identity formation seen in contemporary novels of slavery, although more research is needed to determine the extent of this relationship. However, as far as this text is concerned, both immersion and participation in tandem are essential in how the central theme of *The Broken Earth* is conveyed, illustrating both the instability of the Self/Other binary opposition, and the importance of remembrance for the legacy of trauma.

### Self and Other in *Mistborn* and *The Farseer*

Jemisin is not the only author to call into question the Self/Other binary. Both Sanderson and Hobb disrupt this opposition, but in very different ways than those seen in *The Broken Earth*. In the following section, I will analyse how the Self/Other binary appears in *The Farseer Trilogy* and the *Mistborn* trilogy, focusing on the different methods used by these authors and how these differences illuminate Jemisin's text and DST. What will become clear from my argument is that, while all three texts do disrupt the notion of a unified self, they do so in very different ways.

In Jemisin's trilogy the interaction between Self and Other was ultimately dialogical. However, where *The Broken Earth* illustrates the dialogical interaction between Self and Other, both *The Farseer* and *Mistborn* trilogies show both the dialogical and monological potential inherent in this interaction.

Research into the Self/Other dichotomy in *The Farseer Trilogy* has often been related to the ability of Hobb's two magics, the Wit and the Skill, to break down barriers between Selves and thus present a queer view of identity formation. The Self/Other binary is explicitly identified as a central concern of the series by Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak, who writes that "Hobb's trilogies ... may encourage readers to reflect on the divisive dichotomy of Self and Other which often resides at the heart of human contention" (195). Some more recent research in this line has been conducted by Louise Prater in *Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Popular Fantasy* (2016), and in Peter Melville's 'Queerness and Homophobia in Robin Hobb's Farseer Trilogies' (2018). However, the Self/Other binary has been more directly addressed in another of Hobb's series: the *Soldier Son* trilogy. Siobhan Carroll argues that this series resists "a simple binary between Self and Other" through the protagonist's interactions with different, and opposing, honour systems (315). While the *Soldier Son* trilogy lies outside the scope of this research, it is worth mentioning here as evidence that the Self/Other opposition is of primary importance to Hobb as a writer and can be seen in her wider work. As argued in a previous chapter, the Skill and the Wit are associated with communication, but not

necessarily dialogue. As such they offer the possibility of either a dialogical or monological construction of the Self.

Throughout *The Farseer Trilogy* the reader is presented with a number of instances in which the unity of identity is called into question, supporting DST's assertion of the plurality of the Self. This is primarily the result of the operation of the Skill and Wit magics, but has also been linked to the trilogy's representation of queer-coded identities. The Skill and the Wit work to magically facilitate communication but they are also tied to conceptions of both class and gender. The Skill is the magic of the royal line and is associated with more stereotypically masculine uses: "The Skill can be used as a weapon, to command another person to do something, to discover another's secrets or to confuse invading armies" (Prater 23-24). On the other hand, the Wit is "associated with feminine coded attributes such as cunning and intuition" (Prater 24). This association between the magics and gender stereotypes initially appear to reinforce a gender binary. However, as Prater's work reveals, this binary opposition is in fact "a cultural construction" in Hobb's world and Fitz's use of both magics is just one element that ultimately subverts this simple binary (24).

Furthermore, Prater argues that the challenge to conservative gender stereotypes offered by Hobb's two magics further destabilises the traditional association of masculinity as having "a kind of unified strength", and instead modelling a "plural or integrated mode of being" (22). This 'plural mode of being' aligns with the conception of the Self from DST, in which identity relies on dialogue between different I-positions. In other words, the way the Skill and Wit magics work to

destabilise the unity of the Self is a challenge to gender stereotypes and promotes the idea of the Self as the result of the interaction between different I-positions, rather than a fully independent and immutable identity. This is most clearly seen in the way Fitz uses the Skill to interact with different I-positions throughout the trilogy.

Fitz primarily uses the Skill for communication, but this communication is very rarely without some inherent slippage between Selves. His primary target for communication throughout the trilogy is Prince Verity, who at one point uses the Skill to 'accompany' Fitz in his daily duties, using the telepathic connection to see what he sees: "This was not like other times when he had shuffled through my thoughts as a man sorts scattered papers on a desk. This was a true occupation of my mind" (*Royal* 289). While Fitz is accompanied by Verity, the Prince is aware of everything occurring inside Fitz's own mind: "Verity was with me every second. It was not that we conversed, but he was privy to my internal dialogue" (*Royal* 292). The intimate connection the two characters share leads to an interesting doubling of vision, and Verity sees himself as Fitz sees him: "I felt his tinge of woe at looking down at his own face through my eyes. *A looking glass is kinder. I have aged*" (*Royal* 291). The italics in this quote indicate Verity's own thoughts, and highlight the particular image offered to him that is somehow different from a simple mirror. The act of looking at oneself through the eyes of an Other is highly reminiscent of Bakhtin's own thoughts on the dialogicality of the Self. Bakhtin argues that: "A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary;

looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another*” (*Problems* 287). This image is repeated in *The Farseer Trilogy* at the end of the final book, when Verity does more than simply accompany Fitz’s mind, but temporarily swaps bodies with him. This leads to a scene in which Fitz literally sees himself through Verity’s eyes. Fitz describes this moment thus: “I watched myself coming. My stride was confident and brisk, my head up” (*Quest* 793). The Skill is used here to represent the lack of sovereignty within the Self. The Skill does not simply allow contact between identities, but results in the occupation of one Self with another. This illustrates how the Skill goes beyond communication and actually disrupts the perceived unity of the individual Self, allowing the other-in-the-self to become literal, rather than figurative. This follows DST’s suggestion of the inherent plurality of the Self and illustrates a dialogical relationship with the Other. This disruption of the sovereignty or unity of the individual Self is also seen in the operation of the Wit.

The Wit, as previously discussed, highlights the inherent ‘animalness’ of human beings by allowing for telepathic communication and connection between humans and animals. Fitz primarily uses this ability to link with Nighteyes. But this connection is more than simple communication, and like the Skill it blurs the boundary between two independent Selves who are profoundly impacted by each other. Throughout the series, Fitz relies on his connection with Nighteyes, sharing senses, ideas, and thoughts to help him succeed in his quest. While Fitz gains access to Nighteyes’ more acute senses, Nighteyes begins to see the world less as a wolf

and more as a human, highlighting how this use of the Wit disrupts the seemingly immutable Self, both human and non-human. Tellingly, this is most fully explained by both Fitz and Nighteyes:

I am more aware of the animal that my mind lives inside of. He is more aware of ... *Thinking. Of what comes before and after choosing to do an action. One becomes aware that one is always making choices, and considers what the best ones are. (Quest 543).*

In this passage the italics indicate Nighteyes' thoughts, and the blurring of their dialogue reflects the interconnected nature of their two Selves. As Prater argues, the closeness of Fitz and Nighteyes "suggests slippage between the categories of 'human' and 'animal', and disruptions to the rigid separation of the 'self' and 'other' more broadly" (27). Thus, the Wit disrupts the notion of the separation of the Self and Other. The idea of slippage between the identities of the two characters is supported by Nighteyes, who in one instance states: "*We do not share. We are one. I am no longer a wolf, you are no longer a man. What we are together, I have no name for*" (Quest 342). Their close connection has a profound influence on the identity of both Fitz and Nighteyes, highlighting the impact that the Other can have on the Self. Significantly, Nighteyes suggests that this influence changes them both. By stressing the difference between who they are as individuals and who they are together, Nighteyes indicates the importance of their plural identity, disrupting the idea of the Self as inherently singular. By disrupting the notion of the singular, disconnected Self, both the Wit and the Skill illustrate the dialogic connection between Self and Other. However, *The Farseer Trilogy* not only promotes a dialogic

understanding of the Self, but also illustrates the danger of erasing the connection between Self and Other in the form of the Forged ones.

The Wit not only allows Fitz to communicate with Nigtheeyes, but by allowing him to sense all life around him also illustrates the interconnectedness of all living things. This is often described in terms of connection, with Fitz at one point using the Wit to sense his place on the “web of life” (*Royal* 231). This connection also applies to human beings, with the sole exception of the Forged ones. The interconnectedness highlighted by the Wit is opposed by the Red Ship Raiders “who discover a way to cut the ties between humans and other life” (Prater 25). The Forged ones have the “resonance of their memories stolen away ... They can remember what has happened in their lives and will recognize their family, but these things no longer have any emotional meaning or attachment” (Prater 26). The removal of these attachments does not make the Forged ones more autonomous or secure Selves, rather they become, as Prater puts it, “monstrous” (25). In this way we can see that the Self relies on the connections between Others, but specifically a real, emotional connection, something which the Forged ones no longer have access to. With their emotional connections to Others removed, the Forged ones become barbaric and monstrous beings, serving as the primary threat to Fitz throughout most of the trilogy.

The text also illustrates the importance of accepting these connections, even when that acceptance can be emotionally challenging. This is seen near the end of the

final book when Kestrel offers to help Verity finish his dragon. In order to do this, Kestrel must regain access to her own abilities in the Skill, lost to her due to her guilt over the death of her sister, Gull. It is revealed that Kestrel killed Gull in a fit of jealousy and has been living with the guilt for many years. Fitz successfully uses his own Skill to uncover this secret by entering her mind, saying: "I took her deep inside her mind, to the places and memories she had denied herself" (*Quest 736*). Having entered her mind, Fitz learns what Kestrel must do to regain her Skill: "*Forgive yourself. And let the part of her within you live again*" (*Quest 736*). It is only when she can acknowledge the part of her Self that is still Gull, that she can regain access to the abilities which will help Verity save his kingdom. This is represented as a moment of extreme vulnerability for Kestrel, as Fitz must enter her mind in order to find her memories of her sister. Kestrel's previous rejection of these memories, analogous to the rejection of the other-in-the-self, restricts her ability to connect with others through the Skill. This not only highlights the importance of accepting the other-in-the-self, but also the inherent vulnerability of a Self which relies so heavily on connections to Others.

The example of Kestrel shows that accepting vulnerability and connections to the Other is tied to the successful resolution of the central plot of *The Farseer Trilogy*. Prater and Melville both argue that this vulnerability is related to Fitz's status as a queer-coded character. For Prater, the representation of a male character that is inherently vulnerable to the influence of the Other disrupts "heterosexist binary understandings of the self" which see the male as unyielding and unchanging (27).

For Fitz, his interactions with animals through the Wit and other humans through the Skill disrupt any sense of an immutable, independent Self and highlights his essential reliance on Others. This can be linked to DST's understanding of the Self, not as immutable and separate, but rather as a networked understanding of identity. As explained above, DST understands the Self as only existing in relation to other Selves (Bertau xiii). Thus, the importance of the Other within the plot of Hobb's trilogy conforms to DST's understanding of the Self as created through the dialogic contact between different I-positions. However, as discussed in chapter two, Hobb's two magics have the potential to create a monologue as well as a dialogue. This potential also exists in the text's representation of the Self. At some points in the trilogy the vulnerability of the Self to the Other goes so far as to result in the disappearance of the Self altogether.

The potential danger in a Self which is vulnerable to the Other is seen throughout the series, but most overtly when Fitz's consciousness is merged with Nighteyes to form the hybrid being known as Wolf. In the previous chapter of this thesis, this event is used as evidence to show the danger of fully giving up what Ernest Becker calls the symbolic self. But this use of the Wit also fully erases the barrier between the previously separate, although connected, identities of Fitz and Nighteyes: "We ran alone, we the Wolf" (*Royal* 745). This shows how Fitz and Nighteyes' merging is represented in the narrative by a switch to the plural narrative voice. The trilogy is otherwise consistently narrated from Fitz's perspective, whereas in this scene the two characters see the world as one being from a shared perspective. Justyna

Deszcz-Tryhubczak notes that this sequence reveals to Fitz “a previously unknown area in which there is always something more than just the two homogenized polarities of the essential Self and the essential Other” (188). This ‘something more’ is represented by the almost total fusion of the independent Selves of Fitz and Nighteyes. Within the narrative, however, this fusion is seen negatively. When Chade meets Fitz, after he recovers from his time fused with Nighteyes, they have the following interaction:

“Oh, Fitz, Fitz, my boy,” [Chade] said in a voice full of relief. “I thought we had lost you. I thought we’d done something worse than let you die.” His old arms were tight and strong about me. I was kind to the old man. I did not tell him that they had. (*Quest 31*)

Here, Fitz reveals the depth of his feelings about their actions to save him from death. His time merged with Nighteyes may have saved him from death, but it also had a profound psychological impact. He sees himself as fundamentally changed, saying: “I was no longer FitzChivalry. I was what was left after fear had driven him from his body” (*Quest 28*). Fitz’s fusion with Nighteyes, as seen from the above examples, is not represented as inherently positive. Fitz understands it as worse than if Chade and Burrich had let him die, seeing it as a violation. Thus, the vulnerability of the Self that allows the dialogic contact between Self and Other also carries the possibility of monologue, which is realised in Fitz’s time as Wolf. This can also be seen in the conclusion of the trilogy with Verity’s monological fusion resulting in his immortality.

The fusion of Fitz and Nigtheeyes is very similar to Verity's achievement of immortality which, as noted in a previous chapter, is inherently monological. It is only with the help of Kestrel that Verity can complete his dragon, merging their Selves into a single, immortal being. As Verity explains to Fitz: "Kestrel will be a part of me. And her sister Gull. But I shall be the dragon." (*Quest 774*). When Verity and Kestrel fuse their memories and emotions into the dragon, they also learn more about each other's past:

Oh, I feel them all within the dragon already. The careful inking of colour onto a map, the feel of a clean piece of vellum under his hands. I even know the smells of his inks, now. He has put them all into the dragon. (*Quest 772*)

As Verity and Kestrel work to bring their dragon to life, they infuse it with their own memories and emotions, merging their separate Selves into a single, immortal, dragon Self. As they do, they begin to gain a mutual understanding of each other. At least initially, they maintain their mutual independence while also interacting dialogically. However, this initially dialogical contact ultimately becomes monological when Kestrel and Verity are both fused into the dragon. What was initially the dialogical contact between independent Selves, ultimately becomes a monological fusion into a single Self. This is a necessary step in the salvation of the Six Duchies and the defeat of Regal; however, it is also seen as a tragic sacrifice. It results in Verity leaving his human Self behind, along with his connections to his loved ones.

In *The Farseer Trilogy*, like *The Broken Earth*, the Self is represented as plural. The Wit and the Skill facilitate the connection between the Self and the Other. This connection is shown to be essential, and denying it dangerous, as seen in the example of the Forged ones and Kestrel's inability to use the Skill. However, the plurality of the Self is also seen as a vulnerability that is not always represented positively. Fitz himself is often shown to be extremely vulnerable to influence of others through the Skill. While the monological fusion is necessary for the successful completion of the plot, it is nonetheless seen as tragic. In *The Broken Earth*, monologue was a potential, though unrealised, element of Hoa's narration. In Hobb's trilogy this potential is realised.

In contrast to *The Farseer Trilogy* there has been comparatively little research into the Self/Other binary in Sanderson's *Mistborn* series. *Mistborn* provides a very different understanding of the Self/Other opposition. Sanderson's series represents the conflict between Self and Other as tied to class, and so DST is not as applicable in this case. Nevertheless, the terminology of Bakhtin's dialogue can provide useful insights into the particular form of identity construction the text illustrates. This is most clearly seen in Vin, who struggles with her identity which exists between the skaa and the nobles. The relationship between the skaa and the nobility can be understood in the light of Homi Bhabha's work on the subaltern. Bhabha borrows the term from Antonio Gramsci who defined the subaltern as "oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group" (*Unpacking* 209-210). While the term 'race' is never used in the text to describe the

skaa or the nobility, language of physiological difference between the two groups as a way of justifying the oppression of the former is present throughout the series. I argue that this mirrors the creation of a racial hierarchy during the colonial period, which was also used as justification for the oppression and enslavement of black and indigenous peoples.<sup>32</sup> In *Mistborn*, this can be seen as the creation of a social Other in the form of the skaa. It is important to note that the majority of the *Mistborn* trilogy is told from the perspective of those who sympathise with the plight of the skaa, or skaa characters themselves. As such, it is clear from almost the beginning of the text that the nobles' perspective of themselves as Self, and the skaa as Other, is questioned. I argue that Vin's hybrid position is an inherent threat to the social system of the Final Empire. Vin's hybridity, however, creates a crisis of identity in which she is unable to securely place herself in the traditional system offered by a strict division between skaa and noble. Vin's struggle with her own position in this binary is reflected in the central plot of the text which argues for the acceptance of all parts of society, and even illustrates the danger and hypocrisy in rejecting the inherent plurality of both society and the Self.

Within the social order of the Final Empire the nobility occupy a position of privilege over the skaa. While they are a clear majority in Sanderson's world, the skaa are nonetheless an oppressed group, and their perceived essential difference to the

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<sup>32</sup> For more on this process see Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) or Andrew Curran's *The Anatomy of Blackness* (2011)

nobles is integral to the self-definition of the nobles themselves. The creation of the skaa as Other is rooted in language that is highly reminiscent of real-world justifications for the system of slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This language allows the nobility to justify their position of privilege and the oppression of the skaa. This is most clear in the way magical ability manifests in this world, as one character argues: “there’s a physical difference there ... Skaa never become Mistings unless they have aristocratic blood somewhere in their last five generations” (*Final* 354). Zoe Sherman points out that magic ability in fantasy can represent the power differential in class relations, highlighting that “[n]ot having magic when others do is clearly a severe disadvantage. Those who have magic are liable to press their advantage” (187). In *Mistborn*, magical ability, a marker of social power, is linked to physiological differences between the skaa and nobles, suggesting that the class position of the skaa is the result of a biological trait. The ‘physical difference’ between the skaa and nobility is reinforced through other traits thought to justify the oppressed position of the skaa. This manifests as stereotypes surrounding the skaa, which one skaa character recounts: “I’ve known skaa women to have as many as a dozen children ... but I can’t name a single noble family with more than three” (*Final* 354). Crucially, the physiological differences separating the skaa and nobles are revealed to be true within the world of *Mistborn* and are the result of the Lord Ruler’s usurpation of the role of prophesied hero. The reader learns this from a chapter epigraph, later revealed to be written by Sazed following his apotheosis: “Some groups of people – the noblemen – were created to be less fertile, but taller, stronger, and more intelligent. Others – the skaa – were made to be shorter, hardier, and to have many children” (*Hero* 205). While we are

told these changes were minor and that “*after a thousand years of interbreeding, the differences had largely been erased*”, the above quotes regarding birth-rates and magical ability would suggest that these differences are still present, at least to some extent (*Hero* 205). The crucial point is that prior to the Lord Ruler’s intervention, these physiological differences did not exist. As such, the Lord Ruler’s intervention can be seen as a literal act of the creation of a subaltern identity in the skaa, which cements the class system he ultimately rules over in the language of racial difference. The creation of the skaa as a subaltern group to cement a hierarchical class system reflects Bhabha’s ideas on the function of stereotypes of colonised peoples. He writes: “By ‘knowing’ the population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate” (*Location* 119). Thus, for the nobility of the Final Empire, the brutal treatment of the skaa is considered appropriate due to their physiological Otherness; an Otherness which was literally created by the Lord Ruler.

It is important to note that this division also creates, and is reliant on, a class opposition, which provides a link between the series and the radical fantasy subgenre. Radical fantasy is helpfully defined by William J. Burling in “Periodizing the Postmodern: China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* and the Dynamics of Radical Fantasy” (2009), where he argues that “[r]adical Fantasy evinces an interest in the militant, material struggles for progressive social justice and economic equality, and in the relationship of individual and collective identity understood on the basis of class struggle” (330). The issue of class struggle is foregrounded from the very

beginning of *Mistborn*, in which the central conflict between the oppressed skaa and the privileged nobles is introduced in the first few pages:

“I see them being sluggish, even for skaa. Beat a few of them.” Kurdon shrugged, but nodded. It wasn’t much of a reason for a beating – but, then, he didn’t need much of a reason to give the workers a beating. They were, after all, only skaa. (*Final 5*)

This passage highlights the way in which the nobles’ view of the skaa as less than human justifies their brutal treatment. The struggle of the skaa rebels is not only a struggle against the system of oppression. It is also a struggle against the Othering which the nobility utilises to secure their positions. Thus, the skaa rebellion is also a struggle towards the recognition that the Other is in itself an alternate Self, and forms an integral element of the definition of the nobility themselves.

Understanding the Self/Other opposition in *Mistborn* as relying on both physiological and class differences between the skaa and nobles is important to make sense of how the hybridity of the protagonists provides an existential threat to this system. While the protagonists work towards liberating the skaa and inspiring a revolution, their position is compromised by their own privilege. Not only are many of them half-noble, giving them access to magical abilities reserved for the upper class, but they also live in far better conditions than most skaa. It is Vin who reveals this inherent hypocrisy to the group, as she has lived in a more precarious position than any of the others. She accuses Kelsier and the other members of the crew of being blind to their own privilege. It is important to note

that the factors which problematise the crew's position as liberators are markers of class as well as physiological difference, seen in their access to magic. I argue that the crew, and Vin herself, occupy a hybrid position between the skaa and the nobility. This position is not only a result of their physiological hybridity, but also their class hybridity. Occupying this liminal position is an essential element of the crew's revolutionary project, as it gives them access to noble society, and the magical abilities they need to fight the status quo. The text therefore reflects Bhabha's work on hybridity. Bhabha argues that the presence of a hybrid, like Vin, is an existential threat to the Self/Other system which both defines and maintains the position of privilege enjoyed by the noble class. According to Bhabha the hybrid is inherently threatening to the status quo, given that they are "in a position to subvert the authority of those who [have] hegemonic power" (*Unpacking* 210). For those in positions of hegemonic power, hybridity is a threat because it "breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other" (Bhabha, *Location* 165). The skaa/noble hybrids not only have access to magical ability which provides a physical threat to the nobility, but their very existence disrupts the strict separation between the classes which maintains the status quo. As such, Vin and the rest of the crew disrupt the strict Self/Other binary by their very existence. This explains the Final Empire's moratorium on half-noble children. There is not only a risk of allowing magical ability to fall into the hands of the skaa, but an identity that does not fall easily into one of the two categories allowed by the nobility threatens the foundation of the entire social system of the Final Empire. This hybrid position is predominantly represented by Vin, whose movement between these two social groups highlights the inherent instability in the binary opposition and threatens the

system which sees the Self of the nobility benefitted and self-defined through the Other of the skaa. However, Vin herself struggles with her identity, predominantly due to her inability to resolve the perceived inherent division between her skaa and noble identities. This struggle represents the danger in rejecting the Other, as it is an essential element of the Self.

The difficulty in Vin's hybrid position becomes clear in the first book, where she finds herself caught between the liberation of the skaa and her growing attachment to noble society. The conflict between the two elements of Vin's Self, skaa and noble, is a reflection of the wider class conflict seen in the first book. This class conflict is ultimately resolved with both skaa and nobles working together to create a new social system. While Vin is not initially committed to the revolutionary cause, she does eventually come to believe in the plan and the importance of social change. She has experienced first-hand the oppression of the skaa, and continues to protest their brutal treatment. Over the course of the first book, Vin works as a spy. She presents herself as the daughter of a countryside noble using the name Valette in order to infiltrate noble balls to learn as much as she can about the inner workings of noble society. It is during this time that Vin begins to appreciate the trappings of nobility, eventually seeing them as simply misguided rather than actively malevolent: "a lot of them are good people. I don't think they realize how terrible things are for the skaa" (*Final* 375). Vin eventually finds herself enamoured by the nobility, and even argues against a total purge after the revolution begins: "Some of them seemed quite kind, in their own way, and she was beginning to think

some of the stories skaa told about their cruelty must be exaggerated" (*Final* 328). What is particularly surprising about this quote is that Vin, herself, has experienced these cruelties, and the central characters she befriends along the way all have their own stories of suffering under the nobility. Thus, Vin begins to occupy a hybrid position. She is committed to the revolution and is even instrumental to its success, but at the same time she appreciates the life of the nobility. Vin's intervention in the revolutionary project results in some nobles, notably Elend, being allowed to take part in the post-revolutionary government. Melville argues that this is a key moment in the text which resolves the conflict between Kelsier's more violent revolutionary vision and Vin's more humanist ideals. A total rejection of the nobility, Melville argues, would result in a "mere reversal of domination, in which one class continues to dehumanise and oppress another" (40). Thus, the text illustrates the importance of creating a connection between the opposed elements of the skaa/noble binary through the successful revolution in the first book, which relies on the continued dialogic interaction between skaa and nobles.

Elend and Vin's post-revolutionary government represents the dialogic interaction between the skaa and nobility, two sides of a previously opposed Self/Other binary. In the third book, the reader is offered an example of the monologic interaction between the two social classes. This is seen as hypocritical and dangerous, resulting in the kind of violence that Elend and Vin argued against. After the revolution and the collapse of the Final Empire, the city of Urteau conducted a purge of all nobility. The leader of this purge is Quellion, who orders the execution of anyone with a

connection to the nobility, no matter how tenuous this connection may be. This city is an example of a revolution that totally rejects the nobility, with violent consequences. Spook, an ally of Vin and Elend, is sent to this city to investigate, and he witnesses the violence first-hand: "He could see the sorry individuals that Quellion had decided to murder ... people who had been discovered to have noble parentage. Several others, however, were only spouses of those with noble blood" (*Hero* 361). This is essentially an example of the kind of revolution which Kelsier originally worked towards, before Vin was able to convince him to allow some nobility to live. Nevertheless, the violence in Urteau is all conducted in the name of Kelsier himself, despite Kelsier's half-noble status, and his later rejection of an outright hatred of all nobility. This inherent hypocrisy is ultimately the downfall of Quellion, as it is revealed that his own sister is half-noble. The reveal results in a riot which threatens to destroy the city: "Flames burned in a dozen different spots, lighting the mists, casting a hellish haze over the city. Not the fires of rebellion at all. The fires of destruction" (*Hero* 523). The distinction between the fires of rebellion and destruction follows Melville's argument on the two revolutionary ideals represented by Vin and Kelsier. The retributive violence in Urteau is another example of the 'reversal of domination' that Melville argues is risked by Kelsier's violent revolution, characterized by a complete rejection of the nobility. The revolutionaries in Urteau reject the nobility completely and are unable to recognise the connection they share. This is true of both the physiological connection, as in the noble lineage of some skaa, and the social connection. Thus, the total rejection of the Other results in unrestrained violence, which is seen to go against the ideals of the revolution as represented by Elend and Vin's new government. Similarly, in

*The Farseer Trilogy*, the Forged ones' inability to establish a real emotional connection to the Other leads them to becoming violently selfish. Both texts, therefore, link unrestrained violence to the total rejection of the Other. This is also seen in Vin's personal struggle with her identity, which similarly leads her to engaging in acts of violence.

While the first book of the *Mistborn* trilogy ends with the creation of a "parliamentary council", illustrating the dialogic contact between skaa and nobility, Vin's thoughts indicate that her own struggle with identity has not ended (*Well* 20). Her uncertainty about her identity is highlighted in the final pages of the first novel: "She wasn't certain what she wanted anymore; she wasn't certain if she were Vin or Valette, or even which of them she wished that she were" (*Final* 642). In this passage, the skaa and noble sides of her identity are represented by Vin and Valette respectively. Her fake identity, Valette, created to help her spy on noble society, has now become an integral part of her Self, albeit a problematic one. Throughout the second book of *Mistborn*, Vin struggles with her growing attachment to the life of a noble. Repeated threats to Elend's life constantly reinforce in Vin the idea that she must reject the noble side of her hybrid Self in favour of her skaa past, believing this is more useful for her in her role as assassin and bodyguard. This is particularly clear when she is encouraged to wear noble clothing again. She argues that "when wearing dresses like that, it's too easy to forget who you really are ... I need to be something else. Something harder" (*Well* 283). While Vin sees her rejection of the trappings of nobility as a move towards who she really is, the text itself presents

this as inherently limiting. As one character asks her: “Why look at only one side of yourself?” (*Well* 284). This rejection of one part of her identity eventually leads her to engaging in the same kind of unrestrained violence seen in Urteau. Unable to access a stable position in the Self/Other binary results in Vin’s dehumanisation, and she is manipulated into indulging her full magical abilities to brutally eliminate a potential threat to the new state, killing hundreds in a single night. Afterwards she says she felt like “a child in a roomful of bugs” (*Well* 546). She regrets her actions, saying they were born out of “the same rationale Kelsier used ... when he killed noblemen and their guards. He said they were upholding the Final Empire, so they deserved to die” (*Well* 547). She connects her own actions to Kelsier’s more violent tendencies, which she herself argued against, showing the inherent danger of a complete rejection of an integral part of the Self.

It is not until the final book, however, that Vin is shown to fully integrate the plurality of her Self. In the final book of the trilogy, Vin attends a noble ball and finds her new role as empress accepted by the nobility. This acceptance allows her to reconsider her relationship to the nobility. Finding a new confidence in her hybridity, she thinks: “*This is part of me, ... I am a noblewoman. I do fit in here*” (*Hero* 289). In accepting her hybridity Vin is able to stabilize her Self, no longer forced to choose between the strict binary constructed by the Lord Ruler between skaa and noble. This hybrid identity offers a new security for Vin. When she attended balls in the past, disguised as Valette, she was under constant threat of discovery. Her newfound acceptance changes this:

Yet, she felt none of that same insecurity. She didn't worry if she'd find acceptance or belief ... she'd discovered who she was. Not a girl of the streets, though that was where she'd been raised. Not a woman of the court, though she appreciated the beauty and grace of the balls. Someone else. Someone she liked. (*Hero* 261)

Thus, Vin realises that her own identity is plural, and encompasses both the noble and skaa sides of her Self. In contrast to her thoughts at the end of the first novel, in which she did not know if she wanted to choose Vin or Valette, in the final book she realises she does not have to choose at all. She accepts her plurality, rather than rejects it. Upon gaining this new understanding, she tells Elend: "I had to realise that I could be both people – the Mistborn of the streets and the woman of the court. I had to acknowledge that the new person I'm becoming is a valid extension of who I am" (*Hero* 293). In saying that she can now be both people, Vin reveals that her newfound confidence is reliant on the plurality of her Self, on the understanding that her identity encompasses multiple, at times opposed, elements. Like Elend's parliamentary council, the skaa and noble sides of Vin's Self are both essential parts of who she is.

The Lord Ruler's creation of the Final Empire's social system can be seen as the literal creation of a subaltern Other against which to define the nobility. This system appears rigid and unchangeable, a perception which resists the possibility of resistance. However, hybrid identities like Vin's symbolise the inherent instability in this system. Vin is not only a threat to the Final Empire due to her possessing of the

powers of a Mistborn. She also symbolically represents that the identities of skaa and noble are not so completely opposed as they initially appear. The revolution she helps instigate further highlights the importance of accepting a hybrid view of the Self, and the dangers of rejecting this view are also illustrated within the trilogy. Where Vin and Elend's revolution is centred on the plurality of society, allowing both skaa and nobles to work together, Urteau offers an example of a monological revolution which rejects plurality. This violence is also illustrated in *The Farseer Trilogy*, where the Forged ones, unable to connect with the Other, become monstrously violent in their selfish desires. Vin's acceptance of her plurality is akin to Essun's reintegration of Damaya and Syenite. Essun had to reconnect with her past selves, accepting them as central to her identity. Similarly, Vin ultimately accepts both skaa and noble sides of her Self, illustrating the importance of this plural understanding of the Self. Unlike Verity, whose immortality is rooted in the reduction of plurality through the fusion of multiple personalities into one, Vin and Essun both recognize that their Selves are inherently plural. *Mistborn* cannot be said to illustrate the dialogical Self as proposed by DST as clearly as *The Broken Earth* trilogy does. However, both series do portray the Self as essentially plural, and created through occasionally contradictory elements of a single identity. This plural understanding of the Self is similarly illustrated in *The Farseer Trilogy*, but with an emphasis on the vulnerability of the individual Self and the impact of the external Other. Hobb's trilogy sees the interaction between different Selves as mutually enriching, even if this is potentially monologizing, seen in the occasional fusion of multiple identities. In *The Farseer Trilogy*, the Self is shown to be mutable, and the barriers between Self and Other are disrupted through the operation of the Wit and

Skill. Thus, all three texts appear to illustrate a pluralistic understanding of the Self, which can be understood through the terminology provided by DST. Nevertheless, the text which most closely illustrates the dialogical Self is *The Broken Earth*, in which the narrative structure of the text itself encourages the reader to participate in the dialogical formation of identity.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to compare the different ways binary opposition appears in three highly influential contemporary epic fantasy trilogies, and to show that their representation of binary oppositions is more complex than accusations of simplicity can account for. The binary oppositions identified in the three trilogies studied are certainly complex, and this study has shown several ways in which contemporary epic fantasy authors can illustrate the interaction between opposites. While the comparison between texts was conducted with reference to individual oppositions in the previous chapters, it is now possible to offer an overview of the differences and similarities between all three trilogies from a more holistic perspective.

A central argument of this project follows from Le Guin's defence of Tolkien, referred to in the introduction of this thesis. Rather than deny the charge that Tolkien's work revolves around binary opposites, Le Guin reveals that this opposition is itself important for the construction of meaning in the text. Similarly, each of the three trilogies studied here does feature binary opposition, but dismissing this as 'simple' fails to account for an integral element of the texts. My analysis shows that the trilogies studied do not simply feature those oppositions, but rather use the interaction of binary opposites to question the idea of opposition itself. Mieke Bal argues that opposition is often used as a "handy simplification of complex content" (185). What ties all three of the primary texts together is their

concern with this simplification. Thus, the binary oppositions featured in the texts are not themselves simple, but rather provide the means for a critique of simplification.

I began this thesis by analysing Sanderson's trilogy, in which the central opposition is the good/evil binary, ultimately resolved monologically through relativism. Monologue is key to understanding how this trilogy questions binary opposition, and more specifically fragmentation. Bal argues that one specific drawback of binary oppositions is in their "reduction, of an infinitely rich but also chaotic field" (116). Similarly, Sanderson's text does revolve around binary oppositions, but does so in order to question the way these oppositions fragment a unified totality. In *Mistborn*, no character can be considered truly 'evil' (with the possible exception of Straff Venture), and even the Lord Ruler's actions are eventually justified, even though he may be seen as misguided. Essentially, the text presents 'good' and 'evil' as attempts at an artificial categorisation: human beings are too complicated for this binary to apply. As such, within the trilogy, the categories of 'good' and 'evil' disappear. Ruin tells Vin that "good and evil have little to do with ruin and preservation", nevertheless, the resolution of these two greater powers at the end of the trilogy reflects the monological relativism of the good/evil binary in the text (*Hero* 513). The resolution of both the good/evil and Ruin/Preservation oppositions indicates the reduction and fragmentation inherent in the creation of binary opposition itself.

It is the understanding that both Ruin and Preservation are parts of one whole that allows Sazed to bring them together, granting him immortality and divinity. Like the good/evil binary, the Ruin/Preservation opposition ceases to truly exist as each alterity loses its individual meaning. This occurs through relativism in the case of 'good' and 'evil', and through synthesis in the case of Ruin and Preservation. In *Mistborn*, this synthesis is explicitly linked to Sazed's gender. Sazed's gender-neutral identity is a result of his forced castration at birth, which implies a problematic link between gender and physiology. Nevertheless, Sazed's identity as 'neither really man or woman', as he puts it, is linked to the fusion of Ruin and Preservation into a new being that is also neither one nor the other. This process is very similar to Joseph Campbell's observations regarding male-female gods in myth, which arguably describes Sazed's position. Campbell argues that these figures "conduct the mind beyond objective experience into a symbolic realm where duality is left behind" (131). Similarly, the fusion of Ruin and Preservation illustrates a movement beyond their duality, where the separated alterities are left behind in the creation of a unified totality. In the same way as Sazed's gender identity, this new divine being is neither Ruin nor Preservation. Instead, Sazed takes the name Harmony. The duality between previously opposed alterities is therefore erased.

Sanderson's trilogy further suggests that this fusion is the true pre-fragmentary state of these divine powers. As Sazed ascends, he informs the reader that "Ruin and Preservation were dead, and their powers had been joined together. In fact, they belonged together. How had they been split?" (*Hero* 718). The final moments

of the trilogy show that Ruin and Preservation truly belong as a single whole, and the world can only be saved by looking beyond their artificial fragmentation. This propensity to looking beyond an artificial fragmentation is reflected in Sanderson's wider Cosmere universe as well. Throughout the many entries of this extended shared universe, Ruin and Preservation are revealed to be two of sixteen 'shards' of a greater being. The fragmentation of this greater being is the origin of the state of this universe, and thus the instigating factor for every one of Sanderson's plots. The movement beyond separated alterities towards an essential unity is similarly represented in the good/evil binary in *Mistborn*. The relativisation of this opposition reveals that the Lord Ruler is actually pursuing the same goal as the protagonists: saving humanity from the apocalypse. Thus, any attempt to firmly identify a character as either 'good' or 'evil' would result in the same artificial fragmentation seen in the Ruin/Preservation binary. In both cases, the text critiques the firm separation between alterities as a simplification, or fragmentation, of a larger whole. Thus, the particular form of monologue seen in *Mistborn* results in a more holistic view, which rejects fragmentation and looks past the reduction inherent in the creation of binary opposition towards a more unified totality.

This questioning of fragmentation is also seen in the representation of the Self/Other binary in *Mistborn*. While the good/evil and Ruin/Preservation binaries are resolved monologically, the Self/Other binary in *Mistborn* is, at least initially, represented dialogically. Nevertheless, the particular manifestation of this dialogue is also based on the idea of the connection between alterities, rather than an

essentialising fragmentation. This is most clearly seen in the way Elend's government operates after the revolution. The public attendees of an Assembly meeting are described as "a strangely mixed" crowd, "a collection of different groups who would never have met together during the days of the Final Empire" (*Well* 95). This crowd represents the ideal form of Elend's new society, the unity of which emphasises the importance of wholeness over fragmentation. By allowing the nobility and skaa to work together, this government prevents the kind of violence seen in Urteau, where the rebellion executes anyone found with a link to the nobility. The total rejection of anyone with noble blood is based on a fully solidified binary, in which the nobility is seen as entirely separate from and unconnected to the skaa. Elend's post-revolutionary government, on the other hand, is built on the premise that the skaa and nobility can work together, and both have a stake in the new society they are trying to create. However, while Elend's ideal society is one in which the people are unified, this ideal eventually collapses.

Elend's parliamentary democracy is essentially dialogical, and for dialogue to take place distinct voices must still exist. This accounts for the difficulties Elend has in managing his new parliament. The atmosphere of Elend's parliament is described in the following way: "The Assembly was only twenty-four men, but getting them to agree on anything was almost more challenging than any of the problems they argued about" (*Well* 21). Members of Elend's Assembly are constantly at odds with each other, and whenever they are featured in the text it is almost always to argue. The separation of distinct voices that is inherent to a dialogical system almost

results in the downfall of his new society when some members of the Assembly plot to overthrow Elend to return to the old order. This plan hinges on the support of the wealthy skaa merchants, who “want assurances that they will have titles” once the city is handed over to Straff (*Well* 473). This is most clearly represented by Philen, the leader of the wealthy skaa merchants. As is common throughout *Mistborn*, he is introduced with a high degree of FID: “Philen Frandeu was not skaa. He had *never* been skaa. Skaa made things or grew things. Philen sold things ... Couldn’t they see that the two groups were completely different?” (*Well* 358). Philen’s betrayal hinges on further fragmentation, in this case dividing the skaa into separated classes, hence his desire to gain a noble title for himself. Elend’s parliamentary government was founded on the idea that, while differences do exist between members of the Assembly, they are nonetheless united in their support of the society he leads. However, the fragmentation inherent in this system is never truly resolved. This fragmentation leads Philen to attempt to separate himself from the rest of the skaa, resisting Elend’s unification. It is not until Elend takes power for himself, as a monological authority over a new empire, that political stability is regained. Thus, while dialogue is a feature of Elend’s parliamentary government, the fragmentation inherent in his dialogical system almost leads to disaster. In *Mistborn*, a monological authority is ultimately required to rescue the unity that was at the core of Elend’s ideal democratic system.

This tendency towards unity is also seen in Vin. Where Elend’s Assembly illustrates the Self/Other opposition socially, Vin’s internal conflict revolves around the same

opposition on the personal level. Like many of the members of the original crew which brought down the Final Empire, Vin is half-noble. In chapter three, I discussed how this hybridity is an inherent threat to the social order of the Final Empire in that her combination of noble and skaa is the source of her revolutionary power. Vin's initial inability to accept both skaa and noble parts of her Self reinforces the separation of these two groups, which was previously enforced by the Final Empire. However, she ultimately accepts hybridity, acknowledging the importance of the totality of an essentially dual Self. Vin explicitly uses the word 'both' to describe her new state of being, which encompasses her skaa and noble backgrounds. This would imply that these two alterities still exist individually, thus resulting in an identity which is inherently dual and preserves the alterity of the two opposites. Vin's realisation that her whole Self is a combination of both skaa and noble is symbolic of Elend's ideal society, in which both sides can accept each other and work together. While the larger tendency in *Mistborn* is towards unity, and looking beyond the simplification of binary opposition, Vin's case, like Elend's parliament, highlights that this is not only done monologically. In *Mistborn*, both monologue and dialogue highlight the inherent reduction that is a feature of binary opposition, by emphasising the connection between alterities. Both forms of interaction, though fundamentally different in their operation, highlight the simplification involved in an absolute separation of artificial alterities.

Hobb's text questions binary opposition in a similar way to that seen in *Mistborn*. However, where the emphasis in Sanderson's trilogy is on looking beyond binary

opposition towards a fundamental unity, *The Farseer Trilogy* instead questions the 'opposed' nature of alterities. In Hobb's trilogy, rather than the fragmentation of a fundamental unity, binary opposition is questioned in its articulation of alterities as antagonistic opposites. This is prominently seen in the central binary interaction of the text, in which immortality is achieved through the monological fusion of the Skill and the Wit. While the Skill and the Wit are opposed throughout the series, hints that they are more related than they first appear to be are layered throughout. Their interaction, as argued in chapter two, reflects the opposition between the animal and symbolic selves of Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*. When the two magics fully come together to achieve immortality, the opposition between the animal and symbolic selves is also resolved. Once death is removed as a factor, the animal and symbolic selves are able to come together revealing that these seeming 'opposites' can coexist.

While this is achieved monologically in the case of immortality, the same questioning of the opposition of alterities is seen dialogically in the resolution of the good/evil binary in *The Farseer Trilogy*. In Hobb's trilogy, 'good' and 'evil' revolve around the quality of loyalty. Initially this opposition is straightforward, and Regal's lack of loyalty appears to solidify his 'evil'. The most pivotal moment in Regal's determination as 'evil' occurs near the end of the second book. Having had his brother, Verity, declared dead, Regal also has his father killed, and blames the death on Fitz. Regal's lack of loyalty is fully expressed in this disregard for family ties, and this is a determination that is unchallenged for much of the text. However, as I

argued in chapter one, dialogue does occur when Fitz learns about Regal's motives. Through a connection created by the Skill, Fitz comes to understand that Regal's 'evil' is not so fundamental as he first thought, and that his actions are rather those of a "whining, spoiled child who schemed to take his older brother's toys" (*Quest* 825). Fitz is able to understand that Regal's lack of loyalty is based on the belief that everyone around him has their own plans to do him harm. Similarly, King Shrewd's death was partially the result of his being unable to accept that his son could be capable of patricide. This is not the total relativisation of 'good' and 'evil', as was seen in Sanderson's trilogy. It does, however, highlight the importance of understanding difference. Fitz stands apart from both Regal and Shrewd in that he is able to understand, and accept, the fundamental difference in Regal's outlook. While Fitz remains opposed to Regal, he can understand him in a way Shrewd was never able to.

Hobb's text, however, also questions the idea of absolute opposition. As opposed as Fitz and Regal are, there remains a connection. Fitz's insight into Regal's motivations is granted through the Skill. This occurs near the end of the trilogy and is a moment of extreme vulnerability for Regal. However, Regal reminds Fitz that "[he] will lose [his] own Skill" if he kills using the magic (*Quest* 826). This is explained by Kestrel, who reveals why Verity's Skill was damaged after he used it to kill: "Even though the coterie member was not true to you, still, you had worked together. In killing him, you killed a part of yourself" (*Quest* 730-731). No matter how opposed two figures may be, they can still be connected through the Skill. In this case, even

though Fitz and Regal seem to exist as polar opposites, Fitz would still be killing a part of himself were he to execute his uncle. Thus, the fundamental connection between alterities is emphasised. This differs from *Mistborn* in which the categories of 'good' and 'evil' ceased to really exist due to their relativisation. In *The Farseer Trilogy*, both terms are understood as distinct categories, and this remains the case in the conclusion of the text. Nevertheless, Fitz and Regal share a connection, despite their determination on opposite sides of the good/evil binary, illustrating the connection between opposites without collapsing the binary altogether.

Where Hobb's text differs from Sanderson's is in its alternative view of unity. *Mistborn* questioned the tendency of binary opposition to fragment a perceived fundamental unity. For Hobb, however, the distinction between alterities does exist: it is the total opposition of these alterities that is questioned. Indeed, the complete unification of alterities, crucial for the salvation of Sanderson's world, is represented negatively in Hobb's trilogy. In *The Farseer Trilogy*, the Self is repeatedly shown to be mutable. The Wit and the Skill disrupt ideas of the sovereignty of the Self and facilitate the interaction between different identities. There is, however, a danger associated with this contact. This is seen in Fitz's intimate connection to Nigteyes, which threatens to result in their two identities being fused monologically, erasing their individual identities. This is represented as undesirable in the text, as it would result in the failure of Verity's quest, whose own monological immortality is similarly seen as tragic. While the connection between opposites is emphasised, the unification of those opposites and the erasure of

alterity is consistently shown to be negative. Therefore, *The Farseer Trilogy* appears to illustrate that the weakness of binary opposition is not in the fragmentation of a fundamental unity, but rather the antagonistic relationship between alterities. Furthermore, Hobb's trilogy illustrates that the erasure of alterities is, in itself, a negative outcome. In this sense, while monologue is possible in *The Farseer Trilogy*, it is always represented as a tragedy.

Like *The Farseer Trilogy*, *The Broken Earth* emphasises the connection between alterities over their absolute opposition. It does this primarily through questioning the Self/Other binary, illustrating throughout the trilogy the importance of the Other in the construction of the Self. Whereas the other two trilogies used dialogue and monologue to question aspects of binary opposition, Jemisin's trilogy is solely concerned with dialogue. The importance of dialogue is embedded in the narrative structure of the text itself, encouraging both participation and immersion on the part of the reader, and drawing them into the formation of Essun's dialogical Self. Essun must come to terms with the Other inside her Self, in the form of her past identities. This is not represented as a fusion of those alterities, but rather a productive dialogue between internal I-positions. There is a subtle, but important, difference between this representation of the Self/Other binary and that seen in *Mistborn*. Where Vin's noble and skaa sides are represented as separate alterities, they are nonetheless both elements of a single whole Self. Vin's challenge is in accepting the duality within her own unity. Essun, however, is not the product of Damaya combined with Syenite. Rather, she engages in a productive dialogue with

elements of her own Self. In *Mistborn*, Vin's Self encompasses both skaa and noble, and these two sides are united in the unified whole that is Vin. Essun's identity, however, is inherently fragmentary, in that it encompasses a range of individual I-positions, both internal and external to her Self, which may be opposed but are nonetheless connected.

*The Broken Earth* trilogy's concern with dialogue is fundamental to the way oppositions feature throughout the text. In every opposition studied, conflict is the result of a lack of dialogue or communication. Essun's history of trauma prevents her from truly communicating with her daughter, which leads Nassun to connecting with Schaffa and coming to a different conclusion regarding the fate of the world. Similarly, the origin of the world of the text is also the result of a failure to communicate. It is revealed that the ancient scientists whose experiment results in the collapse of civilisation, failed to realise that the Earth itself was sentient: "no one thought of the Earth as alive in those days – but we *should* have guessed" (*Stone* 322). Their inability to recognise the Earth as an independent Self prevented communication from occurring altogether. Similarly, orogenes are officially considered to be non-human, justifying their brutal treatment. This attitude solidifies the separation between humans and orogenes, or humans and the Earth, and denies any possibility of contact between them. These are all examples of the failure to recognise the Other as an independent Self that is indispensable to one's own self-formation. Thus, a major source of conflict in Jemisin's trilogy is in failing to see the connection between seemingly opposed alterities. While these alterities

are never unified as was seen in *Mistborn*, their connection is nonetheless stressed. By emphasising the link between alterities, *The Broken Earth* disrupts the essential separation of opposites. Recognising the Other as an independent Self, and attempting to communicate despite seemingly insurmountable differences, is ultimately how the world is saved in *The Broken Earth*. The inability, or refusal, to communicate, is what almost results in the death of humanity. Nevertheless, nowhere in Jemisin's text is monologue realised. In Sanderson's text, monologue was a way of looking beyond binary opposition. For Hobb, monologue is the potential danger of a complete erasure of separation. For Jemisin, however, monologue is simply an impossibility. Binary opposition is not seen as a fragmentation, because no unified wholeness ever really existed. In *The Broken Earth*, rather than a primordial unity that is artificially fragmented into binary oppositions, plurality is the natural state. Like *The Farseer Trilogy*, Jemisin's text questions the 'opposed' nature of the interaction between alterities, arguing that productive contact between alterities can, and should, occur. But unlike *The Farseer Trilogy*, there is no risk that this contact could result in a monologue, due to the inherent plurality of Jemisin's text.

The purpose of this research is not to deny the existence of binary opposition in contemporary popular epic fantasy, but rather to investigate these oppositions seriously. To return to Le Guin's defence of Tolkien, complexity is often a matter of perspective. It is possible to see each of these texts as simplistic, due to the division between binary opposites. However, this is only possible by ignoring what the texts

do with these binary opposites. Analysing the way epic fantasy illustrates the interaction between binaries reveals the complexities which would otherwise be overlooked. While all of the texts studied here do engage with the idea of binary opposition, they do so purposefully to question this idea and the simplification inherent to it, albeit in different ways. Bakhtin's theory of dialogue is useful in understanding the way these texts illustrate the interaction between alterities. Whether through dialogue or monologue, all three texts show how binary opposition can over-simplify the complex relationship between alterities. The three trilogies use the structure of binary opposition to disrupt that same structure, either by highlighting the artificiality of fragmenting a unified whole, or by emphasising the connection between seemingly opposed alterities. To paraphrase Le Guin: these texts may be simple, but they are not simplistic.

## Suggestions for future study

This study was necessarily limited in scope due to constraints in both the space and time available. As such, there were a number of promising avenues of study which could not be addressed here. Below I detail some potential new areas of research which arise from my analysis. A central purpose of this study was to highlight the complexity of these texts, by revealing the way in which binary oppositions are featured. One of the central findings of my analysis is that each of the three texts questions binary opposition in different ways, and through either dialogue or monologue. Increasing the scope of this research would be a productive way of

determining a more concrete trend in contemporary popular epic fantasy. It is worth considering the position of the texts studied here within the wider work of their respective authors. *Mistborn* is a relatively early example of Sanderson's writing. However, many of the themes the trilogy deals with are also present in his later work. A focused study of the work of Sanderson would shed light on the way his particular treatment of binary oppositions has developed over time. Hobb also has a large corpus of fantasy writing, and the world of *The Farseer Trilogy*, and Fitz's story in particular, has been expanded across several newer entries. Other works by Hobb which could be of interest include her *Soldier Son* trilogy, which is primarily concerned with binary opposition in a colonial environment, as represented by the conflict between an expansionist militaristic society and an indigenous group defending their land. This could be productively compared to Sanderson's *Mistborn*, which also linked the Self/Other binary to colonial practices. Finally, Jemisin's *The Inheritance* trilogy could also provide useful insight into the nature of dialogue across her work.

The critique of this genre of fantasy as containing 'simple' binary opposition covers a wide range of texts, which provides the basis of a promising sample with which to conduct further analysis. Potential texts for study include the *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series by Steven Erikson, *The Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson, and *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin. These three texts have long been at the centre of the epic fantasy fuzzy set and would therefore provide valuable material for analysis. Children's and young adult fantasy has also

been accused of revolving around simple binaries, and an analysis of texts like *The Wind on Fire* trilogy by William Nicholson, the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series by Rick Riordan, and *The Edge Chronicles* by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell could offer interesting insight into the way binaries are represented in this genre of fantasy. Furthermore, while this study has focused on contemporary popular epic fantasy, an interesting possibility for future study would be to investigate binary opposition in the history of fantasy literature more generally. This could provide a more concrete foundation for the presence of binary oppositions in contemporary fantasy. Certainly, Tolkien's writing has been considered the central pillar of contemporary epic fantasy, and consequently has also been the prime target for accusations of simplicity. Conducting a similar analysis on the work of Tolkien, specifically relating to the way opposites interact, could provide an interesting point of comparison for the way dialogue and monologue are featured in fantasy. This comparison could also reveal the ways in which the treatment of binary oppositions has changed within the genre, from a foundational text like Tolkien's to more contemporary entries in the canon. While popular fantasy literature has long been associated with binary oppositions, this has rarely been directly analysed in academic studies. A wider conversation about this element of the genre could provide important insights into its development, both in terms of origins and evolution.

It is worth pointing out that this study was unable to discuss every binary opposition in the primary texts. One particularly important opposition, which could not be

analysed due to space and time restrictions, is the gender binary. Interestingly, all three texts studied contain a side character which disrupts the gender binary in some way. In *The Farseer Trilogy*, the Fool resists identification as any gender, saying: "That is one thing that in all my years among your folk I have never become accustomed to. The great importance that you attach to what gender one is" (*Quest* 634). In *Mistborn*, Sazed's representation is also non-binary, although problematically so. Finally, in *The Broken Earth*, Tonkee is a trans woman. These three characters appear to suggest that gender is a binary which is questioned in all three texts, as each of these three characters are integral to the culmination of the central plot. Sanderson's text is particularly important in this instance, as Sazed ultimately fulfils the plot, and becomes divine, precisely because he is gender nonconforming. While this representation is problematic, as previously discussed, Sazed's ability to fuse the two opposed powers of Ruin and Preservation appears to be a result of his gender identity. This process is similar to the role of androgynous gods in myth, according to Joseph Campbell which, as discussed earlier, is a central element of Sanderson's text. This may suggest that this particular figure arises from fantasy's extended connection to myth which would further indicate a link between the idea of binary opposition and gender nonconforming folk in fantasy more generally. Some recent research which has been conducted in this area includes Hazel Impey's '*Why Must I Truncate Myself in Order to Please You?: Othering and Queering Depictions of Non-Binary Gender in Pseudo-Medieval Fantasy Literature, 1990-2017*' (2022). The title of this dissertation references a quote from Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy*, although neither Sanderson nor Jemisin are discussed. Placing this research in conversation with a broader understanding of binary opposition in epic

fantasy could provide important insight into the manifestation of this particular binary opposition and its representation in contemporary fantasy literature.

Northrop Frye's work on Romance provided the starting point for this study, as it suggests that binary opposition is a structural factor inherited by epic fantasy through the genre's extended connection to romance. Attebery's suggestion that Frye's work could provide a valuable foundation for fantasy analysis appears to hold true. Another element of Frye's work which could prove useful for future research is his Identification of five types of romance hero. Frye argues that "fictions ... may be classified ... by the hero's power of action, which be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (*Anatomy* 33). A point raised in chapter one was that Elend's authoritarian rule is seen as justified in the text due to his identification, as Frye would put it, as "superior in degree to other men" (*Anatomy* 33). Elend, in comparison to the people he rules over, has greater "authority, passions, and powers of expressions", and therefore his authoritarian rule over the inferior population is justified (Frye, *Anatomy* 34). This has important ramifications when Elend attempts to hand control of society to the people in the form of a representative parliament. This parliament, as shown in the text, cannot be trusted with the rule of the city due to a combination of greed and cowardice which sees some members attempt to surrender to Elend's father. This raises important questions regarding the political implications of the heroic fantasy subgenre. One question that arises is whether heroic fantasy is essentially authoritarian, due to the inherent superiority of one, or a few, characters over the rest of the population.

This appears to be true of *Mistborn*, in which Elend's superiority, both in his knowledge of political theory and his later acquisition of magical abilities, justifies his position as emperor. Further research could analyse the hero figure of contemporary epic fantasy in relation to the way texts portrays political systems. If a correlation can be found between the hero figure and authoritarianism, then it may suggest that this is the result of a structural inclination of the fantasy hero. This follows work done in science fiction studies by Aaron Santesso, whose "Fascism and Science Fiction" (2014) argues that certain critical traditions "work under the impression that genres have natural ideological leanings", based on the premise that "certain generic frameworks and structures have ideological biases built into them" (137). While further study needs to be conducted, it is possible that the inherent superiority of the hero creates a structural bias towards authoritarianism when that hero engages in a system of governance.

Finally, this thesis showed how DST can provide a useful framework in understanding how the Self is constructed in literature. This proved particularly useful when discussing *The Broken Earth* trilogy, in which the second-person narration and theme of post-trauma identity formation resulted in a specifically dialogical understanding of the Self. In *Black Subjects* (2018), while discussing contemporary novels of slavery, Keizer argues that "rather than using representations of slavery primarily to protest past and present oppression ... black writers have begun to represent slavery in order to explore the process of self-creation under extremely oppressive conditions" (11). It is possible that the

particular form of self-creation that Keizer identifies in the contemporary novel of slavery follows DST in the creation of a dialogical Self, however, further research is required to establish this connection. The relationship between the second-person form and the construction of a dialogical Self offers another interesting avenue of investigation. Currently, DST is underutilised in literary studies, and further research in this area could establish a link between certain narrative perspectives, or genres, in the formation of a dialogical Self. *The Broken Earth* provides a particularly interesting case study in this regard, as the shifting narrative voice creates a complex relationship between the text and the reader. Jemisin's trilogy involves the reader directly in the process of identity formation by encouraging immersion and participation in the way they relate to the text. Further research in this area could establish a link between the particular narrative form of *The Broken Earth* and immersion or participation in reader engagement. This would follow the work of James Phelan who has discussed the relationship between second-person narration and immersion in the article "'Self-Help' for narratee and narrative audience: how 'I' – and 'You'? – read 'How.'". Marie Laure-Ryan has also analysed immersion in reader engagement, particularly in *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, and Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik develops the concept of participation in "Second-Person Narration as a Joint Action".

As pointed out in the introduction, fantasy literature is one of the most popular forms of fiction read today. Furthermore, fantasy is a multimedia phenomenon, existing in a variety of forms from print to screen. As the above suggestions

illustrate, the study of such a popular genre could provide important material in a variety of academic investigations. This thesis was, in part, an attempt to show the value of a rigorous academic analysis of popular fantasy. However, it is also important to point out the wider benefit of merging the fan and academic canons, as this thesis attempted to do. By studying the texts that fans are actually reading today, fantasy academia would encourage direct public engagement in the field.



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