Slavery and Imperialism in Fantasy Fiction

A Study of Oppression in *The Great Hunt* and *The Way of Kings*

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Abstract

Fantasysjangerens evne til å gjenspeile kjente ideer og ulike aspekter fra virkeligheten på nye og ukjente måter, gjør at fantasyforfattere kan skape fantastiske historier som har potensial til å gi lesere ny innsikt i disse kjente ideene og aspektene. Denne avhandlingen tar utgangspunkt i denne evnen, og har som mål å utforske hvordan de to episke fantasyverkene *The Great Hunt* av Robert Jordan og *The Way of Kings* av Brandon Sanderson gjenspeiler problemer og aspekter innen slaveri og undertrykkelse, som sett i lys av imperialisme og kolonialisme, presenterer alternative forståelser. De to verkene fremstiller ulike skildringer av slaveri og undertrykkelse som baserer seg på andre kriterier enn de tradisjonelle, som for eksempel rase eller religiøs tilhørighet. Jeg argumenterer for at Robert Jordan og Brandon Sanderson i *The Great Hunt* og *The Way of Kings* bruker fantasysjangerens potensiale til å gjenspeile ideer og aspekter, for å kommentere og gi innsikt i menneskelige oppfatninger av forskjeller, maktforhold og identitet.

For bedre å kunne utforske de forskjellige skildringene av slaveri og undertrykkelse, og hvordan disse konseptene påvirker de ulike samfunnene og menneskene i verkenes fiktive verdener, benytter jeg meg hovedsakelig av teoriene til Orlando Patterson, som skriver om slaveri og historiske slavesamfunn, og Edward W. Said, som skriver innen postkolonialisme. Det legges mest vekt på Pattersons "social death" konsept og Saids kritiske teori "Orientalism". Innenfor fantasysjangeren baserer jeg meg blant annet på teoriene til Brian Attebery og J. R. R. Tolkien for å se på hvordan sjangerens evne til å gjenspeile virkeligheten kan sees i verkenes skildringer av undertrykkelse og slaveri.

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Introduction

Fantasy is a genre that is concerned with the impossible, the imaginary, and the creation of previously unseen and unimagined worlds, peoples, societies and cultures. The subgenre epic fantasy encompasses an even broader scope to deliver readers a truly immersive story where the world itself can be viewed as a character. Although it focuses on the impossible, the genre is still a part of our reality and is thus dependent on the possible, real concepts and ideas to be read and understood. However, this incorporation of real-world elements strengthens the fantasy genre and its works through its ability to twist and change these mimetic notions in unfamiliar ways to create something new and unfamiliar for the reader. The inclusion of real-world topics and themes in a fictive world enable writers to explore and comment on hypothetical scenarios. For instance, what if the way people and whole societies and cultures perceive and judge each other is entirely based on a set of physical characteristics that may seem strange or impossible in our reality? What if societies' hierarchies were reversed? What if those at the top of the social ladder were suddenly stripped of their position? These types of questions can be explored through fantasy's ability to shape and reimagine reality. This is a valuable ability because it provides opportunities for commentary and new insights.

Depictions of slavery and imperial conflict are recurring and at times prevalent themes and tropes in the epic fantasy genre. Slavery plays a central role in some epic series – characters might themselves be enslaved or be affected by something that has to do with slavery – while others have slavery as part of their worldbuilding – a part of a society and culture in the world,

present but not in the foreground.[1] In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) trilogy, although there are elements of physical slavery – people being captured and enslaved by other people – it is not something that is focused on. Tolkien was much more interested in showing slavery in an abstract or metaphysical and philosophical way. The clearest example of this is how Sauron's Ring affects and enslaves those close to it. The corruptions of Smeagol/Gollum and Frodo, for instance, illustrate how the Ring enslaves minds and souls. Tolkien's abstract slavery can also be seen in the orcs' relationship to Sauron. Although they are depicted by Tolkien as a race of inherently evil beings there is a clear sense of domination between Sauron and the orcs, a lack of freedom and free will, withheld by Sauron.

Other examples of slavery in fantasy can be seen in Steven Erikson's *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* (1999-2011) series, and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) series. In Erikson and Martin's series, slavery is more in focus, explicit and uncomfortable. They show the brutality of human nature by depicting human suffering through different kinds of enslavement. In Martin's imagined world, for instance, "conniving and greedy magnates mete out cruel and unusual punishments to their human chattels", and slave soldiers complete their training "by murdering babies torn from their slave mothers" (Hardy 415). Indeed because of the fantastical aspects of the genre, fantasy authors' depictions of slavery and oppression can go to greater lengths in scope. They can portray horrors previously unimagined by readers – both fictive and inspired by the real world – and thus create "worlds in which the unexpected, the surprising, or the unanticipated change places with the "normal," […] mak[ing] uncomfortable realities visible." (Simone 158). Fantasy stories can, thus, provide moments of reflection and learning for the reader. The epic fantasy authors Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson also

[1] Note, the term 'worldbuilding' has to do with the creation of fictional worlds in fantasy and other speculative fiction. It is a process authors go through when planning and writing their stories.

portray different forms of enslavement and oppression in their respective novels *The Great Hunt* (1991), the second novel in *The Wheel of Time* (1990-2013) series, and *The Way of Kings* (2010), the first novel in *The Stormlight Archive* (2010-) series. Though their depictions are not as grotesque, they demonstrate the inhumanity of enslavement in different ways. Both narratives take place in expansive fictional worlds with realized geographies, societies, cultures, and peoples. However, the novels' significance to this thesis lies in how they reimagine slavery and imperial oppression. Jordan, in *The Great Hunt*, portrays imperial invaders enslaving a society's most powerful and influential members: women who can wield magic. In *The Way of Kings*, Sanderson presents a society in which slavery and subjugation are based on people's eye colour. People with dark coloured eyes are seen as inferior and enslaveable, while people with light coloured eyes are perceived as superior.

With this in mind, this thesis aims to explore how slavery and oppression are utilized in *The Great Hunt* and *The Way of Kings*. It examines the insights and critiques they offer, and the role they play in the novels. This thesis argues that by using the fantasy genre's ability to alter and exaggerate real-world notions through its use of the impossible and imaginary, Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson reimagine differing ideas and issues inherent to slavery and imperialism in *The Great Hunt* and *The Way of Kings*. Through these reimaginations, they comment on and provide insight into human perceptions of difference, power relationships and identity. Questions worth asking are, how are slavery and oppression portrayed in the novels, how are they imagined, or rather reimagined? How do they take part in shaping the novels' worlds, characters, cultures and events? How do representations of slavery and oppression in the novels comment on concepts such as power, identity, dehumanization and othering?

The Authors and Their Stories

Robert Jordan, a pseudonym for James Oliver Rigney Jr., was an American author best known for his literary works within the fantasy genre.[2] Jordan was born in 1948 in Charleston, South Carolina (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 706). Before he started writing, Jordan served two tours in Vietnam as a helicopter gunner (706) and worked as a nuclear engineer. Though he wrote other novels, within fantasy and other genres, it is Jordan's epic fantasy series *The Wheel of Time* that is considered his greatest literary achievement. Its story and world can be viewed as one of the major contributions to the epic fantasy genre.

In 2006, Jordan was diagnosed with the rare blood disease amyloidosis (Jordan, "Letter from Robert Jordan"). He died in 2007 and was unable to finish his lifework. His story was, however, completed by fellow fantasy author Brandon Sanderson. Jordan's wife asked Sanderson to complete the last book in the series: *A Memory of Light* (2013) ("Interview with Harriet McDougal and Brandon Sanderson").[3] *The Wheel of Time* spans fourteen main novels and one prequel novel, averaging about eight hundred pages per book. The series began in 1990 with *The Eye of the World* and was not completed until 2013 when *A Memory of Light* was published.

Brandon Sanderson, born in 1975 in Lincoln, Nebraska, began his career as a professional fiction writer in 2003 when his first book was bought ("About Brandon"). Before his first publication, Sanderson had written thirteen novels (Sanderson, "How Did You Get Published?"). Among these thirteen books were the beginnings and drafts of stories that would be published in the following years, one of which is one of the primary focuses of this thesis, *The*

[2] To avoid confusion, I will use the pen name Robert Jordan when referring to James Oliver Rigney Jr., as it is the name he is known by.
[3] Due to the significant size of the last novel, it ended up being divided into three novels.

Way of Kings (2010). Sanderson has become known as an extremely prolific writer in the last fifteen years, publishing around thirty fantasy and science fiction stories, making him a major voice within the fantasy and science fiction community and genre. His most popular works are *The Mistborn* (2006-) series, the ongoing *The Stormlight Archive* (2010-) series,[4] and the three final *The Wheel of Time* novels. Sanderson' stories often deal with subjects such as "class relations, social hierarchies, and political revolution" (Melville 23). *The Way of Kings* and the subsequent *The Stormlight Archive* novels are no different, which will become apparent in this thesis.

Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* and Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archive* are immersive fantasy series set in separate secondary worlds, i.e. imaginary worlds. Both belong to the subgenres high and epic fantasy due to the scope of the world and story, as well as the topics, issues and themes that are brought up. High fantasy stories are "[f]antasies set in [otherworlds], specifically [secondary worlds], and which deal with matters affecting the destiny of those worlds." ("High Fantasy"). Similarly to high fantasy, epic fantasy can be defined as fantasy stories great in both length and scope that follow many different characters. The genre's origin can be traced back to classical epic literary works and deals with many of the same concepts and ideas. Epic fantasies tackle questions and challenges offered by the human experience, such as, the meaning of life, why we exist, and why we are here; is there a creator, and if so, what are their intentions; what is morality, what is good and what is evil (Donaldson, "Epic Fantasy in the Modern World" 13)? Furthermore, an epic fantasy story is "[a]ny fantasy tale written to a large scale which deals with the founding or definitive and lasting defence of a [land]" ("Epic Fantasy").

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[4] *The Stormlight Archive* is planned to be a ten-volume series. At the time of writing, four novels have been published: *The Way of Kings* (2010), *Words of Radiance* (2014), *Oathbringer* (2017) and *Rhythm of War* (2020).

Due to the epic scope of both series, I will only provide a short general overview of their overarching stories and worlds here, to establish an understanding of *The Stormlight Archive* and *The Wheel of Time*. More detailed overviews of the primary works *The Way of Kings* and *The Great Hunt* will follow in the subsequent chapters. Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* follows the journeys and growth of different characters leading up to the Last Battle, the final battle between the forces of good and evil. Jordan's world is inhabited by people of different races and ethnicities, and although there are fantastical races, the majority of people are human. Most of the plot takes place on a continent, the Westlands, with geography and cultures similar to western medieval Europe.[5] An important point to note, in these cultures, there is little to no ill perceptions based on race and ethnicity. People's physical traits are rarely causes for persecution and generalization. Nationality, however, is a cause of prejudice and categorization. This notion is pointed out by Brandon Sanderson in an interview: "Robert Jordan decided not to approach prejudice based on ethnicity, [he] instead made a culture where they approached prejudice based on nationality" (Sanderson, "A Chat with Brandon Sanderson", 00:40:18-00:40:31). The use of magic, called the One Power, is another point of tension, which will be explored in this thesis.

Like *The Wheel of Time*, Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archive* follows several characters in medieval societies and cultures as they try to prevent the end of the world. Note that the series is still ongoing, so giving a precise overview of the overarching story is difficult. Sanderson's world also has different peoples of varying races and ethnicities, as well as fantastical races and species.

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[5] Note that this continent and area where the main plot of *The Wheel of Time* takes place does not have one official name. The name 'Westlands', however, is known as the most popular name for the continent and was commonly used by Jordan and many fans. I will therefore use the 'Westlands' going forward, and refer to its inhabitants as 'the people of the Westlands' or 'Westlanders'.

Fantasy Reproducing Reality – Literature Review

The fantasy genre's growing popularity through the 20th- and 21st centuries has drawn the notice of more and more literary scholars. What is often written about and explored is the genre's potential, what it can accomplish, and how its versatility can be used to examine and comment on human issues, themes and topics such as society, culture, power, gender and race. In *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Brian Attebery identifies the genre's ability to enable authors to put their own twists on the familiar, to reimagine aspects that emphasise and/or create opportunities for readers to rethink or gain new perspectives. Utilizing the mimetic in certain ways can, as Attebery explains, "be an easy way to make sure that the reader will respond to the fantastic", i.e. it is easier for readers to understand and gain insight from a story if the world in which the story takes place is familiar to them (8). The fantastic "depends on mimesis for its effectiveness." (4). Attebery points out that fantasy works are "full of "loaded" images, concrete emblems of problematic or valuable psychological and social phenomena." (7). Combining these aspects into a narrative is an endeavour to create "iconic representation, so that the narrative can, like the city map, give us new insight into the phenomena it makes reference to." (7). Similar notions of the fantasy genre are pointed out by J. R. R. Tolkien as well.

In his influential lecture and essay "On Fairy Stories" (1947), Tolkien discusses many different aspects of the fantasy genre: its origins in fables, myth and mythology (Tolkien 6-11), and the meaning behind fairy stories and its evolution into modern fantasy (17-18). But it is his writings on what he called "recovery" that is relevant to this thesis, as it concerns fantasy's ability to reimagine the known (19). Recovery is, Tolkien states, a "regaining of a clear view. […] We need […] to clean our windows, so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness" (19). He argues that fantasy stories

give readers a new angle to look at things (19). They refresh awareness, creating opportunities to reflect on things that have perhaps been set too strongly in the minds of readers.

While his thoughts on the fantasy genre as a whole and its powers of reimagining are insightful and worth considering, which I do in this thesis, the criticism of Tolkien's own fantasy works in the context of colonial and racialized discourses should be acknowledged. Scholars such as Margaret Sinex, Rebecca Brackmann and Anderson Rearick III have written about Tolkien's depictions of race, race relations and culture. In "“Monsterized Saracens,” Tolkien's Haradrim, and Other Medieval “Fantasy Products”" (2010), Sinex writes about the similarities between Tolkien's Haradrim (a fictional people) and medieval Western Europe's perception and othering of the Saracens. One of her points is the "reliance on binaries" in Tolkien's fictional world, which can lead to generalizations of opposites, like good and evil, and light and dark skin colours (176). Brackmann, in "“Dwarves are Not Heroes”: Antisemitism and the Dwarves in J. R. R. Tolkien's Writing" (2010), argues that the depictions of dwarves in *The Hobbit* (1937) are similar to "cultural assumptions about “Jewishness”" (85). The dwarves' cowardice, appearance and love of gold and valuables can be traced to Western and Christian perceptions about Jewish racial traits.

In "Why is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc? The Dark Face of Racism Examined in Tolkien's World" (2004), Rearick examines Tolkien's orcs and the criticism of their portrayal as a dark-skinned evil people. Rearick defends Tolkien by pointing out "that dark and light in *The Lord of the Rings* is about powers of good and evil and not race," thus "readers should realize that Orcs are dark because they are far from the good" (870). However, Ebony E. Thomas, in "Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic: The Role of Racial Difference in Young Adult Speculative Fiction and Media" (2018), provides a counterpoint to Rearick's defence of

Tolkien’s depictions of orcs. She writes about and criticizes the use of the fantasy trope the Dark Other. In fantasy, Thomas points out, “a primary locus of alterity is embodied darkness.” (2). Further, she asserts that “in modern English, darkness has never been just a metaphor. Even in language, darkness is personified, embodied, and most assuredly racialized.” (3). The ongoing constructions of Dark Others in fantasy, like the recurring depictions of orcs and orc-like races, like the Trollocs in *The Wheel of Time*, maintain the expectation that darkness in fantasy should be purged to right “the wrongs of the world” (5). This expectation “mirrors the unending spectacle of violence against the endarkened and the Othered in our own world.” (4). Regardless of these scholars’ differing opinions, their writings reveal how generalization of racial traits in popular fantasy works within the epic fantasy genre can reinforce certain discourses of othering between races, ethnicities, and cultures.

Similar insights into generalizations of people in the fantasy genre are provided through a postcolonial lens by Myles Balfe. Writing about orientalism and postcolonialism in fantasy in “Incredible Geographies? Orientalism and Genre Fantasy” (2004), Balfe explores how the other is depicted in different fantasy works, one of which is a *The Wheel of Time* novel, and how these depictions are related to geography. Balfe discusses Orientalist tropes common in fantasy, such as protagonists or heroes living in or coming from some sort of western country “embodying the core values” that represent their home (77); the protagonist having to protect their home from the others, which is meant to show the other as an aggressor and the heroes’ beliefs and morals as greater than the other’s (77); the heroes have to travel to an area in the east – often a representation of the Orient – either to “be tested and found worthy, or obtain some object” that helps them “protect their homeland” (77). Balfe argues that the genre’s popularity combined with its use of these common tropes and other aspects related to postcolonial issues can end up being

perceived as a problem. Depictions of “the ‘Western’ characters as the ‘good guys’”, Balfe argues, “can become problematic when these characters encounter ‘Other’ peoples” (76), resulting in a perhaps unhealthy confirmation of “moral and cultural superiority when ‘we’ encounter ‘them’” in fantastical stories.

In her chapter on the meaning of fantasy in *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (2014), Katheryn Hume discusses the incorporation of mimesis in fantasy. She points out that “[m]imesis […] demonstrates its power when an author’s chief concerns are social interaction and human behavior.” (195). Mimesis can be used to establish “relationships between people” and the links between imaginary worlds and our own (196). Mimetic “similarities draw our attention, and persuade us that the issue at stake in the story are relevant to us individually.” (196).

Daniel Baker, in “Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy” (2012), discusses the progressive aspects of fantasy. He suggests fantasy “can use the genre’s ubiquitous temporal dislocation to expose how history informs the present and the future, rupturing reality to re-imagine” the past for the future (440). This reimagination of history offers explorations of the ways in which we perceive issues stemming from the past, such as issues of power and perceived differences seen in imperialism and colonialism. Similar notions are discussed by Helen Young in *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (2016). Young points out that fantasy’s “inherently non-mimetic nature creates a space which is at least nominally not “the real world” and is therefore safer for cultural work around fraught issues such as […] race.” (2). Moreover, Young asserts that

> [f]antasy – despite, or even perhaps because of, its long reception as a genre designed to "serve rather than subvert the dominant ideology" – has considerable power to dig up long-buried histories of colonisation and imperialism and to challenge the assumptions on which their power structures rely by offering new perspectives. (114)

In "Magic as Privilege in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's *Wheel of Time* Epic Fantasy Series" (2016), Louise P. Simone contends that fantasy works can expose readers to "injustice, inequality, and privilege framed in fantastical societies that operate as grand metaphorical narratives about the world in which we live and the historical conditions in which they were written." (Simone 157). This exposure, then, can provide commentary and new perspectives on "those same conditions in the consensus reality." (157). Simone examines *The Wheel of Time*'s portrayals of identity, power and privilege, their relation to each other, and how the series' magic explores these concepts. She asserts that the "novels open a space for readers to understand power and privilege in their own world that are analogous to the alternative world of the novel and allows them to examine it in a safe space." (170). Similar notions of power, identity, and injustice in *The Way of Kings* and *The Great Hunt* are explored in this thesis.

In recent years, the inclusion of slavery and other forms of oppression in fantasy novels have been used to comment on present-day struggles and conflicts, as well as on wrongs done both in the past and present to the subjugated and enslaved. In "Science Fiction/Fantasy Takes on Slavery: N.K. Jemisin and Tomi Adeyemi" (2018), Kathleen Murphey argues that the two genres invite readers to reflect on and consider what they know about slavery (113). Murphey explores the fantasy and science fiction works *The Broken Earth* (2015-2017) by N. K. Jemisin and *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi, where, as Murphey states, aspects of both

the American history of slavery and "African complicity in slavery" are represented (Murphey 110). She asserts that the genres' use of dehumanization, othering and slavery establishes

> avenues to begin conversations about the racial wounds that are central to American identity – the dehumanization of Native Americans to justify their slaughter and the stealing of their lands, the dehumanization of Africans and African Americans to justify the stealing, enslavement, exploitation, and torture of people of African descent. (113-114)

The effect of the genres can be seen in the way "African people [are] "otherizing" other Africans to rationalize their brutalization, torture, slaughter, and enslavement" (111); how the inhumanity of slavery is made greater by showing that enslavement does not have to be based on race, one people can be cruel to, and enslave each other as easily as other peoples (110). Thus, fantasy can comment and create a discourse on human nature, oppression and slavery. Similar depictions of slavery are prevalent in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's novels. Note, however, that Jemisin and Adeyemi's works exist in another category within the fantasy genre in which they more directly engage questions of race and afro-diasporic trauma. Jordan and Sanderson are not as specific in their works. The link between the works of Jordan and Sanderson, and those of Jemisin and Adeyemi, however, is the way in which they utilize the potential of fantasy to reimagine different issues to provide new insights.

Theoretical framework

Due to this thesis' focus on slavery and perceptions of the enslaved in *The Great Hunt* and *The Way of Kings*, I will primarily rely on Orlando Patterson's (1940-) acclaimed *Slavery and Social Death: a Comparative Study* (1982) as a framework. Patterson examines slave systems and sixty-six societies throughout history and discusses the differing symbolic, sociological and ideological aspects of slavery, such as the master-slave relationship, the conditions of the enslaved and their place in society, among others. It is Patterson's concept of social death that is most essential to this thesis, as it relates to dehumanization and perceptions of identity and difference in the primary texts, especially in *The Way of Kings*. Social death revolves around natal alienation of the enslaved, which is "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations", as well as "a loss of native status, of deracination" (7). A socially dead person is dehumanized by their community and/or society. They are made nonbeings. Patterson suggests that there are two conceptions of social death: the intrusive mode and the extrusive mode. In the intrusive mode "the slave was an external exile, an intruder", while in the extrusive mode the enslaved "was an internal exile, one who had been deprived of all claims of community." (44). Put simply, "one fell because he was the enemy, the other became the enemy because he had fallen." (44).

In addition to focusing on slavery, this thesis explores depictions of imperialism and colonialism in *The Way of Kings* and *The Great Hunt*. Because of this exploration, postcolonial theory is a relevant lens to examine the works through. Postcolonial theory in literature investigates both the past and current effects of colonialism upon colonizers and colonial subjects. Among its many aspects, the theory explores the power relationships between sovereigns and subjects; how invasion and subjugation shape peoples into something other in the

minds of the invaders – they are perceived as being types, categorized, removing any hint of individualism among the subjugated. This thesis draws upon the works of different postcolonial critics, such as Edward W. Said's (1935-2003) lauded *Orientalism* (1978) and his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha's (1949-) "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" (2004), and Frantz Fanon's (1925-1961) *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In *Orientalism*, Said investigates how the West, mainly western Europe, created the image and ideology of the Orient as a way to control the perceived otherness of the East, to adapt the Orient's beliefs and customs into something that could be recognized by Western powers – often something inferior to themselves (Said, *Orientalism* 40). Furthermore, Said argues that this fabricated perception of "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1-2).

Many of the ideas brought forth and discussed by Said, such as otherness and the other, the attitudes of those in power toward those without, the treatment of the powerless, and perceiving, constructing and defining identities, go well together with the topics of slavery and fantasy, and are relevant in the exploration of the primary texts *The Great Hunt* and *The Way of Kings*, as both stories have elements of colonialism, imperialism, invasion and othering, i.e. they have relationships similar to the relationship between the West and the East argued by Said: "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said, *Orientalism* 5).

In this thesis, I primarily rely on close reading as a method of analysis. As I mostly analyse interactions between enslaved and non-enslaved characters in primary texts, this method is appropriate to examine the language in these interactions.

Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of two chapters. Note, however, that there is an imbalance in the lengths of the chapters, which reflects the primary texts. *The Way of Kings*' story spans two books, part one and part two, while *The Great Hunt* is one book. There is a greater thematic focus on issues of slavery and oppression in *The Way of Kings* than in *The Great Hunt*. Where *The Way of Kings*' narrative has instances of slavery and oppression throughout its entirety (in both books), *The Great Hunt* mainly focuses on these issues in the later parts of its narrative. Chapter one explores *The Way of Kings*, while chapter two examines *The Great Hunt*.

Chapter one, "On Slavery, Oppression and Perceptions of Difference in *The Way of Kings*", argues that Sanderson's reimagined representations of enslavement, subjugation and perceptions of difference are used to show the arbitrariness of social hierarchy. Due to the two primary texts' greater focus on slavery and oppression, the chapter begins by providing a general overview of slavery and certain slavery institutions throughout history. The second section gives a more detailed overview of *The Way of Kings*' plot, world, people and societies, and how slavery and oppression play a part in the story. Section three looks at Sanderson's use of eye colour as a basis of rule and perceiving people as greater and lesser beings, and why he uses eye colour. The fourth section examines the dehumanization and othering of the enslaved and oppressed in the context of Orlando Patterson's concept of social death. The last section continues exploring the social status of the enslaved. It shows how the enslaved rejects the status imposed on them through their actions and insights. There are a few instances in chapter one in which I refer to the second *The Stormlight Archive* novel *Words of Radiance*. This is done to provide further context or clarification to the discussion on *The Way of Kings*.

In the second chapter, "On Language, Women and Perceptions of Power in *The Great Hunt*", I explore Jordan's reimagination of imperial conquest/invasion and slavery in *The Great Hunt*. I argue that Jordan's representations of female enslavement, imperialism and dehumanization, and the consequences these have for the narrative's invaded society and culture are intended to be a critical examination of the ways abuses of power, in the form of constructions of social hierarchy and language, disrupt social power structures like intrinsic views of gender roles. Through the invaders' explicit dehumanizing language, Jordan shows how it is the oppressors' perceptions and behaviours that are inhuman. Furthermore, by revealing that the aspect of women's enslavement in the invaders' social hierarchy is based on a lie during a crucial moment in the narrative, Jordan points out and emphasizes the false constructions behind imperial perceptions and discourses. This chapter consists of three sections. Section one provides an overview of the plot, societies, cultures and people in Jordan's fictional world. The second section looks at language and discourse's ability to dehumanize and impose identities. It specifically examines the relationship between the invaders and the invaded in *The Great Hunt*, how language is used by the invaders to impose identities and control the narrative of the invasion, and how the invaded use language to resist their impositions by demonizing the invaders. The final section examines female enslavement in *The Great Hunt*, how this enslavement is utilized, and what Jordan is trying to convey with these depictions.

Chapter 1: On Slavery, Oppression and Perceptions of Difference in *The Way of Kings*

1.0. Introduction

Depictions of slavery and oppression are common in the fantasy genre, especially in epic fantasy. As mentioned, works such as George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-) and Steven Erikson's *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* (1999-2011), among others, include slavery as part of their stories: as part of the worldbuilding, and as development and motivation for characters. Fantasy can be used to explore slavery and history in unique ways. In Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980), readers encounter "the transatlantic slave system from beginning to end" through the perspectives of two enslaved African immortals (Okorafor 183). As Nnedi Okorafor states, "[o]nly through a fantasy novel can slavery be presented in such entirety." (183). Furthermore, through fantasy, familiar views of historical slavery can be changed and examined in a new light. Samuel R. Delany's *Return to Nevèrÿon* (1979-1987) series portrays a world in which the people in an advanced society and culture have brown and black skin, while a primitive and barbarous tribal people in the south, who are enslaved by the advanced society, have white skin. With these depictions, Delany's series highlights, among other things, "the ambiguous nature of the power relationships set up by slavery and race." (Okorafor 183). Explorations of such issues as slavery, race, oppression and power are enhanced by the fantasy genre's potential. Perceptions of difference and othering can also be commented on through fantasy's use of reimagination and the impossible. In "The Politics (If Any) of Fantasy" (1991), Brian Attebery points out that through reimagination, fantasy can "make us aware of other kinds of power and injustice. For instance, fantasy shows that one form of power often used unjustly is the power to label others."

(24). The labelling of others and perceptions of greater and lesser are prevalent in Brandon Sanderson's *The Way of Kings*. Though Sanderson does not engage with slavery as seriously as Butler and Delaney, there are still insights that can be gained from his work.

Sanderson constructs the world of the novel through the early introduction of slavery and the establishment of a social hierarchy based on historical and cultural perceptions of eye colour. Eye colour provides the basis for the various stratifications of the narrative's fictional society. This chapter aims to investigate how Sanderson uses representations of slavery and social hierarchies based on eye colour. By exploring the protagonist, Kaladin, and his experiences as an enslaved person, as well as the other characters' relation to the power dynamics of Vorin society (the fictional society the narrative focuses on), I examine the views surrounding eye colour and what it represents, and how Sanderson explores the issues of dehumanization and othering inherent to imperial and colonial perceptions to comment on power, identity and humanity. I argue that Sanderson uses *The Way of Kings*' reimagined depictions of slavery, oppression, and perceptions of difference to comment on the arbitrariness of social hierarchy. He points out the nonsensical notion of judging people based on race by showing how constructions that are similar to those surrounding race and skin colour are applicable to something equally arbitrary, like eye colour.

This chapter's exploration of slavery and imperial perceptions of difference in *The Way of Kings* is split into five sections. Due to the present and following chapter's focus on enslavement and oppression, more detailed overviews of these topics are provided here. Thus, section one provides a general overview of different historical institutions of slavery and other relevant aspects of enslavement to establish a point of reference for subsequent discussions. Section two begins with a plot summary and then provides an overview of the societies, cultures

and peoples in *The Way of Kings*, and its different aspects of slavery. Section three examines how eye colour represents social class and race, and how eye colour serves as a euphemism for skin colour. In section four, drawing on Patterson's concept of social death, I analyse how the enslaved are dehumanized by those in power, and the ways in which the effects of these perceptions and attitudes are shown through the protagonist Kaladin. Finally, section five examines Kaladin and the bridgemen's (an enslaved group) resistance and rejection to their imposed identity and social status.

1.1. An Overview of Real-World Institutions of Slavery

Considering the great, or rather epic scope of the primary texts, with narratives that incorporate entire worlds, societies, nations, and cultures, an understanding of how slavery might fit into such an epic scope is perhaps needed. The enslavement of human beings has throughout history reached levels that have affected entire societies and cultures. They are called slave societies. David Blight (1949-) defines a slave society as "any society where slave labor – where the definition of labor, where the definition of the relationship between ownership and labor – is defined by slavery. […] Where slavery affected everything about society." (Blight, "Lecture 3 – A Southern World View", 00:09:04-00:09:34). It is a society, as seen in the slave society of the U.S. South, where the majority "grew up, were socialized by, married, reared children, worked, invested in, and conceived of the idea of property, and honed their most basic habits and values under the influence of a system that said it was just to own people as property." (00:09:35-00:10:05). These kinds of societies appear in different historical periods. A few notable slave societies throughout history are found in Ancient Greece, Roman Italy and the Roman Empire from 225 BC to 300 AD, Iceland from 870 to 950, the Caribbean from the early sixteenth

century to the mid-nineteenth century (Patterson 353-364), and the U.S. from 1619 to 1865 (Hannah-Jones, "1619 Project"). As Blight mentions, certain views on labour and ownership are inherent to these societies. These views also extend to the overall view of slavery, regardless of whether it is on a societal level or an individual level between a master and an enslaved person.

Slave societies and institutions have certain commonalities and differences between them, which relates to the justifications behind enslavement, perceptions of the enslaved, their treatment and status in society, and so forth. Racially based slavery was an important commonality among societies and institutions. It can be argued, as Patterson does, that race as a basis for slavery is dependent on how one defines race. If "the racial factor" is understood as "the assumption of innate differences based on real or imagined physical or other characteristics […] there have been numerous slaveholding societies where race was socially important" (Patterson 176). The most impactful slave societies based on race are the different American slave institutions during the transatlantic slave trade and the chattel slavery in the U.S. during the antebellum period. Other known societies where race was considered important are the Han dynasty in China, the medieval Islamic empires up to the Ottoman Empire, and, arguably, the medieval Scandinavian societies (176-177). Another important aspect was the status of the enslaved as a person, and whether slavery was a temporary or permanent state of being. That the enslaved were non-beings or stood outside society are repeating notions seen in slave societies. These notions were often tied to whether slavery was a permanent state. In chattel slavery in the U.S. South, for instance, an enslaved person was enslaved for life. However, in other societies slavery could be more temporary. Slavery was tied to such notions as war, debt and criminality. Prisoners of war were enslaved instead of killed; those in debt were enslaved until their debts

were paid;[6] and criminals were enslaved as a form of punishment. Examples of societies where these forms of slavery were in practice are Ancient Greece (113), the Roman Empire (125), and Medieval Europe (127), respectively.

The following section looks at the ways in which slavery is depicted in *The Way of Kings*, as well as the workings of the different societies, cultures, and peoples. It begins with a plot summary.

1.2. Contextualizing Slavery, Culture, and Race in *The Way of Kings*

The story of *The Way of Kings* follows Kaladin Stormblessed, an enslaved dark-eyed commoner, Dalinar Kholin, a light-eyed nobleman, and Shallan Davar, a light-eyed noblewoman, as well as some minor characters in interlude chapters. The narrative is mostly set in the present. But some chapters show events from the three protagonists' pasts. The first chapter is such a chapter, which introduces Kaladin as a squad leader in a lighteyed lord's army through an army recruit's perspective. The chapter that follows takes place in the present and reveals that Kaladin has become an enslaved person in a slave caravan. During a journey to the Shattered Plains, a region where Kaladin's people are at war with a people called the Parshendi, Kaladin meets Syl for the first time. Syl is a spren, something akin to a spirit, who befriends and gives Kaladin supernatural powers.

Upon arrival at the Shattered Plains, Kaladin is sold to Highprince Sadeas, a lighteyed lord, and made a bridgeman in his army.[7] After experiencing several bridge runs, Kaladin

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[6] Whether debt-slavery can be considered true slavery is debatable. However, it was a possibility that debt-slavery could be "a direct or an indirect cause of slavery." (Patterson 124).

[7] Bridgemen, who are part of bridge crews, are enslaved men who carry large wooden bridges armies use to cross the many chasms spread across the Shattered Plains.

becomes suicidal.[8] As he is about to commit suicide, Syl saves Kaladin by convincing him to try one more time; to save himself and the other bridgemen. After this incident, Kaladin takes control of the bridge crew he is in and trains the other bridgemen to fight. Then, during a battle against the Parshendi, Kaladin and his men get an opportunity to escape unseen when Sadeas betrays Dalinar Kholin by leaving him and his army to die. However, instead of taking the opportunity to escape, Kaladin and the bridgemen decide to help Dalinar's army, which results in Dalinar's survival. Kaladin's story in *The Way of Kings* concludes with a confrontation between Dalinar and Sadeas, where Dalinar buys the freedom of every bridgeman in Sadeas' army by giving his Shardblade, a priceless artefact and weapon, to Sadeas.

Shallan's story begins as she arrives in the city of Kharbranth. She is trying to meet and ask the scholar Jasnah Kholin, Dalinar's niece, if Shallan can be her ward. Her true purpose, however, is to steal a magic item belonging to Jasnah, and use it to help her family pay their debts. Shallan's story in *The Way of Kings* mainly focuses on her trying to decide whether to steal the item and help her family or to continue her wardship and studies with Jasnah. During her time with Jasnah, Shallan begins to draw and see strange creatures around her. She initially believes she is going mad. It is revealed, however, that Shallan being able to see these creatures, which are a type of spren like Syl, is part of the manifestation of her supernatural powers. In the latter half of her story, after Shallan's love interest tries to poison Jasnah, Shallan finds out that Jasnah also has powers, and that her magic item is a fake. In the aftermath, Shallan tells Jasnah the truth about her true purpose and about the creatures she can see. Shallan's story concludes with Jasnah telling Shallan about her research, which reveals that the parshmen are the Voidbringers – the ancient and mythical enemy of mankind.

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[8] A bridge run is Sanderson's term for when the bridgemen have to carry bridges over the Shattered Plains so the Alethi armies can cross the chasms on their way to the battlefields.

Dalinar's story revolves around the politics of the highprinces on the Shattered Plain and their war against the Parshendi, as well as his search for answers to his prophetic visions. His visions make him believe that continuing the war is a mistake and that the Desolation – a cataclysmic event – is approaching. To prepare for this event, Dalinar tries to unite the highprinces by making alliances. However, during a climactic battle, Dalinar and his army are betrayed by Highprince Sadeas and left to die surrounded by the Parshendi. They are, however, saved by Kaladin and his men who return with a bridge, which enable them to retreat. Kaladin also saves Dalinar's life by beating the Parshendi champion who is about to kill Dalinar in a duel. Dalinar's story concludes with him finding out that his visions are from the Almighty – the god figure in *The Stormlight Archive*. He realizes that the visions are prerecorded and not personally meant for him. Dalinar is asked to unite all the kingdoms against the coming Desolation and to reform the Knights Radiants. Finally, Dalinar learns that the Almighty is dead.

Most of *The Way of Kings*' plot takes place in the eastern part of Roshar – the name of the fictional world – either within the Vorin Kingdoms, nations following and basing their cultures and societies around the teachings and beliefs of the Vorin religion, or the Shattered Plains, located southeast of Alethkar. The Shattered Plains is where the enemy society and race Sanderson names the Parshendi reside. The armies of the Alethkar kingdom are also camped on the Plains. Alethkar is one of the Vorin Kingdoms and is where Kaladin and Dalinar are from. Because of the war between the Parshendi and the Alethi (people from Alethkar), the Parshendi have been pushed further out onto the Plains and settled an unnamed ancient ruined city.[9] To the west of Alethkar lies the kingdom of Jah Keved, the homeland of the third protagonist Shallan. Due to their strong connections to the Vorin religion, Alethkar and Jah Keved are societies built

[9] The name of the city is not mentioned in the novel. The name, which is Narak, is revealed in the subsequent novel.

on social stratification. Their social and cultural hierarchies revolve around two caste systems based on eye colour. People with darker coloured eyes, called darkeyes, are perceived as inferior to those with lighter coloured eyes, called lighteyes.

The distinction between darkeyes and lighteyes originates from religious teachings on the ancient history of Roshar, where ten divine beings led the human race in wars against the demonic Voidbringers. These ten beings, called Heralds, and their followers had light-coloured eyes – a result of their magical abilities. Thus, light-coloured eyes are over time associated with power, leadership, and nobility. This history, which is the foundation of, and justification for the social hierarchy, is similar to another history found in Sanderson's *Mistborn* (2006-) series. In the society called the Final Empire in the first *Mistborn* trilogy, the population is divided into two social groups: the nobility, an oppressive ruling class, and the skaa, an oppressed and impoverished working-class. When the antagonistic immortal ruler founded the Final Empire, he purportedly physically improved the people who would become the noble class into more advanced beings than the skaa. Peter Melville points out that this history results in "[e]ffectively reifying the nobility's fantasies of racial superiority" (Melville 27). In other words, the past is used to construct justifications for social and racial hierarchy, which is comparable to the justifications seen in *The Way of Kings*. The lighteyes are the nobles and aristocrats who own the land, who are in positions of authority and power. Most darkeyes are peasants, common workers, and soldiers living as serfs. They are also the only ones who can be enslaved. It should be noted, however, that although darkeyes can be enslaved, it does not mean they all are. Though they live under a system of serfdom, the majority of the darkeyed population in Alethkar and the neighbouring nations are free.

The Vorin caste systems are called dahn and nahn. Dahn is the lighteyes' system and nahn is the darkeyes' system. Each system has ten ranks, where ten is the lowest and one is the highest. At the very top is the king, at first dahn. Lighteyes at the bottom of the dahn system are viewed as commoners by those above. Yet, they are still perceived as superior to most darkeyes. Both systems are flexible to certain extents. It is possible to move up and down the ranks in both systems. However, moving between systems is far less common than being raised or lowered within one system. Normally, only darkeyes can move from one to another system. A lighteyes cannot be demoted to the nahn system. He/she cannot go any lower than tenth dahn. Moving up in rank within the systems – especially in the nahn system – is usually done by either joining the military or buying oneself and one's family a higher rank.

The different nations and kingdoms to the west of the Vorin kingdoms, though they have hierarchical societies, do not equate light eyes with superiority and dark eyes with inferiority. They have other means of perceiving, judging and valuing people. The Azish, the dark-skinned people of the nation of Azir, for instance, do not judge and value others on the colour of their eyes or other physical features. They instead value people's intellect. The social hierarchy of the Azish revolve around education and people's ability to move up the ranks of the government's bureaucratic system by using their intellect and skills – i.e. it is a meritocracy.

Sanderson's depiction of slavery and its many aspects – e.g. slaving institutions, the perception and treatment of the enslaved, and master-slave relationship – in *The Way of Kings* does not allude to any one specific aspect of slavery. For instance, Sanderson does not base the institutions of slavery within his fictional world solely on that of the institutions in the U.S. The depictions of slavery are instead an amalgamation of different aspects of slavery taken from institutions and societies of slavery throughout history. There are allusions to ancient Greek,

Roman, medieval European, Scandinavian, Icelandic, and American slavery. Penal slavery – as seen in the Roman Empire (Patterson 126), in Japan "prior to the sixth century A.D." (127), in England, Spain, France, and the Netherlands from the mid-fifteenth century "to well into the nineteenth" (44), and in Russia "from the late seventeenth century on" (128) – is one form of slavery Sanderson draws heavily upon in *The Way of Kings*. The allusion to penal slavery is most evident with the depictions of the bridgemen. Another form of slavery present in the story is indentured servitude or debt-slavery. Sanderson utilizes debt-slavery in a certain way so there is an element of it in all the forms of human enslavement. Upon being enslaved, the enslaved get slave debts (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 77). However, according to Alethi law, an enslaved person must also be given a small wage for their work. Thus the enslaved should, theoretically, be able to pay off their own debts (77).

Where there is an element of indentured servitude within the forms of enslavement of humans in Sanderson's world, such an element is not found in the enslavement of parshmen. Sanderson's depictions of the parshmen introduce another form of slavery, namely chattel slavery. The allusions to the U.S. institution of chattel slavery are strong in the depictions of the parshmen. The way they are perceived is reminiscent of that of the enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade and the African Americans during the antebellum era. However, their treatment differs significantly. The parshmen are not physically and mentally abused or punished to dehumanize and destroy their identities as a free people like, for instance, Africans during the transatlantic slave trade (Hooks 19). This has to do with how they are perceived by human society. Because of what is initially perceived as their docile nature and low intelligence, as well as their more inhuman appearance, parshmen are viewed as "more animal than anything else." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 77). Sold and bred like working animals, they are used

as manual labourers and servants. Unlike enslaved humans in the novel, parshmen do not have slave debts, nor do they earn wages. They are enslaved for life.

The workings of human enslavement in Sanderson's world varies. Enslavement as a punishment for committing crimes is the most common reason for slavery. Being enslaved due to not paying off one's debt is another. A person who cannot pay off their debt can go into enslavement by their own will instead of being punished in other ways (Sanderson, *Words of Radiance* 310). Furthermore, slavery is inheritable. A child of an enslaved person or persons with debts inherits the debts of their parent(s) (310). However, there are differences between the types of enslavement, which are tied to why a person is enslaved. Those who are enslaved because they commit crimes are branded with a glyph on their foreheads, which identifies them as enslaved.[10] Those who go into slavery willingly or inherit the debts of their parent(s), however, are tattooed with a glyph instead (310).

The manner in which parshmen become enslaved differs greatly from humans. Humans do not go beyond the borders of their societies to capture and enslave parshmen in other lands. Like the U.S. South after the end of the transatlantic slave trade (Patterson 165), human societies have internal slave trading systems. Because all parshmen are located within human society, and thus already a part of the slavery system by default, acquiring new parshmen is done by buying and selling internally, and through breeding. They are not taken from other places.

Despite the clear allusions to chattel slavery, which could potentially nuance and broaden my analysis, this chapter will not explore the parshmen's enslavement as much as it explores the humans' enslavement. Because the parshmen's role in the narrative is relatively minor, this

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[10] In the Vorin kingdoms, men do not read or write. They rely on women and scribes to do it for them. They do, however, know glyphs – pictographs – which are used as a basic writing system for easy communication. The glyphs branded or tattooed on an enslaved person's forehead identify him/her as an enslaved person and shows where he/she was enslaved.

chapter focuses more on the enslavement of Kaladin and the bridgemen. The parshmen's role arguably acts as worldbuilding and as an introduction to their coming importance in the subsequent novels, in which they regain their identity and intelligence, and revolt against their human oppressors. Furthermore, other enslaved characters and people, like the human antagonist Szeth, who is depicted as being in a shifting state of enslavement, will not be examined. Neither will the ardents, as their enslavement is questionable.[11]

1.3. Eye Colour, Class and Race

Helen Young states that "[t]he somatic marker of skin colour connects the racial logics of the Fantasy world with those of the real world where it, more than anything else, stands as the most salient signifier of difference in racial discourse." (Young 94). Though there are depictions of skin colour that stand as a "signifier of difference" in *The Way of Kings*, e.g. the parshmen and Parshendi's skin colours, human perceptions of each other based on skin colour is not a point of tension. Sanderson moves away from this or rather reimagines these views to revolve around another somatic marker: eye colour. Eye colour is the greatest source of discrimination between humans in the narrative's societies and cultures. It is the primary means of perceiving difference and value. Because of the social hierarchy, eye colour signifies power and authority, or the lack thereof. Eye colour is, therefore, representative of race in *The Way of Kings*. But because of the social hierarchy and the caste systems, eye colour also represents social class. Though there is an aspect of intertwining between the two, the differences between class and race, conveyed

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[11] The ardents are the priests of the Vorin religion. They are monastic scholars, scientists and teachers within the ardentia order. Due to them not being a part of either caste system, as well as other social conventions, anyone, regardless of eye colour, social status or gender, can become an ardent. Ardents are owned by high ranked lighteyes and are thus technically enslaved. However, they are highly respected, and no one can be made an ardent unwillingly. Furthermore, one can leave the order whenever one chooses. Thus, their status as enslaved is questionable.

through eye colour, are most evident when looking at the flexible and rigid aspects of society and culture. The intent behind these notions of race and class is also something to consider. The use of eye colour raises questions such as: why would Sanderson liken eye colour to class and race? And why base a system of rule on what we in the real world arguably consider an arbitrary physical feature?

Eye colour representing social class is most apparent when looking at the manoeuvrable aspects of society and culture. As mentioned, there are ways in which people's status and social rank can change. People can be both raised and lowered within the two caste systems. The usual way to heighten one's rank, in both systems, involves some form of monetary gain or achievement. People can pay their way to a higher rank, or serve in the military. Marriage is another common method to heighten one's status. It is also one of two ways darkeyes can be elevated to the dahn system. However, only highly ranked darkeyes are "worthy […] of marrying into a lighteyed family" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 211). The other way to be raised from one system to another is for a darkeyes to win, i.e. own, a Shardplate or Shardblade.[12] This notion of darkeyes acquiring Shardplates and Shardblades is explored below.

As mentioned, darkeyes live in a system of serfdom akin to medieval serfs. Medieval serfs commonly could not leave their lord's lands without permission (Cartwright, "Serf"). An aspect of Vorin society that can be perceived as a mix between class and race has to do with freedom of movement based on eye colour and social rank. Darkeyes in the Vorin kingdoms have to be of a certain rank within the social hierarchy to be able to travel freely. They require "the right of travel" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 162). Kaladin's family is of such a

[12] A Shardplate is a supernatural plate armour that is nearly unbreakable, and that gives the wearer enhanced speed and strength. A Shardblade is a giant two-handed sword that can cut through most materials with ease. When a darkeyes goes through a bonding ritual with their new Shardblade, their eye colour changes from dark to light. The person thus becomes a lighteyes. A darkeyes winning a Shardplate and/or Shardblade is, however, exceedingly rare.

rank, as his father explains: "Our grandfathers bought and worked us to the second nahn so that we could have full citizenship and the right of travel." (162). Lighteyes, however, regardless of social rank, need no such right. This discriminatory aspect relates to class and race through historical allusions. The notion of travel rights is also reminiscent of the restrictive conditions enslaved African Americans lived under in the U.S. South. In *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (2004), Stephanie M. H. Camp writes that "[b]y the nineteenth century, lawmakers and slaveholders had laid out […] a theory of mastery at the center of which was the restriction of slave movement. Passes, tickets, curfews, and roll calls all limited slave mobility." (13). As with American slaveholders, the lighteyes' system of confinement is a means of controlling and maintaining power (13). Though there is a certain manoeuvrability for some of them, the fact that the vast majority of darkeyes are confined while all lighteyes are not, is a racial issue rather than a class issue.

It is this sort of greater social inflexibility that makes eye colour a representation of race. Although there are at least two ways for darkeyes to move up the social hierarchy, one of these – winning a Shardblade or Shardplate – is practically an impossibility.[13] Though darkeyes can win Shardblades, there is the issue of whether lighteyes would let them keep the blades. Kaladin and the bridgemen Moash and Sigzil discuss this issue: "'You don't really think they'd let you have a Shardblade, do you?' […] 'Any man can win a Shardblade.' Moash said. 'Slave or free. Lighteyes or dark. It's the law.' 'Assuming they follow the law,' Kaladin said with a sigh." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 130). Kaladin, speaking from experience, hints at the issue of lighteyes not following society's rules. The same issue applies to Shardplates:

[13] Before Kaladin, a darkeyes had likely not won any Shards in centuries. However, Kaladin did not get to keep his blade and plate.

> 'your master was lucky.' 'Lucky to be slain by a Shardbearer?' 'Lucky he didn't win,' Kaladin said, 'and discover how he'd been tricked. They wouldn't have let him walk away with Sadeas's Plate.' 'Nonsense,' […] 'Tradition–' 'Tradition is the blind witness they use to condemn us, […] It makes us serve them.' (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 380)

Shardblades and plates should, in the eyes of lighteyes, only be owned by them, regardless of what the law says.

Sanderson's portrayals of many of the lighteyes' attitudes and ideals can for instance, like most humans' views on parshmen, be an allusion to slave masters and white supremacists in the U.S. This is demonstrated in another element of the inflexibility of society that relates to racial issues: lighteyes cannot be of any nahn rank. They cannot be demoted further than to tenth dahn. The impossibility of the lighteyes being perceived to be on the same level, or even lower than darkeyes, is reminiscent of attitudes and perceptions shared among oppressive powers, rulers and institutions throughout history. Lighteyes take their superiority and their right to rule over darkeyes for granted, as something natural, even biological: "the better your blood as a lighteyes, the more innate Glory you had already." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 303). This 'natural' superiority is perceived by most darkeyes as well: "He was a brightlord, chosen at birth by the Heralds, marked for rule." (35). Another example of the lighteyes' sense of superiority is clearly illustrated in a meeting between Kaladin, his father and their city lord. The city lord tells them: "I do not like your little town. […] I do not like being treated like an *exile*, […] living so far from anything – everything – important. And most of all, I do not like darkeyes who think themselves above their station." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 9). The lord's statement

hints at racist rhetoric. It shows his contempt towards darkeyes, that he sees them as lesser. They are not “important”, i.e. not worthy enough to be among (9). Darkeyes should know their place and not challenge the authority of lighteyes. In other words, ‘they’ are inferior to ‘us’. All these inflexible aspects of Vorin society concern the general population. However, there is one societal aspect that highlights issues of race to a greater extent, namely slavery.

Sanderson’s construction of the Vorin Kingdoms as slave societies is arguably the most significant indication of eye colour representing race. Slavery is one of the clearest separations between lighteyes and darkeyes. Only darkeyes can be enslaved, which is an inflexible aspect of society. Furthermore, slavery revolves around physical traits and is thus comparable to skin colour. I would argue that Sanderson is using the fantasy genre’s ability to incorporate real-world notions and issues to provide insight here. By having enslavement based on physical traits, he draws upon real-world thoughts and perceptions shared by readers through concepts like Carl Jung’s (1875-1961) collective unconscious, which suggests that humankind shares “a single psyche” (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 8), and Fredric Jameson’s (1934-) political unconscious. One could argue that there is a collective notion shared among people – through historical and cultural influences – that slavery within imperial and colonial contexts is tied to race and racial relations between the oppressors and oppressed. Although there have been instances throughout history – e.g. during the periods of the seventh century B.C. Black Sea and Mediterranean slave trade (Patterson 151-152), and the medieval European slave trade (152-154) – where the master-slave relationship was a relationship between individuals belonging to the same race, they have not had nearly the same impact as those that have revolved around a relationship between different races. The most impactful examples of this are the transatlantic slave trade, the “last and greatest of all slave trading systems” (159), which brought “between 11

and 12 million Africans […] to the New World" (160), and the institution of slavery in the U.S., lasting from 1619 to 1865. Thus, by representing the institution of slavery within societies that judge individuals based on eye colour – a physical trait comparable to skin colour – readers will likely identify eye colour as an analogy for race.

One of the most significant indications of the connection between eye colour and skin colour is seen at the beginning of the novel when Kaladin's enslavement is revealed. Sanderson, like all other authors, regardless of fictional genre, depends on mimesis to tell his story (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 3-4). To understand a story, we have to be able to recognize aspects of what we are reading; we must have something we are familiar with in order to interpret what fantasy presents us with. Sanderson utilizes allusions to real-world history to emphasize aspects of his world. The first spoken interaction in the chapter is between Kaladin and another enslaved person, described as a man with black skin and black eyes. As Kaladin sits and looks at the scenery in a caged wagon, a "slave with dark skin and matted hair was crawling up to him" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 39). When he gets close, "[t]he slave's black eyes glanced upward, toward Kaladin's forehead, which bore three brands" (39). After a brief conversation with this man, another one approaches Kaladin, described as having "a long black beard stuck with bits of food and snarled with dirt. […] Like Kaladin the slave wore the remains of a brown sack tied with a rag and he was darkeyed, of course" (41). Unlike the first man, Sanderson does not mention the skin colour of this second man. But what he does mention is the colour of his eyes, which are dark, "of course" (41).

One way to interpret Sanderson's use of skin and eye colour in this way is through the notion of reimagining the familiar. Tolkien's concept of recovery is arguably in effect here. In the context of slavery, shifting the focus from skin colour to eye colour is "something new" that

draws the eye (Tolkien 19). Sanderson relies on allusion to achieve this shift. By first mentioning an enslaved dark-skinned man being transported to distant lands to be sold, he alludes to the transatlantic slave trade or other similar historical events. This allusion creates a sense of familiarity. However, Sanderson then removes this familiarity, and replaces it with something else; something familiar, yet strange and unfamiliar in the context of slavery and oppression. After the description of the first man, there is no mention of skin colour. We are not told what the other enslaved men's skin colours are. However, due to Sanderson's description of the second man, whose skin colour is left out, but whose eyes are dark "of course", readers are left to assume that the men in the caged wagon, though their skin colours may differ, all have dark coloured eyes. This idea is strengthened by the conversation between Kaladin and the second man, as they talk about the reasoning behind their enslavement: "'I killed a lighteyes.' His unnamed companion whistled again, this time even more appreciative than before. 'I'm surprised they let you live'" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 43). Through this interaction, readers are made aware of the significant differences between those with dark coloured eyes and those with light coloured eyes, as well as the feelings surrounding these differences. The "unnamed companion" expresses wonder and excitement when he hears about the killing of a lighteyes. Furthermore, he is surprised that Kaladin was enslaved rather than killed, which further shows the major social disparities between lighteyes and darkeyes.

An aspect that further illustrates the differences between dark- and lighteyes, and that hints at Sanderson's intent behind eye colour, is how slavery is perceived. There is a notion that enslavement is viewed as a mercy by lighteyes, something they grant darkeyes as a substitute to death to show benevolence. Furthermore, death is viewed as something honourable to lighteyes, which speaks to discrimination. When Kaladin is betrayed by his army commander Amaram, he

tells Kaladin: “You are being discharged as a deserter and branded as a slave. But you are spared death by my mercy.” (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 186). Though there are additional factors behind his judgement, Amaram does see enslavement as a mercy; as something that demonstrates his benevolence. An instance of this notion of mercy is seen in the subsequent novel as well. While travelling with a slave caravan, Shallan thinks to herself: “it was rare indeed that a lighteyes was made a slave, aside from ardents. Usually someone of higher breeding would simply be executed instead. Slavery was a mercy for the lower classes.” (Sanderson, *Words of Radiance* 147). Slavery being perceived as a mercy can be interpreted in different ways depending on the context and individual perspectives. Due to their supposed superiority, lighteyes hold the actions and behaviours of their fellow lighteyes in higher regard and are therefore stricter with their judgement of each other. Darkeyes, on the other hand, are given ‘leniency’ in the form of enslavement. A darkeyes and a lighteyes who have committed similar crimes will likely be given different punishments: one being enslaved, the other executed. Occasions that would result in lighteyes killing each other would be wars between different lords or kingdoms, duels between lighteyes, or crimes involving low dahn lighteyes (those low in the caste system).

I would argue, however, that the lighteyes’ notion that slavery is a mercy is a misperception by the powerful. Only those who have never experienced enslavement would see slavery as a mercy. Sanderson illustrates the truth of this misperception through Kaladin and the bridgemen. To Kaladin, enslavement is the opposite of mercy. It is a state that leads to the extremes of the human condition; that drives him to the brink, to the “end of it all. […] He climbed to his feet on the lip of that chasm, and could feel his father’s disappointment looming over him, like the thunderheads above. He put one foot out over the void.” (Sanderson, *The Way*

of Kings: part one 166-167). Kaladin is willing to commit suicide rather than continue living in enslavement, a sentiment he shares with others: "'Where's your bridgeleader?' 'Dead,' one of the bridgemen said. 'Tossed himself down the Honor Chasm last night.'"(98). Instead of continuing their 'merciful' state, many choose to defy the benevolence shown them: "The Honor Chasm, the bridgemen called it, for it was the place where they could make the one decision left to them. The 'honorable' decision. Death." (165). Equivalent feelings are seen in the real world as well. There are copious examples throughout history of enslaved people who would rather die than be enslaved. During the transatlantic slave trade, for instance, thousands of enslaved Africans committed suicide on slave ships (Jaffer, "Dying on Their Own Terms"). Similar instances were seen in the antebellum era, where suicide among enslaved African Americans "raised questions about a host of cultural and political issues" (Snyder 42). Thus, the perception of enslavement as a mercy, and lighteyes preferring death to slavery, are not issues of class, race, status or honour, but rather a human issue. Slavery is generally and inherently an inhuman state of being, one that leads to great suffering, regardless of who the enslaved are. This misperception speaks to the overall lighteyes perception of darkeyes. Their dehumanization and devaluing of darkeyes facilitate the misperception. I believe this is what Sanderson is trying to convey by using eye colour as an identifier of worth.

The significance of people's eye colours being used to identify the superior and the inferior lies in the way it reimagines and shows the arbitrariness of people's views and notions of difference and otherness. As mentioned, eye colour is not the sole system of rule in the world of *The Stormlight Archive*. There is the abovementioned meritocracy in Azir. During a conversation between the bridgemen, Sigzil provides another example:

> 'Have […] you ever heard of the land of Babatharnam? […] they have a curious system of rule there, […] the elderly are given office. The older you are, the more authority you have.' […] 'Sounds fair,' Moash said, […] 'Better than deciding who rules based on eye color.' 'Ah, yes,' Sigzil said. 'The Babath are very fair. Currently, the Monavakah Dynasty reigns.' 'How can you have a dynasty if you choose your leaders based on their age?' Kaladin asked. 'It's actually quite easy, […] You just execute anyone who gets old enough to challenge you.' (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 128-129)

Sigzil's example is meant to show that "no matter where you go, you will find some who abuse their power." (129). Perceived differences, like eye colour, skin colour or age, are ultimately just tools people use to justify their authority and power over others. The irrationality of social and racial hierarchy is explored by Sanderson in *Mistborn* as well. The perceived differences between the nobility and the skaa – the series' two prominent social groups – are constructions enforced by the nobility. Extensive interbreeding over a period of one thousand years has removed genetic differences between the two groups. However, as Melville points out, "[d]espite an absence of demonstrable genetic differentiation […] the skaa remain a racialized group whose socioeconomic conditions and traditions are subject to ideological distortion and are forcibly promoted as signs of biological inferiority." (Melville 28). Notable differences, such as their differing physical statures, for instance, are caused by "nutritional" disparities, i.e., the "[s]kaa don't get enough to eat." (Sanderson, *Mistborn: The Final Empire* 354). Thus, the nobility's perception of their biological superiority, which is a part of their claim to rule, is based on something as simple as their greater access to food.

The arbitrariness of eye colour as a system of rule or basis for judging in *The Way of Kings* is further expressed by Wit,[14] a secondary character who can be regarded as an alien on Roshar. Wit

> happened to have blue eyes, which let him get away with all kinds of trouble. Perhaps Wit should have been bemused by the stock these people put in something as simple as eye color, but he had been many places and seen many methods of rule. This didn't seem any more ridiculous than most others. (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 520)

Being from another world, Wit has an outsider perspective on Alethi society and culture through which he conveys his thoughts on eye colour. That he "*happened* to have blue eyes" is a clear reference to the arbitrariness of eye colour (520; emphasis added). As someone from another world, Wit can enter Alethkar, or any other Vorin kingdom, and be seen and treated as a high-ranking member of society, while a native person, who *happens* to have brown eyes, is seen and treated as Wit's inferior. His use of the dismissive terms "simple" and "ridiculous" emphasizes the notion of eye colour being an arbitrary method of perceiving value (520).

Moreover, there is the notion of becoming a lighteyes by winning a Shardblade. This notion may seem to go against the idea of eye colour being likened to race and skin colour. However, I would argue that the changeability of eye colour is more of an indication of Sanderson commenting on the arbitrariness of people's perceptions and values. In "Magic as Privilege in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's *Wheel of Time* Epic Fantasy Series" (2016),

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[14] Wit, or Hoid, as he is usually called, is a character who appears throughout Sanderson's different fantasy series, like *Mistborn* (2006-). He is what is called a Worldhopper, which means that he has the ability to travel to other worlds and planets in the cosmere, Sanderson's fictional shared universe.

Simone points out a similar idea revealed in *The Great Hunt* that reappears throughout *The Wheel of Time*. Simone suggests that the persecution of the women with magical abilities in *The Wheel of Time* reveals

> the injustice of bestowing or denying privilege to individuals based on aspects of one's life which are out of one's control. As readers react to the debasement of one group by another, they are brought face to face with the reality of prejudice and injustice based on aspects of a person's identity in their own world. (168)

This same notion is reflected in Sanderson's use of eye colour, which indicates how his use of the fantasy genre's ability to reimagine reality provides insight into human nature, issues of identity and power. The ways in which eye colour represents class and race demonstrate and emphasize how perceptions and ideas on difference and otherness can be twisted. However meaningless and arbitrary the perceptions of difference are, they can have tremendous social and cultural consequences, as our societies' violent and traumatic histories have shown.

1.4. Slavery: Othering, Dehumanization and Social Death

One of the ways in which Sanderson's representation of slavery is utilized in *The Way of Kings* is as a tool to illustrate the cruelties and brutal indifference shown by those with power and authority towards those without in an unfamiliar light. He does this is by drawing on mimetic notions of slavery. Thus, because of these real-world allusions, the concept Orlando Patterson calls "the social death of the slave" can be seen in Sanderson's representations (Patterson 38). The enslaved, through a process of dehumanization, are removed from society, thus reducing

them to nonbeings. Patterson suggests that there are two separate representations of social death, which are dependent "on the dominant early mode of recruiting slaves" (39). He calls these two representations, or modes, "intrusive" and "extrusive" (39). The "intrusive mode of representing social death" has to do with outsiders and others being 'recruited' into slaving societies (39). As Patterson states: "the slave was ritually incorporated as the permanent enemy on the inside […] He did not and could not belong because he was the product of a hostile, alien culture" (39). Compared to the intrusive mode, the extrusive mode of social death revolves around those who are already a part of society. Patterson points out that in the extrusive mode of social death

> the dominant image of the slave was that of an insider who had fallen, one who ceased to belong and had been expelled from normal participation in the community because of a failure to meet certain minimal legal or socioeconomic norms of behaviour. (41)

The representations of social death are explored in other fantasy works as well. In Samuel R. Delany's *Return to Nevèrÿon*, for instance, there are two enslaved characters, Gorgik and Sarg, who experience extrusive and intrusive social death. Gorgik is a member of an advanced slaveholding society, while Sarg comes from a more primitive society. Jeffrey A. Tucker points out that Gorgik experiences "the extrusive model of slavery" as "a member of a community who falls into disfavor", while "Sarg endures the intrusive model: an outsider, already considered an "other," who becomes a slave." (Tucker 255). Both intrusive and extrusive modes are seen in Sanderson's representations of slavery in *The Way of Kings*. Through these modes, especially the extrusive mode, the dehumanization of the enslaved in the narrative emphasizes their social status as nonbeings, objects or as living corpses without worth within the Vorin societies.

An early instance of the dehumanization of the enslaved which demonstrates their social status is seen during Kaladin's journey to the Shattered Plains. When one of the enslaved men in the slave caravan gets sick, Kaladin tells the slaver Tvlakv (pronounced tv-LAH-kuv) that "[h]e will live, if you give him an extra ladle of water every two hours for five days or so." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 49). As the sick man is removed from the cage and taken to a water barrel, Kaladin feels "himself relax" (49). But suddenly

> [a] low crack rang in the air, followed by a second one, duller, like someone dropping a bag of grain. […] The mercenary raised his cudgel one more time, […] the weapon making a cracking sound as it hit the slave's skull. […] Tvlakv stood warming himself by the fire. 'Storm you!' Kaladin screamed. 'He could have lived, you bastard!' […] 'He would have gotten you all sick, […] I would not lose an entire wagon for one man.' 'He's past the spreading stage! […] If any of us were going to catch it, we'd have done so by now.' 'Hope that you don't. I think he was past saving. […] I care not. So long as you are strong when it is time for sales. (50)

The different uses of language depicting the act of killing the enslaved here highlight the perception towards those lowest in society. The comparison of the three "cracking" sounds to a falling "bag of grain", that the mercenary might as well be hitting an object rather than a human being, creates a dehumanizing image of the violent act (50). Additionally, the image of the slaver standing by the fire further indicates this notion of carelessness. The treatment of the sick man is a clear example of dehumanization. He is treated as an injured animal unable to work, or as a tool that no longer functions. Tvlakv does not hide his indifference to human life. His

conversation with Kaladin, beginning with how he "leisurely" walks over, demonstrates the relationship between Tvlakv, the slave master, and Kaladin, the enslaved (50). It shows the contrasts between the two. Kaladin's effort to save the man, and Tvlakv's lack of effort, reflect the differing perceptions between someone caring for the life of a fellow being, and someone not seeing the worth of a 'lesser' being's life – i.e. the differing perceptions of the powerless and powerful. Tvlakv would rather kill the man to make sure the rest of his "investments were healthy" than try to save him (44). How the slave master interacts with the enslaved here reflects the power relationship. Tvlakv speaks in this manner because he has the perceived authority and 'right' to do so. But there are other aspects hinted at here, namely the social status of the enslaved, and how that status revolves around attitudes and perceptions of life and death.

Sanderson's introduction of the bridgemen through Kaladin's perspective provides a first-hand look at the dehumanization and othering of enslaved darkeyes and further demonstrates the social status of the enslaved. The work Kaladin and the other enslaved men are assigned to is quickly revealed to be something else than first assumed. They are not "to be woodworkers" who build bridges, as Kaladin initially believes (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 96). They are instead the ones who are forced to carry the wooden bridges, which are "over thirty feet long" and "eight feet wide", through brutal conditions so the highprinces' armies can cross the chasms on the Shattered Plaines (98). The bridgemen are a mixed group of individuals. Among them, "[s]laves were common, but so were thieves or other lawbreakers from among the [military] camp followers" (153), as well as foreigners "who didn't fit in" (225).[15] Occasionally, even "a soldier would be thrown into a bridge crew" (153). But that "only happened if he'd done

[15] To avoid any confusion, the "slaves" among the bridgemen are men who were already enslaved before joining the bridgemen, like Kaladin. When made a bridgeman, everyone is considered enslaved, regardless of what they were before.

something extremely bad" (153). Here one can see that Sanderson draws upon the mimetic in his portrayal of the bridgemen, i.e. he incorporates aspects of slavery from the real world into his secondary world. Patterson points out that, "[a]rchetypically, slavery was a substitute for death in war" (Patterson 5), and frequently replaced death as "punishment for some capital offense[s]" (5). This is shown to be the case in the Alethi military camps, where "[a]cts that would earn a hanging in many armies meant being sent to the bridge crews" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 153). This aspect of the bridgemen more clearly indicates their status as someone or something no longer considered part of society. They are men who should be dead.

The first instances of the bridgemen's dehumanization are seen during Kaladin's first bridge run. Their treatment is reminiscent of that of working animals. After carrying their bridge "a good dozen times" across plateaus (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 103), Kaladin sees that "the *real* nightmare" for the bridgemen begins when they arrive at their destination (105). Right before they arrive, Kaladin is moved "to the front of the bridge" by his sergeant, who tells him: "Newcomers gets to go first at this part, Your Lordship." (104). Kaladin is confused by this and initially thinks that the front is the best position to be in. However, he quickly realizes he has been given a death sentence. Kaladin is now fully exposed to the Parshendi waiting across the chasm, holding "[s]hort, recurve bows to fire straight and quick and strong. An excellent bow to use for killing a group of bridgemen before they could lay their bridge" (105). Afterwards, Kaladin likens the bridgemen's sprint to the battle to "hogs running to the slaughter" (106). He realizes that he "*was supposed to die*, […] *That's why he didn't care if I had a vest or sandals. I was at the front.* Kaladin was the only one on the first row who had lived." (109). This is the first indication of Kaladin beginning to understand his and the other bridgemen's status. They are not perceived as fully human, but rather as something already dead.

Sanderson uses the inhuman conditions of the bridge runs to develop Kaladin's understanding of the bridgemen's status. After suffering multiple bridge runs, Kaladin tries to comprehend the situation:

> Why did this all have to be so horrible? […] Why not let a few bridgemen run out in front of the bridges with shields to block arrows? […] The lighteyes acted as if this entire mess were some kind of grand game. (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 151)

He concludes that they "exist to be killed" (151). This notion is further supported when Kaladin unintentionally sabotages a bridge run during a battle.[16] In the aftermath, when he is approached by a lighteyed officer, Kaladin tries to defend his actions by stating: "If it's worth anything, […] I didn't know this would happen. I was just trying to survive", to which the officer replies: "Bridgemen aren't *supposed* to survive" (545). The officer's statement has a significant impact on Kaladin. He asks himself "[w]hat army would employ men who were supposed to die?" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 18). The bridgemen are not men, however. Not to the other darkeyes and lighteyes in the army. Kaladin realizes that "[a] bridgeman who survives was, by definition, a bridgeman who had failed." (41). They are objects, bait. Kaladin's conclusion is supported by Highprince Sadeas himself, during an argument between him and Dalinar[17]:

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[16] After taking command of the squad of bridgemen he is a part of, Kaladin tries out a new manoeuvre during a bridge run in an effort to protect his men. Although the manoeuvre is successful, his decision results in Sadeas' army losing the battle, and the deaths of two hundred bridgemen. As punishment, Kaladin is beaten and left hanging upside-down on the side of a building in a highstorm – a punishment meant to be a death sentence.

[17] Dalinar, unlike Highprince Sadeas, does not have bridgemen in his army. He instead uses beasts of burden to move bridges.

> ‘The bridgemen serve a very important function,’ Sadeas snapped. ‘They distract the Parshendi from firing at my soldiers. […] Yes, we lose a few bridge crews in each assault, but rarely so many that it hinders us. […] they think killing the bridgemen hurts us. As if an unarmored man carrying a bridge was worth the same […] as a mounted knight in Plate.’ Sadeas shook his head in amusement at the thought. (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 241)

In the eyes of the lighteyed masters, the bridgemen’s purpose is to die as fodder and bait to ferry their ‘superiors’ to conquest, power, glory and riches. Their lives are ultimately wasted on a war they have no say in and no stake in.

Returning to Kaladin contemplating the bridgemen’s status. He wonders if they are “not dead already” (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 152). Furthermore, while recovering from the highstorm that was meant to kill him, Kaladin thinks: “They were corpses. […] Who bought corpses? Highprince Sadeas. He bought corpses. They still walked after he bought them, but they *were* corpses. The stupid ones refused to accept it, pretending they were alive.” (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 17-18). Kaladin also describes himself as a corpse when recollecting the state he was in shortly after being made a bridgeman, when he considered suicide: “A man with haunted eyes, a man who had given up on caring or hoping. A walking corpse.” (41). Sanderson’s uses of “corpse” are noteworthy not just because they relate to death and enslavement, but because the term has already been used to refer to the lighteyes by Kaladin in a different context. This different use of the term is explored more extensively below.

Kaladin’s thoughts on the status, objectification and death of the bridgemen signify that the concept of social death is a part of the novel’s societies and cultures’ social structures. The

slaveholding societies depicted in Sanderson's world do what "almost all slaveholding societies" have done through history: defining "the slave as a socially dead person" (Patterson 38). Furthermore, both modes of social death, intrusive and extrusive, are represented. Patterson points out that "in the intrusive mode" the enslaved individual was perceived "as someone who did not belong because he was an outsider" (44). The best example of the intrusive mode of social death in *The Way of Kings* is seen in Sanderson's portrayal of the parshmen.

The parshmen are revealed to be literal "permanent enem[ies] on the inside" (Patterson 39) by Jasnah Kholin during a discussion on the Voidbringers – the mythical enemy of mankind – between her and Shallan:

> 'the legends lie about one thing,' Jasnah continued. 'They claim we chased the Voidbringers off the face of Roshar or destroyed them. But that's not how humans work. We don't throw away something we can use.' […] Parshmen. With skin of black and red. Ash and fire. 'We didn't destroy the Voidbringers,' Jasnah said from behind, her voice haunted. 'We *enslaved* them.' (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 500)

Jasnah's theory that the parshmen are Voidbringers enslaved by humans is a significant indication of intrusive social death.[18] It further clarifies and emphasizes their status as the other in human society and culture. There are multiple aspects of the intrusive mode of social death that fit the parshmen. Like the intrusive enslaved enemy, who stood "as a living affront to the local gods, an intruder in the sacred space" (Patterson 39), the parshmen/Voidbringers are said to have come "again and again, trying to force mankind off Roshar and into Damnation. Just as

[18] The accuracy of Jasnah's theory is not revealed until later in the series. In short, she is mostly correct. When the parshmen 'awake' from their docile state and regain their identities, they truly become enemies on the inside.

they once forced mankind – and the Heralds – out of the Tranquiline Halls." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 362).[19] Thomas F. McIlwraith states that an intrusive enslaved person "was a stranger in a strange land, unsupported by a chain of ancestors reaching back to the beginning of time." (McIlwraith, qtd. in Patterson 39). Furthermore, enslaved peoples, Peter Suzuki comments, "have no past nor future, living as they do, on the whims and mercy of their masters. They live on the fringes of the cosmos and are viewed as being almost on a par with animals." (Suzuki, qtd. in Patterson 39). Both of McIlwraith and Suzuki's assertions about the perceptions of intrusive enslaved people can be seen in the parshmen. As mentioned, parshmen are often likened to animals, and exist "on the fringes" of society – i.e. they are not considered members of human society, yet they are a part of it (39). McIlwraith's mention of intrusive enslaved people being "unsupported by a chain of ancestors" is particularly significant to parshmen representing the intrusive mode of social death (39). The Voidbringers' defeat in the past resulted in many of them losing parts of their souls, their identities and the spiritual/mental connection they had with each other. They, thus, became parshmen, and in their defeat and eventual enslavement were no longer supported "by a chain of ancestors" (39). The parshmen literally lose their connection to who they are, to their past and future, and to the rest of their people: the Parshendi. Their defeat and enslavement literally dehumanize them, which is reminiscent of the way in which enslaved Africans lost their connection to their past because of their enslavement.

Another aspect of the intrusive mode of social death that further shows the parshmen's societal role, and why they are perceived the way they are, is tied to what enslavement can symbolize. Patterson writes that within the intrusive mode of social death, "the slave was

[19] The Tranquiline Halls and Damnation can be viewed as Heaven and Hell in Sanderson's world.

symbolic of the defeated enemy, the power of the local gods, and the superior honor of the community." (Patterson 39). Looking at the revelation that the parshmen are the Voidbringers through this aspect introduces new insights on human society in Sanderson's world. The enslavement of the parshmen symbolizes the perceived legitimacy of the humans' faith in their beliefs and their god and reinforces their perceived societal and cultural superiority, which in turn justifies the continued enslavement of the parshmen.

The other form of social death, which Patterson calls the extrusive mode, is the representation of social death that is the most narratively focused upon in *The Way of Kings*. With this form of social death, an enslaved person "became an outsider because he did not (or no longer) belonged." (Patterson 44). Kaladin and the bridgemen are the best example of extrusive social death in *The Way of Kings*. They are all an amalgamation of individuals who have "fallen" and been "expelled" from their communities and society due to failings – their own, others or the society they were a part of (41). Kaladin is enslaved as a consequence of not wanting to follow cultural norms, for rejecting the opportunity to become a lighteyes. He instead chooses to remain a darkeyes and – as he sees it – keep his identity. This rejection is seen in a flashback chapter, where Kaladin kills a full Shardbearer in battle and is given the choice to claim both a Shardplate and Shardblade, which would make him a lighteyes.[20] However, Kaladin instead decides to give his 'Shards' to one of his soldiers, which he subsequently thinks "had to be the most monumentally stupid thing anyone […] had ever done" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 181-182). When asked why he rejected the Shardblade by Amaram, his lighteyed lord and commander, Kaladin simply says that he does not "want it" (183). When Amaram asks again for

[20] A Shardbearer is a person who has a Shardplate and/or Shardblade. As mentioned, a Shardplate is a nearly unbreakable supernatural plate armour that gives the wearer enhanced speed and strength, while a Shardblade is a giant two-handed sword. A Shardblade is one of the few things that can damage Shardplate. If a person is able to either defeat or kill (which is rare) a Shardbearer in battle, the person can claim the 'Shards' as their own.

a reason, Kaladin thinks to himself: "*Because it would make me one of you. Because I can't look at that weapon and not see the faces of the men its wielder slaughtered so offhandedly*" (184). Kaladin sees the blades as the tools of the oppressors. They are the symbols of the lighteyes' power and status; figurative borders separating sovereigns and subjects, the masters and the enslaved. Due to the nature of the blades, their ability to change dark coloured eyes into light, they can only truly be owned and wielded by the lighteyes. This aspect speaks to the abovementioned notion of eye colour representing race, and the arbitrariness of using eye colour as a means to separate the superior from the inferior.

Sanderson alludes to different forms of historical oppression in the scene where Amaram betrays Kaladin by killing his men, taking his Shardblade and Shardplate for himself, and condemning him with enslavement. Amaram tries to justify his actions by stating that, unlike a darkeyes, he is "trained in the sword […] and [is] accustomed to plate" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 185).[21] He claims his actions are "[f]or the good of Alethkar", and that he "can't worry about the lives of a few darkeyed spearmen when thousands of people may be saved by [his] decision" (185). Amaram's claim that he is merely trying to do what is best for the people – both lighteyes and darkeyes – which implies that he 'knows' what is best, is analogous to the white slavers and supremacists in the U.S. who claimed to know what was best for the enslaved Africans and African Americans. Moreover, although Amaram is not an imperial figure in this context – they are in Alethkar – parallels can be drawn to a similar sentiment that was common among imperialists and colonialists. That an 'inferior' people, race, or society/culture are unable to protect themselves, that they do not know what is best, was a widespread notion among Westerners and other ruling peoples. Said points out that it is the oppressor "that knows [the

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[21] Darkeyes are not allowed to wear or wield swords. They can only use bows, spears, etc. Only lighteyes are allowed to use swords.

subjects] and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves" (Said, *Orientalism* 35). Kaladin sees through Amaram's justifications, however, stating: "It's not about Alethkar! It's about you!" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 185).

Amaram's reasoning behind the condemnation of Kaladin relates to social death: "Five men telling the same story would have been believed, but a single slave will be ignored" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 186). The wording here is telling. Kaladin's life is spared, but at this moment he becomes a socially dead person. After his branding, Kaladin will no longer be a part of society as a person. He will be "ignored" because he has become a nonbeing according to the rules of society (186). Thus, because Kaladin fails to do what society expects of him, to accept the 'honour' of becoming a lighteyes when given the opportunity – to become 'better' than he previously was – he is "expelled" from society through enslavement (Patterson 41). Moreover, Kaladin rejecting to be counted among the 'superior' social group threatens it by questioning its authority. The lighteyes' power stems from the belief in their superiority. If the 'inferior' darkeyes begin to express disdain for the lighteyes' status, their authority will diminish. Kaladin's rejection signifies the beginning of his resistance against the lighteyes' 'natural' superiority. This defiance appears throughout Kaladin's time as an enslaved person and reaches its culmination during his time as a bridgeman.

1.5. Rejecting Their Status

The notion of resistance is prevalent in *The Way of Kings* and is depicted in two notable ways: directly by Kaladin in the form of attitudes and views on the lighteyes' 'natural' superiority, and indirectly through the bridgemen's rejection of their status as socially dead men. The two forms of resistance are significant because they emphasize the contradictory and arbitrary aspects of the

novel's social hierarchy, which alludes to and reimagines aspects of real-world history and culture. Through the reimagined representations of slavery, readers are offered greater insight into what this resistance explores, namely how perceptions of worth and identity are based on arbitrary notions. The dehumanization of the bridgemen, their status as socially dead beings, as living corpses and bait for the Parshendi are all identities imposed by the lighteyes. However, these identities are shown to be contradictory and flawed. The lighteyes' dehumanizing attitudes and acts, which stem from the influences of the social hierarchy, instead assert the bridgemen's humanity and ultimately lead to a rejection of their status. This rejection is realized through Kaladin's insights into the inherently corrupt social hierarchy and his supportive actions towards the other bridgemen.

Kaladin questions the superiority of, and reasons behind the authority of the lighteyes several times. When Kaladin arrives at the Shattered Plains and recollects his previous experiences as an enslaved person, he recalls that "[e]ach lighteyes [he] had known, whether as a slave or a free man, had shown himself to be corrupt to the core, for all his outward poise and beauty. They were like rotting corpses clothed in beautiful silk." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 77). Here we see Kaladin using the term "corpses" again, as he did when reflecting on the status of the bridgemen. In this instance, however, the term refers to lighteyes instead of the walking corpses that are the bridgemen. Sanderson's language here, specifically the line "rotting corpses clothed in beautiful silk" (77), interprets as a commentary on the corrupting and twisting nature of power. In other words, the belief in the superiority of lighteyes as a part of the Vorin religion – the outward appearance – have turned the lighteyes into something no longer human, something inhuman or dead – into walking corpses. The corrupt nature of the lighteyes is emphasized by Kaladin multiple times: "They're all the same, Syl. The more noble they look, the

more corrupt they are inside." (Sanderson, *Way of Kings: part one* 343); "[a]rrogant, […] vengeful, greedy, corrupt to the core." (380); "[p]retending virtue but corrupt inside." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 421).

Another instance of defiance against lighteyed superiority and the natural order is seen during a discussion between Kaladin and a bridgeman about the lighteyes and the Knights Radiant's greatness.[22] The topic of power and corruption hiding behind a beautiful outward appearance reappears here. The bridgeman tells Kaladin that "[t]hey weren't just lighteyes. They were Radiants" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 331). Kaladin, however, states:

> They were people, […] Men in power always pretend to virtue, or divine guidance, some kind of mandate to "protect" the rest of us. If we believe that the Almighty put them where they are, it's easier for us to swallow what they do to us. […] Stories and legends, Teft, […] We want to believe that there were better men once. That makes us think it could be that way again. But people don't change. They are corrupt now. They were corrupt then. (331)

Kaladin sees the religious and cultural ideologies of society as excuses and justifications for the lighteyes to rule and subjugate the darkeyes – i.e. those in power hide behind a pious and virtuous cloak to keep their power. Furthermore, there is an aspect of acceptance to the natural order among darkeyes, which he believes helps them cope with the situation they are in. Both of the abovementioned instances of Kaladin's defiance and questioning of the social order, show his

[22] The Knights Radiant is an ancient military organization of knights with magical abilities, Shardplates and Shardblades, that was led by the Heralds, divine beings within the Vorin religion. During the events of *The Way of Kings*, it has not existed for centuries.

insight into the processes of power and oppression. It is his ability to think critically about Vorin society and the supremacist ideology that enables Kaladin to resist. The lighteyes' ideology is reminiscent of what is found in imperial and colonial discourse. In 1910, Jules Harmand (1845-1921), a French colonialism advocate, stated:

> It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle […] the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, […] our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. (Curtin, qtd. in Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 17)

Harmand's notions of superiority are analogous to those of the lighteyes'. This allusion speaks to Sanderson's social commentary on flawed perceptions of difference within society. The lighteyes' views and ideas of superiority that their right to rule is based on are inherently flawed because of their immoral perceptions and attitudes towards their 'inferiors'.[23]

The examples above are all instances of direct resistance by Kaladin. Another form of resistance is seen in Kaladin and the bridgemen's rejection of their status. Their opposition to their dehumanization asserts their humanity. Returning to Kaladin's first bridge run, Sanderson depicts the bodily suffering of Kaladin and the bridgemen in order to emphasize the discord between their dehumanized status and their humanity:

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[23] Note, I am referring to the views and attitudes of the general population and overall social structure here, not individual lighteyes. There are many lighteyes who exhibit a lack of immorality, like Dalinar.

> They continued jogging as the army crossed the bridge behind them […] Before too long, blood ran down Kaladin's shoulders. His breathing was torturous, his side aching painfully. He could hear others gasping, the sounds carrying through the confined space beneath the bridge. (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 100)

The mentions of running "blood", an "aching" side, "torturous" breathing and "gasping" clearly displays their humanity in these scenes, which speaks to the inhumanity of their treatment (100). However, the inhuman conditions of the bridge runs eventually begin to affect the bridgemen, making them perceive themselves as what they are 'supposed' to be, as objects: "He ran. […] Like a boulder rolled down a hill, or like rain fell from the sky. They didn't have a choice. Neither did he. He wasn't a man; he was a thing, and things just did what they did." (154). Nevertheless, the bridge runs' horrors, the losses they inflict, still produces human moments:

> Kaladin huddled in the barrack […] He curled against the cold stone. […] *I can't keep going like this* […] *I'm dead inside, as sure as if I'd taken a spear through the neck*. […] for the first time in over eight months, Kaladin found himself crying. (155)

Although he may see himself as dead, or as a thing, Kaladin is very much alive and human, as his emotions show. In Kaladin's following scenes, he tries to commit suicide. As mentioned, enslaved people committing suicide can be acts of defiance, of rejecting one's status as a nonbeing, of denying the slave master their power over the enslaved. Although Syl stops him from killing himself, he does leave a part of himself on the chasm's edge – the "wretch", the part of him that represents his "[a]pathy", i.e. his acceptance of his status as a walking corpse,

inflicted by previous losses and failures (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 82-83). Kaladin's attempted suicide and newfound determination to protect the bridgemen represent a turning point in Kaladin's story. At this moment, he is arguably reborn as he regains aspects of his humanity by discarding his status as socially dead: standing on the chasm's edge, "Kaladin opened his eyes. He was cold and wet, but he felt a tiny, warm candle flame of determination come alight inside him." (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 168). He is "changed", and sees the world anew (170). This turning point is further demonstrated by Kaladin's comment to Gaz, a bridge crew officer, as he returns from the chasm: "[t]he world just changed, Gaz" (169). Kaladin thus rejects his social death by determining to save the bridgemen.[24]

After this narrative point, Kaladin begins to actively combat the bridgemen's imposed social status. The first act that represents this form of resistance is seen when Kaladin returns to the bridgemen's barrack after his aborted suicide attempt. He asks the bridgemen their names. The significance of names in this scene prompts a look at the importance of names in the fantasy genre, specifically the trope of True Names. The True Name trope revolves around the power of names, which often involves magic. A True Name symbolizes a "deep understanding of the named thing's essence, identity or [Achilles' heel], and is usually well guarded" by the thing or being ("True Name"). In some stories and fairy tales, knowing someone or something's True Name means that one has power over the person or being. This power is often used to defeat beings, like dragons, demons and other fantastical creatures ("True Name"). An example of using a being's True Name to defeat them is seen in the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale "Rumpelstiltskin" (1812). Though there are similarities, Sanderson uses this aspect of names differently to demonstrate the significance of Kaladin's act. As Kaladin gets inside the barrack,

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[24] Note, the bridgemen Kaladin intends to protect are the ones in his bridge crew, i.e. the group of bridgemen he runs with, not all the bridgemen in the army.

> [h]e visited each man, prodding or threatening until the man gave his name. They each resisted. It was as if their names were the last things they owned, and wouldn't be given up cheaply, though they seemed surprised – perhaps even encouraged – that someone cared to ask. (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 171)

The reluctance to give their names is comparable to the idea of hiding or protecting True Names. Their names are intrinsically tied to their identities, which are "the last things they owned" (171). The bridgemen do not wish to bare their identities and, thus, relinquish what little power they have left. But instead of having the power of their names used against them, it is used to help them see their own worth again. This notion is further indicated through Kaladin's feelings toward the bridgemen's names: "The names mattered. The men mattered." (171). The bridgemen respond to Kaladin's act of reaching out by showing that they care, which signifies the beginning of the rejection of their status.

Kaladin gradually helps the bridgemen see their own worth.[25] He realizes, however, that they cannot truly overcome their apathy, and thus reject their social status as walking dead men if their "lives aren't *worth* living" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part one* 373). The culmination of Kaladin and the bridgemen's resistance occurs when they are given an opportunity to escape during Sadeas' betrayal of Dalinar and his army.[26] This opportunity is significant to Sanderson's commentary because it explores the notions of choice and agency, which relates to identity and

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[25] Kaladin gains the bridgemen's trust and respect by healing and not abandoning the wounded during bridge runs; by making medicine, and sharing his food with the wounded not given food by the army, and by teaching them to fight and survive battles.

[26] Following the betrayal, as Sadeas' army retreats and leaves Dalinar's army trapped on a plateau surrounded by a large Parshendi army, Kaladin's bridge crew ends up falling behind the retreating army. Then, during a rest, Kaladin manages to trick their lighteyed officer to continue without them by saying they will follow after their rest. Thus, Kaladin and the other bridgemen are left alone on the Shattered Plains with a bridge they can use to disappear.

humanity. Furthermore, it illustrates the misperceptions of the social hierarchy. The bridgemen are given a choice. They have a "chance to vanish, presumed dead" (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two* 420). But instead of escaping, they choose to try to help the doomed army. Note the significance of 'choose' here. Kaladin sees it as "*what is right*" (422), and tells the others: "'we *have* to go back!' […] One by one, they nodded. […] [M]en who had once cared for nothing but their own skins – took deep breaths, tossed away thoughts for their own safety, and nodded." (422-423). As they alone charge the battle plateau, Kaladin acknowledges that

> [*t*]*his is my choice*, […] *It's not some angry god watching me, not some spren playing tricks, not some twist of fate. It's me. I* chose *to follow Tien. I* chose *to charge the Shardbearer and save Amaram. I* chose *to escape the slave pits. And now, I* choose *to try to rescue these men, though I know I will probably fail.*[27] (425)

Kaladin fully displays his humanity through his agency. He and the others rise above and reject their imposed social status by *choosing* to "throw away [their] chance at freedom" and risk their lives to help the thousands of soldiers left to die (421). Their act of compassion represents the culmination of their defiance against their status as already dead men, which speaks to what Sanderson is trying to convey: how perceptions of value based on different arbitrary aspects of peoples' identities are inherently flawed. At this moment, Kaladin and the bridgemen show that they are more human than those who perceive them as nonbeings. Moreover, Sanderson is commenting on the natural resilience of the human spirit by demonstrating the ways in which the enslaved and subjugated will and always should resist their conditions.

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[27] Tien is Kaladin's younger brother who was conscripted into Amaram's army. Kaladin chose to enlist with him to protect him. However, they were separated and Tien died in battle.

In this chapter, I examine the reimagined representations of slavery and social hierarchy in *The Way of Kings*. By demonstrating that eye colour is an analogy of race and skin colour, I argue that Sanderson uses this analogy to critique perceptions of worth based on something as arbitrary as physical characteristics, a part of one's identity one does not have control over. I then move on to examine the perceptions of the enslaved humans in Vorin society by drawing on the concept of social death. Through this concept, I analyse the ways in which the enslaved are dehumanized, and what the effects of this dehumanized social status are. Finally, I look at how Kaladin and the other bridgemen resist and reject their dehumanized social status. The culmination of this rejection is reflected through their morality and agency. They prove their worth and assert their humanity by choosing to save those who consider them nonbeings. The following chapter explores Robert Jordan's depictions of reimagined social hierarchy, imperial invasion and slavery.

Chapter 2: On Language, Women and Perceptions of Power in *The Great Hunt*

2.0. Introduction

Similarly to the topics of race and class, women and gender have been explored in different ways through the use of the fantastic. This exploration has been done by reimagining portrayals of gender in society and culture. Female characters are shown to go against stereotypes and removed from familiar gender roles, which "can call certain assumptions into question" and challenge preconceived notions of gender (Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 103). Attebery points out that removing the constraining "details of contemporary society gives [fantasy] flexibility, for its heroines need not carry such cultural burdens as women's economic dependency, religious rationales for the suppression of women, and the commercial exploitation of women as sex objects." (103-104). Being free from these constraints give women in fantasy "a chance of coping with personal relationships" and their own limits (104). A way in which fantasy authors can reimagine women's place in society is through magic. Kimberly Wickham suggests that "[m]agic offers female characters a way to access power that is outside of societal structures, because, while magic may be regulated in different ways, […] it is not created by society, but exists outside of it." (Wickham 7).[28] It provides a way in which "conventional power relations" can be overcome (6). However, magic can also be used to constrict power, which can lead to different forms of oppression. Fantasy works that explore these gender issues are, for example, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) and Lois M. Bujold's *Paladin of Souls* (2003).

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[28] Whether or not magic is created by society depends on the author and story. However, it is commonly, as Wickham implies, a part of a fantasy world's nature or a natural force.

Explorations of gender and different forms of oppression are seen in Robert Jordan's stories as well, in which they are tied to the notions of imperialism and slavery. Unlike Brandon Sanderson, who introduces slavery and oppression early in his series, Jordan introduces these notions in the later part of *The Great Hunt*. Jordan depicts a world in which prejudices and perceived differences revolve around nationality rather than race and ethnicity, and where the wielding of magic by women is a point of contention. However, Jordan's introduction of an imperial force in the narrative, called the Seanchan, establishes something foreign to the established world, namely slavery and imperial domination. Although they have a relatively small part in the greater narrative, their introduction affects the novel's plot in different ways. Furthermore, due to the fantasy genre's ability to twist and reimagine real-world perceptions, Jordan depicts enslavement in a way that readers may be unaccustomed to. Instead of basing slavery on the subjugation of races or people perceived to be 'inferior' because of skin colour or other physical features, Jordan reimagines slavery by basing it on misconceptions and generalizations of individuals inhabiting two notable traits: they are women who wield magic. Though the enslavement and oppression of women by society is not an unfamiliar notion, what *is* unfamiliar, and which adds newness, is magic being used as a justification for enslavement.

This chapter aims to explore the ways in which Jordan depicts the notions of imperialism, and magically and gender-based slavery in *The Great Hunt*. By looking at scenes that show interactions between the Seanchan and the Westlanders, I examine how their language, perceptions and attitudes towards each other affect the story and world. Furthermore, the novel's representation of female enslavement and imperial invasion, while not the focus of the novel, prompts an exploration of the consequences of introducing gendered subjugation in a culture where the perception of empowered women is intrinsic to people's cultural identity. I argue that

Jordan's reimagined representations of imperial invasion, women's enslavement and dehumanization, and the consequences these have for the invaded society in the narrative are intended to be a critical examination of the ways in which abuses of power, in the form of language and constructions of social hierarchy, disrupt social power structures such as intrinsic views of gender roles. Through his depictions of the invaders' overt dehumanizing language, Jordan shows how it is the oppressors' perceptions and behaviours that are inhuman. Additionally, by revealing that the aspect of female enslavement in the invaders' social hierarchy is founded on a lie during a pivotal moment in the narrative, Jordan points out and emphasizes the fabrications behind imperial perceptions and discourses. Further, I ask, what are the implications of Jordan's critical examination with regard to women and enslavement?

To explore the different aspects of the Seanchan's disruptions more intently, the chapter will be divided into three sections. Section one is an overview of the plot, the societies and the people in the novel. The second section examines the role and power of language to dehumanize and impose identities, its ability to express resistance to said impositions, and why these notions are significant to the rest of the plotline. The third section explores issues of gender by examining instances of female enslavement in *The Great Hunt*, and what their broader implications for the novel might be.

Language has always been a tool used to gain and maintain power and influence. For instance, imperial and colonial powers, as well as societies and institutions wanting to exert their beliefs and dominance over others, e.g. slave societies and institutions, employ language to establish 'truths' that become intrinsic parts of their cultural identities. These 'truths' consist of notions such as justifications for domination and absolute demarcations between 'superior' and 'inferior' peoples. Writing about Roman imperialism, Myles Lavan states that through language,

societies "establish a normative framework for the exercise of […] power." (Lavan 251). In other words, language is a foundation which enables societies to realize and normalize their own truths concerning rights, superiority – moral, racial, ideological etc. – and justifications of expansion and domination. Furthermore, Homi K. Bhabha believes that the language or discourse of colonialism is "crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization." (Bhabha 96). Through language, invaders/colonists or people with power and authority over others, like slave masters, can impose identities on the colonized, the subjugated – the other. Frantz Fanon, further, argues that the dominated can, through the language of the dominators, be made into "a kind of quintessence of evil" (Fanon 6); someone "impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values" (6). They are ultimately made "the enemy of values." (6). This sort of language is not necessarily used consciously or in a planned manner by the dominators, though there are exceptions. In his writings on how classical British writers' language reflects imperial attitudes in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward W. Said suggests that a language of othering used by oppressors against the oppressed is not viewed as such by the oppressors. It is instead inherent in their perceptions of others; it is "bound up with the development of [the imperial power's] cultural identity, as that identity imagines itself in a geographically conceived world." (52).

The Great Hunt's depictions of female enslavement towards the end of the novel are significant and prompt an exploration of gender issues, such as female disempowerment and containment. In *Constructing Reality from Fantasy in "The Wheel of Time" and "Anita Blake"* (2004), Joansandy M. Wong states that the "world of *The Wheel of Time* is one in which female and male individuals are portrayed as strong characters regardless of gender and in which each

are needed in order to sustain a balance in the world." (16). However, in *The Great Hunt*, Jordan depicts a disruption to this balance in the form of the Seanchan. The progressive gender roles of the established society and cultures of the world are suddenly threatened by imperial domination and a form of subjugation that opposes these roles: the enslavement of the most powerful women in the invaded society. Through the perspectives of different characters in the novel, Jordan explores the ways in which the reimagined progressive society's people react to the threat to their social and cultural structure.

However, before engaging with these issues, the next section provides an overview of some important points of information about *The Great Hunt*'s plot, world and people so the reader is familiar with what will be explored.

2.1. Contextualizing Cultures, Societies, and Power Structures in *The Great Hunt*

The Westlands is the fictional geographic location of Jordan's novel. It consists of several nations and cultures with varying forms of governments and institutions, with monarchies, as seen in traditional medieval societies, being the most common. There is, however, no slavery, no institutions that resemble those seen in Sanderson's story or the real world. Slavery is commonly viewed as immoral by the people of the Westlands. Furthermore, Westlands society generally favours women, and some are semi-matriarchal. The notion of patriarchy as seen in the real world is arguably non-existent in the novel. Women often have a stronger presence in positions of power and authority and have an equal or slightly higher social status than men. Highest in the social and cultural hierarchy, alongside monarchs and nobles, are the Aes Sedai, a female-only organisation of magic users. Led by an elected Aes Sedai – titled the Amyrlin Seat – who is ranked "socially as the equal of a king or queen", they rule over the city-state Tar Valon (Jordan,

The Great Hunt 686). The Aes Sedai are best known for being able to 'channel', i.e. access and control the female half of the One Power (a magic power), called saidar.[29] They are, thus, viewed as a very select and elite group of individuals whose cultural and institutional power and presence are felt throughout all Westlands society.[30]

The reasoning behind the societal favouring of women arguably has to do with history shaping the societies and cultures of the world. Roughly three and a half thousand years before the events in the novels there was a period called the Breaking of the World. This period was caused by the Dark One corrupting the male half of the One Power, which led to every male Aes Sedai going insane. For "nearly one hundred years" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 702), until the last male Aes Sedai died, they destroyed whole societies and "changed the face of the earth" (687).[31] However, due to the One Power being split in two, a male half and a female half, the female Aes Sedai did not go insane. They were therefore able to help survivors and salvage what remained of society. The events that took place during this cataclysmic period, then, likely led to a greater trust in women, resulting in women often having greater roles in society. The history Jordan creates provides a back story as to why the Aes Sedai are depicted as a powerful institution in Westlands society and culture. Their strong presence and their roles as advisers, leaders, and protectors in the past and present, have made the Aes Sedai central figures of authority. However, due to their use of the One Power, they are also figures of controversy.

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[29] The One Power is split into a female half called saidar, and a male half called saidin.

[30] Note, however, that not all women who can channel are Aes Sedai. Only those who are found and sent to train, or who seek them out on their own become Aes Sedai. Many women go unnoticed their entire lives, not knowing they have the abilities, or they join other smaller or lesser-known 'underground' groups.

[31] When I mention "the last male Aes Sedai" I am referring to the men who were part of the organization in the past. Before the Breaking, both men and women were Aes Sedai. After, however, all Aes Sedai are women. But there are still men who are born with the ability to channel. Because of the corruption of saidin, these male channelers are perceived as evil and dangerous. When their abilities become known, they are usually killed, commit suicide, or are hunted down by Aes Sedai and 'gentled', i.e. their abilities are magically taken away.

The One Power is one of Jordan's greatest sources of conflict in *The Wheel of Time*. Viewed as something evil and unnatural by some, and as something good and natural by others, it is a cause of contention for many. Due to the events that transpired during the Breaking of the World, and the evils done by the insane male Aes Sedai, most commoners – unaware of the full extent of history – generalizes the One Power and the Aes Sedai. Thus, the female Aes Sedai "are blamed by many for the Breaking of the World" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 684), and their use of the One Power is perceived by many as something evil.[32] Aes Sedai are often perceived by common people as mythic, or fairy tale-like characters, appearing in many popular stories within the world of *The Wheel of Time*, where they are depicted as powerful, evil, manipulative, and scary figures. They are often referred to as "the witches" or "Tar Valon witches" by people in nations and regions who view them as evil and deceitful (10, 159). When the protagonist Rand sees Moiraine – his mentor and guardian – for the first time after learning that she is an Aes Sedai, he thinks to himself: "if the stories were true, then she should look closer to a Trolloc than to a more than handsome woman" (Jordan, *The Eye of the World* 101). However, there are also elements of awe and respect, of deference, shown towards the Aes Sedai, which stem from the distinct difference in institutional and cultural power between Aes Sedai and other Westlanders.

These are some of the aspects of the world Jordan presents to readers in the first two novels in *The Wheel of Time*, aspects that are relevant for the following exploration of Jordan's depictions of slavery, power, disruptions of normative perceptions of power, clash of cultures, and social upheaval brought into his world with the introduction of the Seanchan Empire.

The Seanchan or "Those Who Come Home", as they call themselves, are the descendants of an empire that existed in the Westlands, around a thousand years before the events in *The*

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[32] Any mention of the term Aes Sedai will henceforth be a reference to the female Aes Sedai.

Wheel of Time novels, who crossed the western ocean as an expeditionary force (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 416). Any memory of this expeditionary force is lost to most Westlanders by the time the Seanchan reappear on their western shores. Through the centuries leading up to the events in *The Great Hunt*, the expeditionary force goes through a long period of conquest on the Seanchan continent. A new empire is established, heavily influenced by the empire of their ancestors, with similar ideologies, beliefs, and values. Similarly to the Westlands, there is a lack of patriarchal notions in their society. During the events of the series, Seanchan is ruled by an empress whose rule is absolute.

The Seanchan society is a slave society, built upon the enslavement of women who can channel. There is also a 'normal' slavery institution where people without magical abilities are enslaved. This institution, like the enslavement of female channelers, is part of the Seanchan's social stratification. Although this aspect is relevant to slavery and postcolonial issues, I choose to focus on the enslavement of Aes Sedai, as they are central to the novel's narrative and plot development, and because their enslavement illustrates several points of interrogation for this thesis. The enslavement of channelers is achieved by magical means through magic items called a'dam. The a'dam comprises a collar and bracelet linked by a silver leash. By wearing the bracelets, specially trained women called sul'dam can mentally control and dominate the female channelers wearing the collars.[33] The Seanchan call these collared women damane, which means "the Leashed Ones" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 423). The Seanchan view all women who can channel as damane. Through the a'dam, the sul'dam can both inflict excruciating pain and cause extreme pleasure unto the damane; understand and read their emotions; set absolute demands and

[33] Only women can be trained as sul'dam. This has to do with the differences between saidin and saidar, saidin's corruption, and the workings of the a'dam.

conditions; and, over time, experienced sul'dam in control can almost read or sense the damane's thoughts.[34]

The plot of *The Great Hunt* continues shortly after the conclusion of the first novel and follows Rand, Egwene, Perrin, Mat and Nynaeve, as well as some secondary and tertiary characters. During the initial parts of the story, the main protagonists are separated into two groups. Rand, Mat, and Perrin are sent on a quest – a great hunt – to retrieve a stolen magical artefact, a curled musical horn. Egwene and Nynaeve, who are revealed to be channelers in the first novel, travel to the Aes Sedai's city to learn to channel and become Aes Sedai themselves. Throughout the first half of the novel, there are mentions of invaders and strangers on the west coast of the Westlands, who are revealed to be the Seanchan.

Rand, Mat, Perrin and a group of soldiers journey across the Westlands hunting Padan Fain, one of the series' antagonists, who stole the horn. At one point they are separated. But they eventually find each other and manage to track Fain to the west coast, to the city of Falme.

The first half of Egwene and Nynaeve's story revolves around them journeying to the White Tower, the headquarters of the Aes Sedai in Tar Valon, and learning to channel the One Power. During their stay there they meet and befriend Elayne, a princess and channeler, and Min, a young woman who can see and 'read' people's auras. After being in the Tower for a time, they are visited by the Aes Sedai Liandrin, who is secretly a follower of the Dark One. She tricks the four women to travel with her alone to the west coast by telling them that Rand, Mat and Perrin are there and that they are in danger. They believe Liandrin's lie and go with her. When they

[34] Other traits inherent to the a'dam: damane wearing collars cannot touch or pick up any object they perceive as a weapon, or that can be used as a weapon; damane feel any pain that is inflicted on the sul'dam they are linked with to a greater extent than the sul'dam themselves; if a damane tries to move a bracelet not worn by a sul'dam, it causes the damane great pain and nausea to the point where she may fall unconscious; a sul'dam can force a damane to use or not use the One Power.

arrive, a group of Seanchan soldiers and sul'dam are waiting for them. The four women are confused at first. But when Liandrin's betrayal is revealed, a fight breaks out. In the confusion, Nynaeve and Elayne escape, while Egwene and Min are captured. Egwene is then collared with an a'dam by a sul'dam and made damane, i.e. she is enslaved. Egwene and Min are then taken to Falme, where Egwene goes through traumatizing experiences as she is 'trained' and conditioned to be a damane by the sul'dam. She spends approximately two months as a damane in Falme.

In the concluding chapters, everyone ends up in Falme. After their escape, Nynaeve and Elayne follow the Seanchan to Falme and begin planning Egwene's rescue. When they manage to capture a sul'dam and take her a'dam, Nynaeve and Elayne use the sul'dam to access Egwene's room and free her. After she is freed, Egwene gets her revenge on the sul'dam that tortured and conditioned her by putting the a'dam collar on her and leaving her to be found by the other sul'dam.

During this rescue, Rand's group have tracked Fain and the horn to the Seanchan leader's house in Falme. They break in and find the horn, but are discovered by the leader and his soldiers. A battle breaks out, during which Rand kills the Seanchan leader. They win the battle and manage to get out with the horn. As they ride away from Falme, Rand and the others find themselves between two armies: the Seanchan and a Westlander army approaching the city. In an act of desperation, the three decide to blow the horn, which summons a small army of dead legendary heroes. With the help of these heroes, Mat, Perrin and the others drive the Seanchan out of Falme. Rand, however, ends up confronting and battling the antagonist Ba'alzamon in the sky above Falme. He wins but is gravely wounded. The story concludes with Egwene, Nynaeve, Elayne and Mat travelling to Tar Valon, while Perrin and Min stay with Rand, who is revealed to all to be the Dragon Reborn after his battle with Ba'alzamon in the sky.

2.2. A Language of Othering – Invaders Imposing Identities

In the chapters focusing on the Seanchan's invasion, both sides of the divide, the Seanchan and the Westlanders, utilize language that dehumanizes, alienate and categorize the other side. The Seanchan's language of othering is utilized as a means of domination and justification for their conquest. It is used to control the narrative of the invasion, to show that the Seanchan are in the right. The Westlanders' language, however, otherizes and demonizes the Seanchan by likening them to the most apparent representations of the Dark Others of the Westlands, the followers and creatures of the Dark One like Darkfriends and Trollocs, which points out the inhumanity of the Seanchan's behaviours.

The Seanchan's impositions and perceptions of female channelers are demonstrated in their language. Furthermore, these perceptions are significant because of the greater disruption they cause Westlands society and culture. This disruption is best represented by the terms they introduce to the Westlands. I am here referring to the Seanchan terms damane, marath'damane and sul'dam, all of which relate to slavery and are intrinsic to Seanchan culture and society. Damane and marath'damane mean "the Leashed Ones" and "Those Who Must Be Leashed" respectively (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 423, 573),[35] while the term sul'dam means "Holder of the Leash" (566). These three terms are connected to the channelers of the One Power.[36]

Certain terms in cultures and societies, like the three Seanchan terms, can have significant power. They can represent a culture and society's constructed belief in their own right

[35] The distinction between the two terms is that damane are female channelers who are enslaved, while marath'damane are female channelers who are not enslaved but would be if they are found.

[36] It should be noted that two additional terms also relate to slavery. They are da'covale and so'jhin, which mean "one who is owned" or "person who is property" (Jordan, *Winter's Heart* 682), and "a height among lowness" (690). But because the two terms do not appear in the novel, they will not be included in the following exploration of the Seanchan's language of othering.

to subjugate others. In other words, through "institutions, traditions, conventions", and "agreed-upon codes of understanding" societies create terms that give them power and authority (Said, *Orientalism* 22). The greater a term's importance is to a society's culture and history; the more power can be drawn from it and then used against others. The importance of the terms damane, marath'damane and sul'dam to Seanchan culture, society and history – which are all characterized by slave institutions and social hierarchy – thus give the Seanchan considerable power and authority to impose constructed identities onto others. This power of imposition is comparable to the changing of an enslaved person's name – a topic explored below – which Patterson states "is almost universally a symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity" (Patterson 55). A person's name "is the verbal signal of [their] whole identity, [their] being-in-the-world as a distinct person." (54). Calling a woman damane or marath'damane is thus an act of dehumanization and alienation that strips the woman's identity from her by making her something other. The first instance of this in the novel is seen in the scene where the secondary character Bayle Domon, a ship captain and trader, is boarded by a Seanchan ship led by Egeanin, a female Seanchan captain, during a sea voyage. When Domon looks at a collared woman following Egeanin aboard, Egeanin, "with the pride of ownership" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 422), asks him: "You admire my *damane*? She cost me dear, but she was worth every coin." (422).[37] Egeanin's use of damane here reveals her perception and attitude towards the enslaved woman. She is not referring to the woman as a person, but as something to be admired, like a valuable object or exotic animal, and expects Domon to do the same. When Domon instead calls the woman Aes Sedai, and thus asserts her humanity by perceiving her as someone with a strong

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[37] Note, terms such as damane, marath'damane and sul'dam are italicized in the novel. This is likely done to indicate that they are terms from the Old Tongue, the language of the Age of Legends. To avoid any confusion about emphasis, I will avoid italicizing the abovementioned terms whenever I am not directly quoting from the novel.

cultural identity, Egeanin corrects him by stating that "[t]here are only the *damane*, the Leashed Ones" (423). The enslaved women can "only" be damane (423); they can "only" be "the Leashed Ones", nothing more (423). To Egeanin, damane represents the perceived 'truth' of the Seanchan.

The full extent of these Seanchan terms' powers of representation and impositions of identity is seen during the protagonist Egwene al'Vere's time as a damane. After Egwene is captured, collared and linked with a sul'dam called Renna, Renna tells Egwene: "Know this. You are a *damane*, a Leashed One, and I am a *sul'dam*, a Holder of the Leash." (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 566). Renna's statement introduces the sul'dam-damane power-relationship, sul'dam perceptions of damane, and hints at the contradiction surrounding the sul'dam's perceived identities. The rhythm of her speech indicates how Renna views herself in regard to Egwene. She speaks "emphatically", but there is "no animosity in her voice, but what almost sounded like friendliness." (566). Additionally, her statement is direct and instructional. It is as if she is talking to a child or an animal, and wants to be understood. Renna's speech thus hints at the notion that sul'dam see themselves as something akin to animal trainers, which implies they perceive female channelers as animals. The use of a 'leash' furthers this notion. Another aspect revealed by Renna's statement is the explicitness of the relationship between her and Egwene. Renna does not hide her intentions. Her dehumanizing language is obvious, a notion that is repeated in most of the sul'dam's language throughout the novel.

After being punished for bringing "attention on [herself]" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 570), Egwene reassures Min, who tried to stop her punishment, by saying it was not her fault. Renna, however, states: "[i]t was your fault, Egwene" (571), and explains that "[w]hen a *damane* is punished, it is always her fault, even if she does not know why. […] *Damane* are like furniture,

or tools, always there ready to be used, but never pushing themselves forward for attention." (571). Renna's language thoroughly dehumanizes and objectifies Egwene. As a damane, Egwene is an object, a tool, not a person. She is therefore not perceived by the Seanchan to require an identity. A sul'dam enjoys, as Renna calls it, "shap[ing] and mold[ing]" a damane into something other (575). The dehumanizing language is, again, obvious, which arguably emphasizes Jordan's intent. Renna's statement artfully illustrates how she perceives Egwene as a thing to be transformed into a tool or weapon. It reveals the mind of Renna and the sul'dam; that they appreciate the othering process of female channelers. Furthermore, Renna's dehumanizing language towards Egwene is unsettling because of who she is. Egwene is one of the most established characters in the series, someone readers have followed from the beginning; someone they have seen become a fully empowered and realized human being through her journeys. Readers know Egwene, which is why her reaction to her enslavement and dehumanizing treatment is so disruptive: "*I have to get away. I have to, but how? Nynaeve, help me. Light, somebody help me*." (575). Thus Jordan's portrayal of the Seanchan's overt views on the otherness of female channelers, through Egwene's perspective, makes it so readers pay attention to the inhumanity of their behaviours.

Jordan's depictions of Egwene and the other damane's treatment, and their imposed transformation and conditioning through language and other punishing means is similar to how enslaved people have been treated in different slave societies and institutions throughout history. The damane's treatment is comparable to the treatment of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (2014), Bell Hooks states: "Crucial in the preparation of African people for the slave market was the destruction of human dignity, the removal of names and status" (19). This destruction of identity was done

through different tortures and punishments, which "succeeded in forcing African people to repress their awareness of themselves as free people and to adopt the slave identity imposed upon them." (19). The torturous punishments were done "as a way of "breaking them in" or "taming"" the enslaved Africans (19). A similar "taming" is done to the damane, which is reflected through language. Although the treatment of the damane and those of the enslaved Africans and African Americas in chattel slavery are comparable, I do not believe Jordan is invoking the historical conditions of the enslaved to specifically compare the two. He instead draws on the most apparent aspects in order to realize the reimagined dehumanization and othering of female channelers.

The language is meant to be noticed in this context. It emphasizes the cruelty of the Seanchan's actions, which in turn demonstrates the irony of the Seanchan: their dehumanizing perceptions and impositions towards female channelers equally dehumanize them. The sul'dam not perceiving themselves as masters of enslaved people, but rather as animal trainers is analogous to the notion of the animalisation of the other in imperial and colonial discourse. Fanon states that the subjugated and enslaved are often "reduced to the state of an animal" by those in power (Fanon 7). An instance of this notion, expressed through the Seanchan's language, is seen when Egwene is forced to give her name to Renna:

> "Egwene," Renna said. "That is a good name." And to Egwene's horror, Renna patted her on the head as she would a dog. That […] was what she had detected in the woman's voice – a certain good will for a dog in training, not quite the friendliness one might have toward another human being. (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 567)

The scenes following Egwene's capture present more examples. When Egwene is 'honoured' by speaking to a Seanchan noblewoman, Renna tells Egwene that she "would let [her] wear a ribbon to mark the honor." (570). When Egwene is told that she will be treated well if she can create a'dam, she asks: "Am I supposed to look forward to being pampered like a pet dog? […] A lifetime of being chained to men and women who think I am some kind of animal?" (573).[38] After Egwene is punished for lying and trying to fight back, Renna tells her that she "will be one of the best" and strokes her hair, like "a mistress soothing her dog." (575). These examples reflect the inherent dehumanization and animalisation that characterizes the condition of being enslaved. Further, the explicit language is significant to Egwene's role in the larger narrative. It displays the inhumanity of the Seanchan to Egwene, which inspires her resistance to their subjugation. Jordan continues to depict their inhumanity through language and impositions of identity as Egwene is conditioned as a damane.

During a visit from Min, Egwene tells her: "the *sul'dam* and the *a'dam* are training me." (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 599). Egwene continues, saying that she once "considered hitting Renna […] with [a] pitcher", and was instantly hurt by the a'dam (599).[39] To touch the pitcher again without it hurting her, Egwene "not only had to stop thinking about hitting her with it, [she] had to convince [herself she] would never, under any circumstances, hit her with it again" (599). But Renna finds out. When she is able to touch the pitcher again, Egwene is forced to use it for bathing for several days. The sul'dam thus 'trains' Egwene to give up her resistance to the imposed damane identity. This imposition reaches a climax when Renna thinks she has "been too lenient with" Egwene (601):

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[38] Egwene only mentions "men" here because she is unaware of Seanchan culture and history. She is immediately told that there are no male sul'dam, only female.
[39] Note, one of the traits of the a'dam is that it will hurt and incapacitate the damane who tries to touch a weapon or use an object as a weapon.

> I think I made a mistake letting you keep your old name. I had a kitten called Tuli when I was a child. From now on, your name is Tuli. […] I as your *sul'dam* and trainer […] I will stop when you tell me how much you love being *damane* and how obedient you will be after this. And, Tuli. Make me believe every word. (601)

Renna's language – that she has been "letting" Egwene keep her name – conveys the power relationship between sul'dam and damane (601). But it also demonstrates the irony of Seanchan perceptions. By giving Egwene a pet name as a form of punishment and conditioning tool, Renna believes her 'taming' of Egwene, i.e. the shaping of Egwene's identity into something less than human, should be intensified. However, Renna's use of language instead strengthens Westlander perceptions of the Seanchan as something evil and monstrous, which justify Westlander characters like Egwene and Nynaeve's views and empower their resistance against their impositions. Thus, Jordan illustrates the power of language for domination but also resistance.

Although there are similarities between the languages of the colonizers and the colonized – both sides categorize and generalize each other – there is a distinction. As mentioned, the Seanchan's language of othering is used as a framework to exert power by devaluing the Westlanders, which provides the Seanchan with perceived moral superiority and justifications for their invasion/conquest. The Westlanders' language, however, is used as a form of resistance against the Seanchan. The Westlanders do not make the other side of the dichotomy into someone or something inferior. They instead oppose the Seanchan impositions of identity, values and ideology, i.e. their aforementioned 'truths' and perceptions, by dehumanizing and alienating

them. To be more precise, the Westlanders demonize the Seanchan, labelling them as something inhuman, and as an inherently evil people.

The Westlanders' language resembles aspects of language used in other fantasy works that either intentionally or unintentionally utilize the fantasy trope of the Dark Other. In "Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic: The Role of Racial Difference in Young Adult Speculative Fiction and Media" (2018), Ebony E. Thomas states that there is a "primal fear of darkness and dark Others" in Western myth, which includes fantasy (2). Furthermore, "[i]n the Anglo-American fantastic tradition, the Dark Other is the monstrous Thing that is the root cause of hesitation, spectacle, and violence." (4). The Dark Other has represented different forms of Other in fantasy throughout western history. During the medieval period, mysteries concerning natural darkness in the world was connected to "fear of unknown and unknowable dark things, including imaginary monsters beyond the boundaries of the known world" (2). In modern history, the Dark Other came to include dark-skinned "conquered and enslaved people from beyond Europe's borders" who were perceived as "not fully human" by white Americans and Europeans (2).

The most obvious Dark Others in Jordan's world are the various Shadowspawn, like Trollocs – Jordan's equivalent to Tolkien's orcs – and Myrddraal, who follow the Dark One.[40] These Dark Others are what the Seanchan are likened to by many Westlanders. The Seanchan are rumoured to be "monsters, creatures of the Dark One", and "Darkfriends" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 74). They are said to come "into battle riding monsters as often as horses, who fought with monsters by their sides, and brought Aes Sedai to rend the earth under their enemies' feet" (416);[41] and to be "monsters, with heads like huge insects" (419). Because of Jordan's focus on

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[40] Trollocs are large humanoid bestial monsters who function as the Dark One's foot soldiers. Trollocs are hybridizations of different animals. Myrddraal are pale white men without eyes wearing black cloaks and armour.
[41] The monsters the Seanchan ride and fight with are only native to the Seanchan continent, which is why Westlanders call them monsters. They have never seen these creatures before. There are different kinds of

prejudice based on nationality rather than race and ethnicity, this othering of the Seanchan is approached through a behavioural perspective rather than a physical perspective. The language the Westlanders employ, their use of "monster" – that the Seanchan utilize and surround themselves with monsters, and that they are monsters themselves – is used to emphasize the inhumanity of their behaviour. An important point to note, however, is the tension between what Thomas is discussing and what Jordan is potentially doing with this language. Thomas criticizes the notion of using the Dark Other trope, as it constructs and reinforces the idea that darkness is something that needs to be defeated in fantasy and other speculative fiction (Thomas 4). She would likely critique Jordan's constructions of the Trollocs and other Shadowspawn, as well as the language comparing the Seanchan to these representations of Dark Others. One could argue, however, that because he intentionally depicts cultures in which prejudice is based on nationality, as mentioned, Jordan is merely invoking a language revolving around the Dark Other as a way to assert the status quo of his world. In other words, it is a world in which perceptions of difference concerning the notions of darkness and monsters relate to immoral behaviour and attitude rather than any physical characteristics.

Looking through a historical lens, similar use of language is invoked in Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative where he dehumanizes white slavers. Upon seeing white slavers for the first time aboard a slave ship, Equiano is filled with "terror" as he thinks the slavers are "bad spirits" and "men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair" resembling monsters (Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano"). Equiano's language of othering is a form of resistance strategically designed to highlight the inhumanity of the slavers and to comment on the dehumanizing language utilized against enslaved Africans and African

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'monsters'. Most are reptilian and dinosaur-like, while a few are mammalian. One of the mammalian creatures is an elephant.

Americans. Although the Westlanders' language is similar, I do not believe Jordan intended to use this language to such an extent, but rather to show how the Seanchan are dehumanized and alienated through demonization. However, the parallels are there, which demonstrate how fantasy's potential to imagine alternate realities can provide insight into familiar notions in new ways. The comparisons between the Seanchan and the monsters and followers of the Dark One makes sense considering the cultural identity of the Westlanders. Before the Seanchan invasion, the term "monster" in *The Wheel of Time* has mainly been associated with the Shadowspawn. These are the monsters Westlanders know, the monsters inherent to their cultures through their shared histories.

The demonization of the Seanchan enables Westlanders to better resist the Seanchan's impositions by seeing themselves as the Seanchan's moral superiors. They do not require a constructed justification, as it is their right to resist the imperial forces who try to enslave and subjugate them. This is, again, more clearly depicted in the interactions between sul'dam and female channelers. When Nynaeve, Elayne and Min[42] capture a sul'dam and put an a'dam collar on her to rescue Egwene, Nynaeve tells the sul'dam what her perception of her is to establish authority and moral superiority:

> As far as I am concerned, you are worse than a murderer, worse than a Darkfriend. I can't think of anything worse than you. The fact that I have to wear this thing on my wrist, to be the same as you […] sickens me. (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 627)

[42] To reiterate, Nynaeve and Elayne are female channelers – Aes Sedai apprentices – while Min is a non-channeler.

To Nynaeve, sul'dam, and by extension the Seanchan, are evil. They "are worse than" murderers and Darkfriends (627).[43] This notion of Westlanders resisting the impositions of the invaders through moral superiority is demonstrated further when Egwene is freed. After Nynaeve removes Egwene's collar, Renna (the sul'dam) enters the room. Egwene immediately attacks her, collars her with the a'dam and begins inflicting pain on her. But Nynaeve quickly stops Egwene and tells her that "[i]t is all right to hate them […] They deserve it. But it isn't all right to let them make you like they are." (648). Egwene, as she "almost claw[s] the bracelet off of her wrist and thr[ows] it down.", responds by saying: "I am not like them. […] I'm not. But I wish I could kill them." (648). Egwene thus rejects the imposed identity as something less than human by not giving in to the immoral behaviour and attitudes of her oppressors. Furthermore, Nynaeve, morally empowered by her perception of the Seanchan, tells the collared sul'dam that

> it may be that you've done enough good to counterbalance the evil you have done, enough that you will be allowed to remove [the collars]. […] If not, you will be found […] I think perhaps you will learn at first hand the life you have given to other women. That is justice (648-649)

Nynaeve and the other women demonstrate their moral superiority over the Seanchan by letting the sul'dam live. Their language highlights the sul'dam's behaviour as inhuman, while their own behaviours toward the sul'dam recognize the sul'dam's humanity regardless of what they have done. Nynaeve's views and decision show how Jordan uses the fantasy genre to provide insight into human relationships, perceptions and morality. It makes readers reflect on the situation. Is

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[43] Darkfriends are individuals who have abandoned the Light and follow the Dark One to gain power, wealth, and other rewards. Some even hope to be given immortality.

Nynaeve's decision truly just? Although killing the sul'dam is an option, in the context of the narrative, and the secondary world, it is arguably an act of mercy rather than justice. The narrative establishes that there are female channelers who would rather die than be enslaved with the a'dam. A captured Aes Sedai tells Egwene that "she wants to take her own life" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 598); and when Nynaeve prepares Egwene's rescue, she thinks to herself: "*I won't let them take me alive. Please, Light, not that.*" (622). It also shows how the collaring of the sul'dam results in feelings of terror and mortification: "please take – it – off! If anyone sees it on me… […] No! no, please! If anyone sees me –" (626). Thus, death is arguably a mercy for the sul'dam. However, leaving the collared sul'dam to be found by their own people will likely result in them being treated the same way they treat the damane. They will experience the same pain and suffering they inflicted on other women, which, according to Nynaeve, is justice.[44]

2.3. Fantastic Women and Shifting Perceptions of Power and Status

Where the last section explored the role of language, the Seanchan's language of othering and its ability to impose identities onto the different peoples of the Westlands, and Westlanders' language as a means of resistance, this section looks at the consequences of the enslavement and dehumanization of the group of people perceived as central to their societal and cultural identities, namely female channelers. Their central role in Westlands society and culture is twofold: (a) they are women, which means they are valued and often possess relatively high social status, and (b) they are channelers, whom most Westlanders perceive as Aes Sedai, regardless of whether or not they are, as Mat's comment on damane demonstrates: "They can

[44] There are more ways to examine and discuss Nynaeve's decision that is not explored here. But seeing as this is meant to be an example of how Jordan's story can provide insight, it will not be explored further.

channel, and that makes them Aes Sedai." (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 582).[45] This view on female channelers makes them powerful and influential members of Westlands society. The disruption to their perceived social status in the novel, caused by their enslavement, is thus greater because of this double role.

In certain colonized countries and regions, colonizers used the role and "status of native women" to justify their conquest "as a civilizing mission." (Bahri 200). If women were perceived to be treated unfairly or oppressed in a way colonizers deemed wrong, these treatments were made to represent the colonized country's or region's cultural identity (200). Thus, colonizers were 'morally obligated' to take control of the country or region to protect the women and change the culture for the betterment of all.[46] In *The Great Hunt*, the Seanchan's reason for invading and conquering the Westlands revolves around the reclamation of the lands they perceive as stolen. Most of their justifications are also centred on this 'theft' and their perceived superiority over Westlanders. Though there are similarities between the Seanchan's and historical colonizers' utilization of women, the role and status of women are not used to justify the Seanchan's conquest in the same way. The Seanchan's colonization and real-world colonization revolve around the invader gaining power through the disempowerment of the invaded. However, where real-world colonizers, e.g. the British Empire, used women to indirectly gain power – through constructed justifications – the Seanchan use women to gain power both directly and indirectly. The Seanchan directly gain power by capturing, enslaving and turning female channelers into tools and weapons of conquest. In a twisted way, the Seanchan's capture of female channelers can be seen as them taking and using the Westlands'

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[45] Due to Mat's background and upbringing as a commoner from a rural village, his sentiment towards female channelers and Aes Sedai arguably represents the general Westlander view.

[46] A well-known example of this is the Sati practice (widow-burning) in India (Bahri 200).

'resources' for their own benefit. This enslavement practice also indirectly gives them power through the disruptive effect it has on Westlanders (the colonized). When Rand and the others ride through a village visited by the Seanchan, they meet villagers who

> shook with fear that the Seanchan would return with their monsters and their *damane*. That women who should have been Aes Sedai were instead leashed like animals frightened the villagers even more than the strange creatures the Seanchan commanded (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 581)

Seeing women "who should have been Aes Sedai", i.e. women perceived as mythical, untouchable, revered and feared figures of power and authority, treated as something akin to animals evokes fear and disruptions of their social and cultural views. Through this disruption of the Westlanders' preconceived notions, the Seanchan gain power.

Because of women's roles and importance in Westlander society, and the social and cultural power structure, which the Aes Sedai are at the top of, the disruption the Seanchan's institutional practices of enslavement have different implications. In her discussion on the progressive portrayal of women in the overall society and cultures of the Westlands, Joansandy M. Wong points out that

> [a]t times Jordan's characters choose not to incorporate gender practices of other cultures into their individual lives, revealing that there is choice. The message of freedom of choice is further exemplified in the way that some characters choose to assimilate certain

> gender practices. Jordan argues that despite the reinforcement of gender by society people do not have to perform the role that society has constructed for them. (Wong 64)

However, in *The Great Hunt*, this notion of women – specifically those women who can become, and are Aes Sedai – choosing their roles is threatened by the Seanchan's persecution. The denigration and enslavement of Aes Sedai, one of the most influential members of society, upset these women's "freedom of choice", which consequently affects the social and cultural history and identity of Westlanders, as well as the established power balance (64). Furthermore, looking at this disruption in the context of the greater fantasy genre, it demonstrates how fantasy can comment on issues of identity, power, and normative perceptions of the world by depicting alternative realities that invite us to question our established reality.

In the narrative, the enslavement of female channelers elicits significant reactions from characters in the novel. These reactions illustrate the contrasting views of female channelers before and after being exposed to their treatment, as well as Jordan's reimagination of issues of imperialism and slavery. Bayle Domon is one of these characters. He has two notable reactions to witnessing the enslavement of these women which provide an outsider's perception[47] to the disruption of the Aes Sedai. The first occurs during the abovementioned boarding of Domon's ship. Upon seeing the sul'dam and damane for the first time, Domon initially assumes that the sul'dam is "an Aes Sedai" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 423). His assumption is based on his social and cultural identity and perceptions, which would identify the imposing woman with the bracelet as an Aes Sedai. The realization that the woman wearing the collar is a channeler set "his head whirling", and makes him think: "*No one could do that to…*", by which he means no

[47] Although Domon is a Westlander, he is a non-channeler. His perception is, therefore, not as direct as a channeler's.

one could do that to Aes Sedai (423). The second reaction is conveyed through Domon's account of an Aes Sedai being captured:

> I did see a – a woman who wore a ring like that taken by the Seanchan. A pretty, slender woman she was, with […] a big man with her […] the Seanchan did have an ambush laid for them. […] The – the woman. … Six *damane* they put around her […] I did think she would … do something […] but […] One moment she did look as if she would destroy them all, then a look of horror did come on her face, and she did scream. […] I will remember it until I die. Ryma, help me. That is what she did scream. And one of the *damane* did fall down crying, and they put one of those collars on the neck of the … woman, and I … I did run. (609)

Domon's account shows the impact the enslavement of female channelers has on Westlanders. It shows his emotional response to the enslavement; how he has difficulty expressing what he saw; and how the Aes Sedai's disempowerment disrupts his perception of them. This disempowerment, we learn, is in a sense literal. Elayne explains that "[t]hey cut her off from the True Source", which means that the Seanchan temporarily took away her ability to use saidar, the female half of the One Power (609). She therefore cannot defend herself, as Domon expects her to do. Furthermore, her scream, her calling out for help to Ryma – the already enslaved Aes Sedai who falls down crying – and the image of the collaring are so harrowing that Domon flees from the scene. The notion of disempowering someone in this manner is a fantastical reimagination of how empires and institutions control, silence and suppress those considered a threat or inferior, as well as someone/something unwanted. A channelers ability to use the One

Power is intrinsically tied to their being. Its removal is depicted as a "loss" (277), and comparable to depriving someone of their sense of hearing or sight, or removing someone's ability to use their legs or hands, or to feel.[48] Thus, the Seanchan's act of disempowerment disrupts female channelers' sense of self.

Another character reaction demonstrating the disruptive impact of the enslavement of Aes Sedai is Egwene's, during her enslavement. Before her enslavement, Egwene experiences the Aes Sedai from different perspectives: as a naïve village girl, as a travelling companion to an Aes Sedai, and as an Aes Sedai apprentice. Through these perspectives, Egwene, and by extension readers, develop attitudes and perceptions of Westlands society and the Aes Sedai's place in it. Following her enslavement, however, there are significant changes and disruptions to these attitudes and perceptions. Like Domon's reactions, Egwene's reaction revolves around the total disempowerment of the Aes Sedai. However, she also reacts to the Aes Sedai's 'breaking', i.e. loss of Self, which disrupts the perceived illusion of the mythic and authoritative Aes Sedai figure. During a visit from Min, Egwene mentions that two of the damane in the city are Aes Sedai. ""Aes Sedai!" Min exclaimed. […] "Egwene, if there are Aes Sedai here, they can help us."" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 598). Min's reaction reflects the common Westlander perception of Aes Sedai. Her exclamation is a combination of surprise and excitement: she is surprised at the notion of enslaved Aes Sedai, and excited because she believes their presence will make it easier to escape. Min, like most Westlanders, views the Aes Sedai as larger than life figures who

[48] Note, cutting a channeler off from the One Power is done by the Aes Sedai as well. However, there are significant differences. Aes Sedai may temporarily 'shield', as it is called, other Aes Sedai as a means of punishment or as part of their learning. When Aes Sedai commit serious crimes, such as betraying the organization and its ideals, they are 'stilled', which means that their ability to channel is permanently removed. 'Stilling' Aes Sedai, however, is extremely rare. Aes Sedai cutting channelers off from the One Power is traditionally not done out of malice or domination.

can do almost anything. However, after spending weeks in enslavement, Egwene, who previously shared Min's views, reveals what she has learned during her time as a damane:

> They can't even help themselves, Min. I only talked to one […] She told me in between bouts of tears. She's Aes Sedai, and she was crying, Min! She has a collar on her neck, they make her answer to Pura, and she can't do anything more about it than I can. […] She was crying because she's beginning to stop fighting against it, because she cannot take being punished anymore. She was crying because she wants to take her own life, and she cannot even do that without permission. Light, I know how she feels! (598)

Egwene's account of, and reaction to the Aes Sedai damane goes against her and Min's preconception of the Aes Sedai. The image of a powerless, mentally beaten and broken, even suicidal Aes Sedai is antithetical to that of the powerful and mythical figures who act as protectors, manipulators, and advisers in Westlands society. Though she witnessed it herself, Egwene seems to still find it unbelievable. Due to Jordan's worldbuilding and prior depictions of character interactions with Aes Sedai, the simple line: "She's Aes Sedai, and she was crying" (598), is particularly impactful because it contradicts the expectation that Aes Sedai either do not show emotions or that they are always in control.

Egwene's account speaks to the grief, powerlessness and complete disempowerment caused by the Seanchan's disruption. It shows the way in which Seanchan oppression takes away the freedom to choose one's social and gender roles, which, as Wong points out, is an important part of the Westlands cultures (Wong 64). Female channelers are forced into roles that stand in opposition to the progressive gender roles of the established society. Furthermore, the disrupted

perception of the Aes Sedai distorts the image of Egwene's future self, what she is moving towards: becoming an Aes Sedai. However, Egwene's experience "makes her strong and resilient", and provides her with insight (Wickham 82). She no longer sees the Aes Sedai as legendary figures, but as human beings, which gives her a clearer view of the world.

What further emphasizes the utilization of female enslavement, and that invites reflection on the way gender works in the novel, is Jordan's portrayal of women being the primary enslavers of other women.[49] Furthermore, the revelation that these female slave masters are themselves capable of channelling, and thus share the same otherness as the enslaved women, is Jordan commenting on the contradictions of slavery institutions, and the extreme ways in which it can affect human beliefs. The Seanchan's justification for enslaving female channelers is built on a lie and false perceptions. During the scenes following Egwene's enslavement, we learn that the reasoning and justification behind the enslavement involve perceptions of power. When Egwene asks why female channelers are enslaved, Renna (the sul'dam) states:

> Could we allow anyone to run loose who can do what a *damane* can? Sometimes men are born who would be *marath'damane* if they were women […] and they must be killed, of course, but the women do not go mad. Better for them to become *damane* than make trouble contending for power.[50] (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 572)

The potential power female channelers possess is perceived as a threat to Seanchan society and empire. Their containment is thus justified in the eyes of the Seanchan. Similar notions are true

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[49] Note, I am referring to the master-slave relationship between sul'dam and damane here. Damane are not owned by the sul'dam, but by other wealthy and powerful Seanchan who can be both men and women. However, the sul'dam are the ones who are directly in control of the damane and are therefore the damane's primary dominators.
[50] To reiterate, marath'damane is the Seanchan term for any non-enslaved female channelers.

in the real world as well and speak to the workings of oppression. The power of the others is often seen as a threat. Renna continues to explain that the enslavement practice began during the initial conquest of the Seanchan continent. When the expeditionary force arrived on the continent they encountered native armies. Among them there were many "who called themselves Aes Sedai. They contended for power among themselves and used the One Power" in battle (573). One of these Aes Sedai defected and provided the leader of the expeditionary force with the first a'dam. She then "made more *a'dam*, the first *sul'dam* were found, and women who called themselves Aes Sedai discovered that they were in fact only *marath'damane*, Those Who Must Be Leashed." (573). The initial justification for the enslavement of female channelers, long before the novel's current narrative, was the gaining of power and advancing the goal of conquest on the Seanchan continent. Once the conquest was over, however, the enslavement of female channelers became unjustifiable. To maintain power, those highest in the social hierarchy, the leaders of the Seanchan imperial project, created new justifications and institutionalized slavery.

Yet, after setting up this system, which alludes to similar historical systems of slavery and oppression, Jordan exposes its contradictions by revealing the lie at the centre. During Egwene's rescue, the lie is exposed when Nynaeve uses an a'dam on the sul'dam they capture and is later confirmed by Egwene when she is freed. Egwene tells the collared sul'dam, called Seta: "You had better hope whoever finds you will remove the *a'dam* and keep your little secret" (Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 646). Egwene continues to explain her realization:

> I wasn't sure, but Seta proves it. […] Nynaeve, *a'dam* only work on women who can channel. Don't you see? *Sul'dam* can channel the same as *damane*. […] A *sul'dam* would

> die before admitting she could channel, even if she knew, and they never train the ability, so they cannot do anything with it, but they can channel. (646)

There is no intrinsic difference between sul'dam and damane. Master and enslaved are the same. Sul'dam, like damane, can channel the One Power. The only difference is that their abilities manifest later and are less noticeable.[51] The lie facilitating the Seanchan's misperception of female channelers is analogous to the ways in which imperial and colonial forces, in their pursuit for power, tend to construct and control people's perceptions of others for their own reasons. The difference between damane and sul'dam is incidental by being a fabrication that, at one point in their history, favoured the oppressors by giving them power. In *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (2016), Helen Young points out a similar lie in *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010), the first novel in N. K. Jemisin's *The Inheritance* (2010-2011) trilogy. She states that the "ideological justification" for ruling the powerful society in the novel, called the Arameri, "is exposed as a lie which had been specifically designed to justify their rule." (Young 131). This lie, contends Young, "references the way in which racial hierarchies developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely to justify European imperialism and the domination and acquisition of land, resources, and labour by claiming White racial superiority over all other peoples of the world." (131). These notions of justifications founded on lies are also relevant to the division between darkeyes and lighteyes in *The Way of Kings*.

Whether the sul'dam and other Seanchan know the truth is not explicitly stated in the novel. The two collared sul'dam's reactions indicate that they did not know: "Seta's hands were pressed to her face. Renna touched the collar at her throat disbelievingly, with a shaking hand."

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[51] There are numerous Aes Sedai, like the sul'dam, whose abilities are not realized when they are young.

(Jordan, *The Great Hunt* 648). However, in the two supplementary *The Wheel of Time* books *The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time* (2000) and *The Wheel of Time Companion* (2015), the lie is more clearly explained. They state that "[i]t is fairly certain that" the expeditionary force's leader – the first emperor – "knew that *sul'dam* […] could" channel if trained, "but with his antipathy toward Aes Sedai this information was likely supressed." (Jordan and Patterson 214). For hundreds of years, "it was not known that *sul'dam* were actually women who could learn to channel, but that discovery was made after the Seanchan" invaded the Westlands (Jordan et al. 704). Jordan's criticism, conveyed through the lie, is made more impactful by the fact that it revolves around the enslavement and dehumanization of women who are highly respected and influential members of a society in which progressive gender roles are intrinsic to cultural perceptions of identity. Additionally, that these women's persecutors possess the same inherent trait which is used to justify their enslavement speaks to the ways abuses of power and constructions of social hierarchy can affect our perceptions. The sul'dam, whose perceptions are based on fabrications and lies, unknowingly take pride in a work which in truth destroys their equals. Through these depictions, then, Jordan shows how fantasy can provide insight into such notions as power, identity and perceptions of difference.

Conclusion

The fantasy genre's potential to imagine alternate realities can lead to explorations of familiar issues and ideas in different and previously unimagined or unseen ways. The two epic fantasies I have chosen to explore in this thesis utilize the genre's potential to reimagine issues and aspects related to slavery and imperialism with the intention to provide social commentary and critique of abuses of power, identity and perceptions of difference. The incorporation of these real-world notions in the two fantasy works has provided me with a greater understanding of them and the genre.

In the discussion on Sanderson's use of eye colour as a method of perceiving value, I argue that the significance of eye colour to Sanderson's depictions of slavery and social oppression lies in its representations of race and skin colour. By likening eye colour to race and skin colour, a link between the real and the fantastic is established, which enables readers to relate to and gain new insights from the story. Through this link, then, Sanderson can better convey his critique of social hierarchy by demonstrating the arbitrary perceptions the hierarchy is based on.

To illustrate and emphasize the differences between the enslaved and the oppressors in *The Way of Kings* more clearly, Sanderson relies on historical allusions of enslavement and perceptions of enslaved people, specifically their dehumanization and alienation. In order to examine these differences, I draw on Patterson's concept of social death as a means of unpacking Sanderson's representation of the enslaved. The concept of social death is remarkably relevant in representing the experiences of those who were enslaved and the status of the parshmen within the narrative's society and culture. Looking at Sanderson's imagined slave society through the

concept of social death provides insight into the adaptability of the fantasy genre. In other words, though there are differences between Sanderson's imagined slavery and real-world slavery, that the conception of social death is represented to such an extent in the narrative's slave society speaks to the fantasy genre's potential to draw on and adapt reality to present us with something that challenges and affects our preconceptions. Considering the relevance of the two modes of social death in representing the experiences of the enslaved, Sanderson's representations of slavery are often analogous to those found in the real world. But because certain common traits of slavery, like the basis and justifications for enslavement, are altered, Sanderson's imagined slave society has elements from both reality and fantasy, which provides new and alternative ways to explore human nature, perceptions of difference and power relationships.

In the discussion on the resistance and rejection of social status, I contend that Sanderson depicts two forms of resistance. One form revolves around Kaladin questioning the 'natural' order of social hierarchy, while the other is reflected in Kaladin and the bridgemen's rejection of their status. Through these depictions of resistance, Sanderson is better able to comment on the arbitrary aspects of social hierarchy and the corrupting nature of power, and to demonstrate the nature of human resilience in response to oppression.

The ways in which language is utilized by both the invading Seanchan and the invaded Westlanders plays a significant role in Jordan's depictions of slavery and imperial oppression in *The Great Hunt*. In the discussion on the language of the Seanchan, I argue that the overtness of the language indicates an intent by Jordan. He intentionally presents their behaviours and views as inhuman through their dehumanizing language. Thus, with this obvious use of language, Jordan is just as explicit in his critique of imposed constructions of identity as the sul'dam are in their dehumanizing views and attitudes of female channelers.

By depicting the enslavement of a society and culture's elite members, Jordan draws our attention to the ways in which oppression can disrupt intrinsic balances to social hierarchy. The oppressors introduce and impose perceptions and beliefs that go against those of the oppressed. However, Jordan ultimately shows the flawed foundation on which these perceptions are constructed, which emphasizes the immorality and abuses of power inherent to the notions of imperialism and slavery.

As I am approaching the end, I would like to acknowledge that the broad scope of the genre Jordan and Sanderson are writing in has made the writing process challenging. The two novels' positions within the greater narratives of *The Wheel of Time* and *The Stormlight Archive*, i.e. their placement in expansive and realized fictional worlds, have required extensive deliberation due to the multitude of themes and issues they explore. Furthermore, the two works' various cultures, societies, peoples, and institutions are different enough to our own and thus require recognition and contextualization to be thoroughly examined. That being said, the explorations of the novels' narratives and worlds have proven insightful, and show that there are more to be examined in their respective worlds in the subsequent novels. For instance, it would be interesting to study how human society is affected by the parshmen's revolt after the events in *Words of Radiance*, the second *The Stormlight Archive* novel. I also believe it would be worthwhile to look at the ways in which the relationship between the Westlands' peoples and the Seanchan Empire explores complicated issues, such as sacrificing one's moral principles by working alongside a 'lesser' evil in order to vanquish a 'greater' evil in the later *The Wheel of Time* novels.

Now, when all is said and done, I truly hope this thesis has been successful in offering some insight into fantasy fiction and showing how the genre can provide readers with new and

unfamiliar perceptions on important issues such as the human condition. I will conclude the thesis with a quote by Kaladin that I personally find appropriate for this thesis: “Journey before destination.” (Sanderson, *The Way of Kings: part two: part two* 422).

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