

## **“Evil Father Earth”:**

Personification and Villainization of the Setting in N. K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth*

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Ecologically orientated writing and ecocritically motivated readings are increasingly common in the contemporary context of climate change. This increased eco-awareness is an acknowledgement of how the human relationship with nature is undergoing profound changes, which demand interdisciplinary investigation in both natural sciences and cultural studies. In literary analysis, science fiction writing offers windows into worlds that force us to critically re-examine our attitudes and practices concerning nature and non-human agency.

In this thesis, I examine N. K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* trilogy and its sentient setting, Father Earth. The dynamic planet of the trilogy is an example of heightened ecocentric personification and planetary-scale anthropomorphism, essentially a character itself. Through an analysis of Father Earth, I explore more generally how milieus and objects in literature can be seen as actors and characters within the narrative. This re-evaluation of object agency is done using concepts of ecocriticism, eco-philosophy, anthropology, and narratology. The unstable ecological state of the Stillness also compares to James Lovelock’s Gaia theory in that the planet has become active and unwell due to the destabilization of its equilibrium.

Ultimately, I suggest that the way Jemisin personifies the setting of *The Broken Earth* as a mistreated and vengeful character alludes to the central theme of her work. Nature should not be taken for granted and exploited without consequence, as it is more or less directly linked to human wellbeing in the end. By harvesting the magic lifeforce of the Earth, the ancient inhabitants of the Stillness became corrupted and drove the ecosystem to an unstable state. This acts as an allusion to the unsustainable economic practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century that have been a target of critique for ecocritics and environmentalists for decades now. Using clever second person narration, Jemisin addresses the reader more directly, encouraging further evaluation of our individual actions and anticipation of their long-term effects, comparable to the choices that Essun faces in *The Broken Earth*.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, personification, object agency, Gaia, genius loci, hyperobjects

# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>On <i>The Broken Earth</i> trilogy</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	The Stillness of the Earth	8
2.2	Story and the Storyworld	11
<b>3</b>	<b>Exploring Personified Objects, Villainized Settings, and the Corresponding Narratives</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Ecological Thought in Elevating Objects</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1.1	Anthropomorphism and Personified Nature	19
3.1.2	Hyperobjects and Object-Oriented Literary Criticism	24
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Breathing Life into the Inanimate</b>	<b>28</b>
3.2.1	Postmodern Anthropology and Resurgent Animism	29
3.2.2	Gods and Gaia	31
3.2.3	Earth Souls and Localized Spirits	34
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Narrative Element</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Interpreting the Earth</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1	Beneath Broken Earth: Setting as a Character	44
4.2	The Revenge of Father Earth	48
4.3	A Narrative against the World	54
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>62</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>66</b>



## 1 Introduction

“Look at Mother Nature on the run, in the 1970s” sang Canadian singer-songwriter Neil Young in his 1970 ballad “After the Gold Rush”, a harrowing environmental elegy that reflects on humanity’s relationship with nature from the Middle Ages far into the future. 1960s and 1970s were a period of environmentalist awakening, and modern-day environmentalism has been said to have begun with *Silent Spring* (1962), in which Rachel Carson turned what was a problem of science into a widespread cultural and political debate (Garrard 2012, 6). Paul Ehrlich’s Malthusian work *The Population Bomb* (1968) already foresaw that the exponential growth of the human species would result in ecological disasters in the very near future, and Club of Rome’s seminal report *The Limits to Growth* (1972), while not quite so alarmist, stated that Earth’s capabilities to support such demographic and economic growth were indeed not limitless. Thus, Neil Young’s evocative lyric, which personifies nature in desperate flight from human growth, resonated then as it does now over five decades later when Young in concerts replaces “1970s” with “21<sup>st</sup> century”.

An ecocritical aura pervades our contemporary culture in an unmistakable fashion and literature has been one of the main contributors to this cultural shift. Landscapes of fiction have always fascinated readers around the world, and the wave of environmentalism that emerged in the 1960s was to no small amount influenced by select ecologically motivated writers. As the relationship between humans and nature has irrevocably changed, the link between the written word and the environment too has evolved to depict the complexity of this relationship more accurately. Recognizing the possibility that we are entering a posthumanist world, many writers seek to question the long prevalent anthropocentric worldview that has been the standard in science as well as the arts for centuries. The intrinsic properties of nature fascinate artists and authors around the world who work to convey their fascination forward and in doing so add to the deconstruction of the human-centred paradigm.

Traditionally one of the more marginalized fields of literary criticism, fantasy literature is a valuable instrument for exploring non-anthropocentric worldviews and values. Alternate fictional universes and realities created by fantasy and science fiction writers offer fresh starting points for studies that seek to understand world outside the subjective lens of humanity. After all, it is not surprising that imaginative world-building would create a world more ecocentric than anthropocentric. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay (1991, 308) already positioned over three decades ago “that SF has ceased to be a genre of fiction *per se*, becoming instead a mode of awareness about the world, a complex, hesitating reflection toward the future”. Imagining a future

illustrates potential states of being and how they may come about. In its last verse, Young's classic song too takes a science fiction turn as he dreams of chosen ones who carry "Mother Nature's silver seed to a new home" on a spaceship as others are left behind on ruined planet Earth. A large variety of utopian and dystopian futures for our planet have been envisioned, and alternative secondary worlds also work as reflections of what is happening in our primary one. Science fiction and fantasy writing particularly excel at articulating non-human agency, even posing the question: what if Mother Nature was not fleeing but instead fighting back?

This premise and its implications are present in American science fiction author N. K. Jemisin's highly ecocentric series *The Broken Earth* (2015–2017), in which she meticulously crafts one of the more intricate and remarkable landscapes of recent speculative fiction. In the trilogy of books – *The Fifth Season* (2015, further references are abbreviated as *Season*), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016, further references are abbreviated as *Obelisk*), and *The Stone Sky* (2017, further references are abbreviated as *Stone*) – Jemisin maps out a unique, geologically unstable world ravaged by seismic turmoil and seasons of extremely harsh weather. The complex nature of the continent is matched by its assorted residents, some of whom can harness the ambient power of the earth and bend it to their will. Hailed as an accomplishment of detailed world-building and praised for its originality, the trilogy made Jemisin the first person to win three consecutive Hugo Awards for Best Novel in 2016–2018. Simultaneously the first person of colour to win said award, Jemisin's work is also characterized by the convoluted identity politics and racial expectations that fantasy and fiction writers like herself have had to contend with.

Reflecting this, those who face subjugation in *The Broken Earth* are similarly born with the misfortune of being different, with "[t]he ability to manipulate the thermal, kinetic, and related forms of energy to address seismic events" (*Season* 2015, 462). The main characters of the story are these humanoid individuals, *orogenes*, who can both subdue and set off the seismic activity of the world, a supercontinent called the Stillness, which is about to enter another devastating period of harsh winter known as a Fifth Season. In this ecologically unstable world, those who best understand the environment are the most hated; under oppression and control, the potential threat that they pose feared over the appreciation of their value as an asset. This broken world is unkind to its inhabitants, most of whom are powerless in face of movements of the Earth and victims to the machinations of those in power.

In a work abound with inventiveness, one central figure of Jemisin's subcreation rises above the rest. And I mean this figuratively, since for the most part it is right underneath the others. Taking the notion of making a setting feel alive to new heights, Jemisin has created

Father Earth, both a setting and a being. A vengeful parent, an earthly deity, and a lonely world in mourning, Father Earth is a unique example of a heightened ecocentric personification and creative fictional animism. The unstable environment greatly affects its inhabitants, who must adjust to living under volatile conditions and prepare for inevitable ecological disasters and life in the subsequent post-apocalyptic world. In turn, the orogenes can subdue the earthquakes and raise them at will, creating rifts in the earth. The relationship of influence is therefore bidirectional, and the narrative pits other characters against the malevolent environment. This also means that the landscape of the story is not merely the setting for the action but part of the action as well. As an actor with goals in the narrative, the setting comes alive to the extent that it may be considered a character of its own. As the story progresses, other characters and the reader become more aware of how alive the Earth is, and their understanding of it grows.

In this thesis, I explore this characterization of the setting and the relationship that characters have with it and nature in the trilogy of books: *The Fifth Season*, *The Obelisk Gate*, and *The Stone Sky*. I examine how the personification and the villainization of the setting in *The Broken Earth* (henceforth abbreviated as *Broken*) corresponds to the ecocritical tonality of the books, which seems to suggest that anthropocentric attitudes – such as capitalist greed and selfish deanimation – are the cause and the catalyst for the vile nature of the environment. To succeed in this extraordinary character study, I draw upon a variety of different theories on how places and objects can be seen as being alive, consisting of but not limited to ecocriticism, narratology, and anthropology studies. Ecocriticism is crucial for the analysis to illuminate the used ecological tropes, such as personification, as well as the cause-and-effect connection between actions of the main characters and their impact on the continent and vice versa.

Comparing Father Earth's retaliation to the proposed idea of Gaia's revenge, I also explore the implications of this dynamic relationship regarding the notion that the work can be read as an allegory for climate change. As a text written during the time when ecological awareness for how human actions impact the ecosystem is becoming the most urgent socio-political issue of our time, the *Broken* trilogy draws inspiration from the prevalent atmosphere and comments on the way that we have exerted control over our environment without realizing the repercussions. This is further evidenced by the second person narration of certain chapters in the book, which seem to directly address the reader and demand further examination through narratological methodology. I entertain ideas from such influential thinkers as James Lovelock, Carl Gustav Jung, Bruno Latour, and Timothy Morton concerning agency of the inanimate as it is applicable to the literary study of a setting as a character. Lastly, this thesis also raises an ontological question about the role of not just settings but also other objects in literature.

## 2 On *The Broken Earth* trilogy

N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy is a work of epic fantasy with several ambitious themes and a complex plot that slowly unravels throughout three books. It features several major storylines, ranging from the personal to global in scale: a mother's desperate quest to find her daughter, the emancipation of a long-subjugated minority, a worldwide struggle for survival against the backdrop of an ecological apocalypse. The trilogy of novels blends science fiction concepts with fantastical elements, placing *Broken* genre-wise somewhere in the middle of the vast realm of speculative fiction. The environmental focus could arguably label it as climate fiction, though science fantasy might be more appropriate. The magical powers of orogeny may seem unscientific, they are tied to the science of geology, commonly a lesser focus in science fiction narratives. Most of the main characters are orogenes, mutated humans who exhibit telekinetic powers and can use the energy of their environment to their advantage. Reflecting the chthonic, geological basis of this power, their name is "derived from scientific nomenclature for a mountain-forming process" (Khatchadourian 2020, 19). Consequently, the forces present in *Broken* are, even if remotely at times, based on "material, physical rationalisation" as much as on the "supernatural or arbitrary", reflecting the basic premise of a science fiction novel as defined by sci-fi scholar Adam Roberts (2006, 5).

The result of inventive world-building and long refinement, the setting of the trilogy – a supercontinent called the Stillness – features creatures, objects, and ideas alien to our world. Therefore, before further analysis, the complex world of *Broken* should be briefly reviewed, and an overview of the plot presented since the overall narrative and its implications are of importance to this study. In this chapter, I first go over the setting in more detail, after which I will outline the overall story and important concepts and characters found therein.

### 2.1 The Stillness of the Earth

A planet distantly reminiscent of our own, the Earth that Jemisin creates for her saga was not always broken. Thousands of years before the main events that take place in the trilogy, the climate of the planet was temperate and stable before the onset of the Seasons. Then dominant cultures are now known as *deadcivs*, as several societies and governing bodies have crumbled in the millennia of ecological catastrophes. People have adapted to survival conditions, living in communities or *comms* of different sizes where every member is part of a specific use-caste and thus beneficial for the maintenance and survival of the community. Acclimated to the seismic upheaval that conditions their lives, most people keep 'runny-sacks' in their homes with



essential supplies in them in case that a natural disaster should demand sudden relocation.

Though unique in its narrative functionality and role, the setting of the novel is not visually distinctive from countless other worlds seen in fiction writing in any major way. In the prologue of *Season*, the narrator wryly summarizes the world as follows:

Here is a land. It is ordinary, as lands go. Mountains and plateaus and canyons and river deltas, the usual. Ordinary, except for its size and dynamism. It moves a lot, this land. Like an old man lying restlessly abed, it heaves and sighs, puckers and farts, yawns and swallows. Naturally this land's people have named it *the Stillness*. It is a land of quiet and bitter irony. (*Season* 1–2)

This early passage, which introduces the storyworld, additionally also gives the first hint of the anthropomorphism to come. Figuratively, the Stillness is compared to an elderly man having trouble resting calmly, instead forced to bend to his body's will and act out its many quirks. This simile gives hint of the world's age as well, for young boys too exhibit similar restless energy and refusal to stay still, but the Stillness is evidently more rugged and strained by the passage of time. There is a clever subtle suggestion at work here. The Stillness is first written off as "ordinary, as lands go", but that supposedly ordinary world is brought alive only two sentences later. In what the reader might at first think is just a passing simile are embedded the very ideas that all worlds are alive and that they have their own temperament, the Stillness just more explicitly so. Jemisin personifies her world from the onset, foreshadowing the importance of thinking about this land beyond the mundane worldview in a more imaginative way.

Further emphasizing that the Stillness is a place with a vast history, the cryptic narrator reveals that it has been known by several other names in the past, and also that it used to be made up of various different lands as opposed to the large singular continent it is now (*Season* 2). The narrator goes on to describe the largest city of an empire in decline, unique because there people braved to build massive constructions and buildings of awe, defying the tumultuous world. This capital city, Yumenes, is different than other towns and villages because it can afford such luxury; whereas comms elsewhere only worry that their fields stay fertile, Yumenes is the only one to mould their greenery aesthetically (*Season* 2–4). The enormous city has been stable because of the network of node maintainers and orogenes present across the prosperous equatorial region, but it is also where the latest devastating Season begins at the onset of the trilogy.

The Equatorials of the Stillness house other large cities too; being the most stable part of the continent, life there has had protection and consistency to grow. Majority of the series takes place outside the Equatorial metropolises, however, in the more turbulent regions to the

north and south. Several smaller communities are featured throughout the novels. Tirimo is the inconsequential little comm where the main characters reside at the start of the Season, located in a mountainous valley. In Tirimo, people build not for splendour or comfort as much as pragmatism. The walls are made of wood and bricks, and the roads are not paved with “the miraculous substance the locals [of Yumenes] have dubbed *asphalt*” (*Season 3*). The difference in lifestyles between populaces in the cities and countryside comms goes even beyond the ordinary urban/rural dichotomy, as the orogenic assets under those in power subvert the forces of nature, essentially disconnecting the cities from the environment.

Among the most interesting comms is Castrima, where much of the action of *Obelisk* takes place. Located inside a giant geode below the surface of the earth, the comm unusually houses several ‘feral’ orogenes, meaning those were raised outside of the Fulcrum, who are essential in maintaining the comms functionality. The people of Castrima have developed their own harmonious bioregion where they use subtle orogeny to maintain their living conditions. There the societal constructions are inevitable tied to nature, unlike in the Equatorials where orogeny is used as a tool not to live with nature, but rather beside it. Castrima is not transient but has existed in harmonious state for generations. As such, it as a locale advocates the idea of how being rooted in the environment will create a sustainable basis for dwelling in a place.

In his 1966 essay “How to Build a Planet”, Poul Anderson lamented how “[f]ar too many stories merely give us a planet exactly like Earth except for having neither geography nor history” and emphasized that “[t]he process of designing a world serves up innumerable story points” (Anderson qtd. in Adler 2014, 206). This is true for many classic science fiction stories from before, during, and after the said Golden Age of the genre, and it is an understandable concession especially for the short story format. Interestingly, while Jemisin’s world is not distinctive on the surface level, it does diverge from Anderson’s argument on the latter two points by establishing a rich cultural history that is tied to geology and geography. Arguably the works that have the most lasting impression among sci-fi and fantasy are the ones where the writer first paid attention to carefully constructing the secondary universe where the action takes place.

Such is the case with *The Lord of the Rings*, for example. J. R. R. Tolkien began expanding the story in his mind onto paper by first sketching out the fictional realm, working out the distances and fleshing out the history of the various races. And before this he had already crafted his own languages for some of them. Tolkien may be the ultimate creator of fantasy worlds, and his influence shows far and wide in subsequent works whose writers were once captivated by the enchanting Middle-Earth. In his profile of Jemisin, Raffi Khatchadourian

noted that while she had “no interest in pseudo-medieval Europe”, her attention to world-building echoed that of Tolkien (Khatchadourian 2020, 19). Jemisin reportedly began her work by delving into geology, visiting volcanoes in Hawaii and working out a map for her world based on geological stability (ibid.). Geological undertones are indeed crafted onto every layer of the novels, from the names of the characters to the history of the world.

The history, present, and the future state of the imaginary world are the foundation of any story, but how well they are thought out before any writing takes place can have great effect on how well the story turns out. Yet however well an imaginary world is constructed, “lack of a compelling story may make it difficult for someone to remain vicariously in a secondary world” (Wolf 2012, 29). Without a captivating plot we are left with nothing but data that we do not know what to do with. Tying the various bits and pieces together in an engaging narrative that works towards some intended ending gives meaning to an imaginary world, which would have remained hollow and bereft of purpose otherwise.

## 2.2 Story and the Storyworld

Beginning with the enigmatic declaration “[t]his is the way the world ends. For the last time” (Season 14), *The Fifth Season* sets off the trilogy in an explosive yet restrained manner. The prologue describes an unidentified man breaking the ground apart, using his orogeny to tear a rift through the continent. This signals the start of the new Fifth Season, cataclysmic enough to be the last as it turns out. Next, with the confusing reassurance “[y]ou are she. She is you. You are Essun” (Season 15) the narrator introduces Essun, an orogene and mother of two in her forties. Essun’s son Uche has been beaten to death by his father Jija, who has then fled, taking along their daughter Nassun. Like Essun in her youth, her children show signs of early orogeny, and they keep a low profile together to hide this as orogeny outside of the militaristic watch of the Guardians and their Fulcrum order is illegal. Essun is discovered by her town after she saves it from the earthquake set off in the prologue and leaves to chase after the remains of her family. In the process, she demonstrates the dangers and the difficulty of controlling orogeny when she wreaks havoc on the town after being provoked. Essun’s quest to reunite with her daughter spans the entire trilogy and saving her only surviving child serves as her ultimate motivation.

A parallel storyline in *Season* follows a young Damaya, who is taken to be trained by the Fulcrum as a legitimate Imperial orogene by the Guardian Schaffa. *Guardians* are earthbound humanoid creatures who “track, protect, protect against, and guide orogenes in the Stillness” (Season 461), who aside from specific powers to combat orogenes and suppress orogeny also have superhuman strength and seem to live for eons. Ordinary people, who are

referred to as *stills*, regard them with a combination of suspicion, respect, and fear. Implanted at the back of their neck is a magical corestone, a piece of metal that secretly gives Father Earth substantial control over them. As a member of this superhuman caste in charge of controlling the orogenes, Schaffa begins the harsh training to make Damaya control her emotions and her powers even under extreme duress. She is an adept student and quickly gains her first rings, which orogenes wear to indicate the level of their abilities.

The third narrative running in parallel with the two aforementioned ones features Syenite, an orogene-in-training sent on a mission with Alabaster Tenring, a senior orogene of the highest rank. The two have a tenuous relationship, which is not helped by the breeding program of the Fulcrum, which mandates that gifted orogenes must sire offspring. Alabaster serves as a mentor for Syenite, who comes to learn the true extent of the oppression of the orogenes. Eventually the two are united in their disillusionment and manage to establish new lives free of systematic oppression, though their happiness ultimately proves transitory, and a confrontation with the Guardian order results in great loss that leaves Syenite alone. As the three storylines meet, it is revealed that Essun, Syenite and Damaya are in fact all the same person in different stages of her life. Damaya adopts the name Syenite upon getting her first ring, and Syenite starts a new life as Essun after the death of her child with Alabaster and his disappearance. Now ten years later, as Essun, while tracking her husband Jija and her last surviving child Nassun, she arrives in Castrima, a distant comm located inside a geode, along with the traveling companions she acquired along the way. There, she is reunited with Alabaster, and it is revealed he was the orogene who instigated the rift that tore the continent in half at the beginning of the novel.

The first novel introduces the storyworld through different temporal and spatial viewpoints. Essun's fractured selves each have their own road narrative as they travel the Stillness in different stages of her life. Whereas other intriguing characters are introduced, Father Earth remains largely a mythological figure in the first novel, a hinted presence that is not made explicit. Early on in her journey, Essun meets a young odd-looking boy who calls himself Hoa, who takes a liking to her and joins along with her. The enigmatic Hoa reveals little about himself but exhibits curious characteristics such as eating rocks and the ability to turn a threatening wild feline creature into stone. Eventually it comes clear that Hoa is also truly not a boy but an ancient being known as a *stone eater* – one of the mysterious statue-like beings who can travel within the earth and can temporarily assume more human form. Antimony, one of the central stone eaters in the story is described early on as having “shaped a portion of her stiff substance to suit the preferences of the fragile, mortal creatures among whom she currently

moves”, though “her emulation of human gender is only superficial, a courtesy”, and still up close “her skin is white porcelain” (*Season 5*). The stone eaters are liminal beings who veil their true self and their intentions from all except those they trust the most. They join up with some of the main characters in the novels, seeking to guide or goad them into fulfilling their age-old goals. More importantly, at the end of *Season* it becomes evident that Hoa is also narrating the story. Essun’s point-of-view chapters, which continue throughout the trilogy, Hoa recounts uniquely in second person while other storylines are narrated in the third.

The second novel gives a more in-depth exploration of the mechanisms of the Stillness. *The Obelisk Gate* sees Essun and her companions find a new temporary home within Castrima, where they participate in the maintenance and daily life of the comm, which is the Stillness name for towns and cities that underscores how a community together survives. In Castrima, Essun learns from Alabaster about the Moon, which has not been seen in thousands of years. Alabaster reveals that he tore the continent apart to create an opening for a powerful orogene to use the energy of the Earth and bring the Moon back. Use of the magical obelisk conduits for this task demanded such a link that the lingering effects of it are slowly turning him into stone. He begins to train Essun for the completion of this mission that would correct the fractured state of the world and end the Seasons once and for all. Essun’s main concern is for her last remaining child; to find where her daughter Nassun has been taken by her father. Throughout the novel, Castrima’s society of both orogenes and stills begins to show signs of unease under duress, since even though orogenes are essential in maintaining the comm, they also pose a danger. Eventually a rival comm besieges Castrima with help from a faction of stone eaters, and Essun is forced to use the Obelisk Gate to wreak havoc to the besieging forces, achieving a pyrrhic victory for the people of Castrima.

The other major storyline of the novel is that of Essun’s daughter, Nassun. It shows what happened after her father Jija abducted Nassun from Tirimo. Blinded by anger over the abnormality of his children, Jija is intent on finding a way to cure the orogeny he suspects plagues his daughter as well. Taking Nassun away from her mother, he drags her through the country roads in search of Guardians who could possibly cure her of orogeny. Together they arrive at a comm called Found Moon, where young orogenes are being trained under the guidance of a small number of Guardians, including Schaffa, who has survived the battle at sea at the end of *Season*. The control that Earth has over him kept him alive, but it is now damaged as is his memory. Only recalling parts of his past life, including his connection to orogenes, he has taken it upon himself to protect and train them. Gradually, through his acceptance of Nassun for who she is, Schaffa becomes the only person who Nassun loves in a world that hates her.

In the second novel, the history of the Stillness is elaborated further via Alabaster's teachings. Essun learns of the stone eaters and how they used to be human: "Earth tried to make them more like itself, dependent on itself, thinking that would make them harmless", Alabaster explains, "I guess it's reassuring to know the planet can cock up, too" (*Obelisk* 167). This conversation leads Essun to learn that the Earth holds more actual agency than she previously could have imagined. When Alabaster tells what he experienced recuperating among the stone eaters for years, he recounts his revelation upon travelling to the core of the planet: "'The Earth is alive.' His voice grows harsh, hoarse, faintly hysterical. 'Some of the old stories are just stories, you're right, but *not that one*'" (*Obelisk* 169). In what can be considered an anagnorisis, Essun learns that the inhabitants of the world have been waging a war with it since the Moon escaped from the Earth's orbit long ago, and that establishing "equilibrium on the Earth-Moon system" (*Obelisk* 171), i.e., bringing back the stolen child, could end the Seasons for good.

In *The Stone Sky*, after her activation of the Obelisk Gate, Essun has been in a comatose state and her left hand has turned into stone, resembling first stages of Alabaster's transformation. Travelling with the comm of Castrima in search for new locale to shield them from the escalating Season, Essun prepares herself for the task of catching the Moon as she senses its trajectory closing in on the Earth's orbit, in hopes that restoring the child of Father Earth would soothe his anger and malice. Her only living daughter Nassun, however, begins a journey along with her Guardian, Schaffa, to do the opposite; to bring the Moon into collision with the wicked Earth that has robbed her of her family. Both parties are guided by representatives of the ancient stone eaters of differing sects that seek to bring the old cycle of Seasons and destruction to a close in one way or another. Another parallel narrative – this time told by Hoa in first person – sheds light on the origins of the Seasons and the stone eaters.

Thousands of years ago, an enormous city-state of Syl Anagist was the ruling entity of the world. Through a fusion of biology and technology with magic, they sought to advance their own wellbeing and quench their thirst for power. Hoping to harvest the very magic of the Earth itself, they built the Obelisk Gate and designed a race of *tuners* to control it. These tuners were based on the ancestry of a more magically advanced species that the Syl Anagist vanquished. The last six remaining tuners, Hoa being one of them, become aware of the horrible fate of their precursors who have been linked to a large mechanism that uses their lifeforce beyond death, trapping their souls and denying them rest in the afterlife. Before the launch of the Obelisk Gate, the tuners agree to fault the process and instead use the awesome magical forces of the Gate to destroy Syl Anagist and its corruption. Their plan too is thwarted as the Earth takes

control of the Gate in mid-launch and tries to annihilate all the arrogant life forms upon its surface. Hoa and the others are able to hold on to some of the Obelisks in the network and prevent this, which the Earth retaliates by turning them into the first stone eaters. The activation of the Obelisk Gate sets off the Fifth Seasons however, as the Moon slips off its orbital pattern around the Earth. The stone eaters are prevented from establishing the network themselves again, but they can try to direct others powerful enough to do so, which is what they have been working towards for forty thousand years as the trilogy begins.

The ancient civilization of Syl Anagist is a crucial component of the trilogy's ecocritical message. They worked towards harnessing all the possible energy on their planet, digging into the crust of the world in search of the orogenic power hidden within. The Soviet astronomer Nikolai Kardashev devised a typology for advanced civilisations based on the energy available to them. Type I civilization could make use of all the energy on its planet, Type II could go harness the power of its star, and a Type III civilization could go as far as all the energy in its own galaxy (Adler 2014, 308–309). By seeking control over the magic power of the Earth, Syl Anagist was essentially aspiring to become a Type I civilization on the Kardashev scale. However, the Obelisk Gate was the catalyst that awakened the Earth and pushed the system onto an unstable state.

Back then the Stillness was three different continents and not a supercontinent. Syl Anagist came from one land and conquered the others. Among the peoples of the other continents were the Niess, who knew magic better than the other races. So, the conquerors began to dissimilate the Niess with their "icewhite eyes and ashblow hair" (*Stone* 208) gradually through scholarly studies and policies, which eventually designated them completely non-human on the basis that their connection to the Earth was evidence of distinctive abnormality. A systematic approach of the colonising force, who "conjure phantoms endlessly, terrified that their victims will someday do back what was done to them" (*Stone* 209). These long-established traditions are manifested in the treatment of the orogenes. Their ability to command the magical currents of the Earth also makes them dangerous for both the environment and others around them, which is why the stills, the ones without adeptness for orogeny, largely ostracize them.

Overall, there are several systems of control present in the books and the society of the Stillness is highly stratified. People are divided into use-castes, each with their specific role within the society. Besides the systems of subjugation, the *obelisks* are another lingering, transient remnant of a more advanced bygone era. Over two hundred and fifty of these large rock formations (onyx, amethyst, sapphire) sparsely shadow the sky of the Stillness. Creations of the Syl Anagistine biomagestry, the obelisks were intended to harvest, control, and direct the

flowing magical currents of the Stillness. After thousands of years their real purpose is largely unknown, but their power is evident enough so that the Fulcrum orogenes are forbidden to interact with them. They float along the sky of the Stillness undisturbed, “just another grave-marker of just another civilization successfully destroyed by Father Earth’s tireless efforts” (*Season 8*). In truth, they act like conduits for the chthonic power of the inner Earth, channelling and focusing it to be used by human individuals.

Orogeny is the level of this power that is within reach of orogenes, but there is a deeper layer to it: a silvery magic originating from the core of the Earth. This “strange silvery not-orogeny, which Alabaster called magic” (*Stone 11*) binds all living things together, and some are more attuned to sense and pull at these invisible strings: “Magic is everywhere in the world. Everyone sees it, feels it, flows with it” (*Stone 208*). In this it bears a resemblance to the Force in the *Star Wars* universe. The Jedi in *Star Wars* are also an age-old semi-religious creed built around the concept of controlling the naturally occurring Force to a great effect, acting as the peacekeepers of the galaxy by using it for good. There is a slight similarity, even though the Fulcrum order is a more oppressive, malevolent system. Admittedly both orogeny and the Force are just fantasy magic by another name, and indeed Jemisin seems to make light of this fact by introducing the word ‘magic’ almost inconsequentially halfway into the trilogy as a more powerful substitute for orogeny. Like Arthur C. Clarke’s Third Law famously stated: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (Clarke 1968, 255). Jemisin uses this fact to her advantage with concepts like orogeny, biomagestry, and Geoarcanity, giving her magic a scientific foundation and elements of physical, material rationalization.



### 3 Exploring Personified Objects, Villainized Settings, and the Corresponding Narratives

In the 1902 French short film “A Trip to the Moon” (“Le Voyage dans la Lune”, dir. Georges Méliès), a team of astronomers decide to embark on a mission of discovery to the only natural satellite orbiting Earth. Building a bullet shaped capsule, the astronomers launch themselves upwards into space. What awaits them at the end of their trajectory is not an inanimate blob of moon dust and rock, however. Unfortunately, the eager spacefaring astronomers plunge directly into the right eye socket of the Man in the Moon. Needless to say, the unexpected Moon-Man is not too pleased with this sudden incursion. The famous image of the anthropomorphic Moon struck in the eye with a space capsule is an iconic portrayal of the long-standing myths that the Moon is embodied by a spirit and a staple in cinematic and science fiction history. Though director Georges Méliès continues the film’s satirical take on imperialism through the astronomers’ conflict with the native people of the Moon and does not engage with the personified Moon beyond the landing sequence, that short segment serves as a significant early example of planetary-scale anthropomorphism and animism.

In this section, I explore what different theoretical concepts and approaches can offer to interpreting sentient milieus and animated objects in literature. The analytical focus centres on both anthropomorphism and animism, and is at the same time ecocritical, anthropological and in the end quite philosophical. I estimate that the most useful methodological approach to deciphering the characteristics placed upon the setting of the trilogy is to examine the long-established tradition of ecocentric personification and how it manifests in the novels. Ecofeminism and animal studies also contribute to this study of anthropomorphic characteristics. Another central issue is non-human agency, which requires a more object-oriented viewpoint. Here recent imaginative eco-philosophical ideas offer illuminating angles for the exploration of planet-scale agency.

Further, I seek to understand the cultural roots of such a being as Father Earth, briefly going over select literature concerning postmodern anthropology and its attempt to breathe new life into the understanding of animistic worldviews, largely neglected in the history of modernist science. Highlighting some examples of similar mythological beings, I draw comparisons to the metaphorical holistic planetary entity of Gaia as proposed by James Lovelock. Likewise, I look at how localized spirits are thought to have materialized in primary and secondary worlds. Lastly, I review some narratological concepts relevant to understanding the overall structure and narrative of the books and how it converges with its ecocritical tonality.

This inclusion of different theories is not done out of indecision, but rather to try and bridge the gap between these different methodological approaches and test their suitability to this task.

### 3.1 Ecological Thought in Elevating Objects

Reading literature from an ecocritical point of view places additional importance on the ways in which nature is presented. In analysing the representations of the environment in the classics and older literary works, rereading the story from an ecological perspective often works out of the context of the original time of writing. However, when it comes to more recent works of literature, the contemporary ecological awareness that has already been in effect at the time can be seen more evidently as an influence on the text. In all walks of life, the way that our actions relate to our environment has become one of the quintessential ethical questions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the 1960s, authors have focused increasingly on ecological issues in their writing, and ecocritical tropes such as pollution, wilderness, eco-feminism, or even ecological apocalypse are often present in many contemporary literary works.

Ecological thought and environmentalism have been very much at home when it comes to fantasy literature. Grand epics of the genre such as *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) promote harmonious, symbiotic relationships with nature, as exhibited by the agricultural and peaceful Hobbits, the tree-shepherd Ents, and the stewardship of the Elves, against the backdrop of the rising industrialism of Isengard and Mordor. Frank Herbert's classic novel *Dune* (1965), which holds a similar masterpiece status among works of science fiction, brings forth a focal message about understanding the ecological consequences of our actions and evaluating our exploitation of nature more carefully. By dislocating the reader from overtly familiar surroundings, new reflections on environmental issues become easier. Illustrations of ethical dilemmas can be more creative and poignant, while the reader's familiar frame of reference outside of the fictive universe still covertly works in the background.

However, there is a problem in distancing from the familiar as now we have new objects of study for which there may not be a ready approach. In order to convey the dimensions and articulations that magical realms place on environmental issues, we must either find already in place methodologies that are applicable to these new types of entities or create ones of our own. Fortunately, the field of ecocriticism has widened to incorporate tools useful in interpreting even the most magical and uncanny elements of nature depictions. First, it is worthwhile to examine more traditional ecocritical concepts regarding anthropomorphism and then move on to re-examine subjectivity in a contemporary light provided by the cultural sense of eco-awareness and rejection of anthropocentrism. I propose to do this by beginning with ecocentric

personification to get an overall understanding of the tradition, then moving on to examining how exactly nature is personified in terms of gender, and finally, what can be done with these objects of the natural world other than to present them as humanized entities.

### 3.1.1 Anthropomorphism and Personified Nature

*Anthropomorphism*, the act of giving human characteristics to animals, objects, or places, is an old cultural tradition that has been employed since antiquity in written and illustrated form. From Sappho's lyrics and Virgil's eclogues through to the metaphorical use of nature in the works of the Romantics, ecocentric personification has been used to great effect in literature, though it gradually grew out of fashion approaching modernity. Several expressions related to nature, such as 'the sea was angry' and 'wind howls' came to be regarded as clichés and added to the trope of personification being regarded as a cheap literary device. Indeed, the allocation of anthropomorphic habits and features to nature – what critic John Ruskin labelled as "pathetic fallacy" in mid 1800s, albeit with different linguistic meaning compared to modern usage – is commonly regarded a false representation of nature, which does not possess emotions or movement comparable to humans. Ruskin's distaste for this personification might have stemmed from its supposed overuse during Romanticism, but later views of this device have been less strict (Baldick 1990, 163).

In *Ecology and Literature*, Bryan L. Moore (2008, 10) draws focus on ecocentric personification throughout literary history, pointing how it "works by intersecting the two essential points of rhetoric and ecology: it seeks to *persuade* an audience that all living things are *connected*". This is the essential argument of anthropomorphism that is often disregarded in discussions of the subject. Personification is a method of emphasizing interrelatedness. Yet the very ideas of the Enlightenment saw "unending progress achieved through the application of human ingenuity applied to an inert external world" (Hamilton 2013, 207). Cartesian subject-object dichotomy further split the natural world into two based on perceived Otherness. Deep ecology sees that all anti-ecological patterns derive from this dualistic thinking (Garrard 2012, 26). Dividing the world into Nature and Culture, or the non-Nature, separated and elevated human qualities from those of animals, for example, whereas personification worked to underline the similarities and shared connections.

Anthropomorphic representation is mainly a way of interpreting the world in human terms. Classic examples are found for instance in the Romantic poetry of William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (1816) offers a view of the sublime wonders of the Alpine landscape, where "wilderness has a mysterious tongue", and the mountain has a

voice to influence the mind of those that gaze upon it, a testament to the power found in nature (Garrard 2012, 73). Both Shelley and Wordsworth readily present the nature as an actor, doing things. However, whereas Wordsworth sees nature as a teacher of moral virtues in “The Tables Turned” (1798), Shelley’s sublime landscape is both a force of good and evil, not necessarily correlating with human moral codes. It works on another level obscured by clouds, situated in a universe unbound.

The literary device of personification became somewhat unjustly stigmatized since anthropomorphism is inherently linked to the human experience. In fact, its general use has not waned. For example, cultural and societal constructs like nation-states are constantly referred to in the news as acting like humans. Humans continue to personify many aspects of the world: sports car engine purrs like a wildcat, phones die when the battery is drained, not to mention how human-like robots previously only found within the confines of science fiction are fast becoming a reality. From these examples alone, it seems that technology is replacing nature when it comes to anthropomorphising our everyday life, a reflection of the modern urban techno-reality. To Alf Hornborg (2006, 22–23), these “new technologies and networks” not only contradict Cartesian dualism, they also “prove to be not objects but what [Bruno] Latour calls ‘quasi-objects’: part Nature, part Society, and brimming with agency”. Perhaps the personification of these emerging new strangers is just a tool for coping with their encroaching existence.

Nature is still not without its share of contemporary personification; in fact, it is more overt and obscene than ever before. In this modern dog-eat-dog world of man, fast-food ads present anthropomorphic pigs and cows holding signs with the imploring suggestion “eat more chickens” written on them with the adequate number of backwards letters and errors. Advertisement is a field that continuously uses a significant amount of ecocentric personification, particularly in the form of what Moore (2008, 19) calls “pseudo ‘green’ commercials”, where different groups of animals applaud the eco-friendly actions of big corporations. This kind of anthropomorphism is rather poor in taste, and it in a way illustrates the crucial line between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. Anthropomorphic personification is a bidirectional practice of both seeing ourselves in nature and recognizing nature in us. The fallacy in this practice comes from assuming nature subscribes to our moral codes. By doing so, what was ecocentric becomes anthropocentric. As Moore (2008, 11) poignantly summarizes, “an extended analysis of ecocentric personification, in theory and practice, is important because its practitioners thereby profess to speak for a voiceless nonhuman nature”.

To personify nature is to grant it human characteristics, including those associated with gender. An overarching cultural theme shared across the world identifies nature as feminine. Kate Soper ([1995] 2000, 139) outlines that the answer to the question of “what accounts for this coding of nature as feminine – which is deeply entrenched in Western thought, but also has been said by anthropologists to be crosscultural and well-nigh universal [...] lies in the double association of women with reproductive activities and of these in turn with nature”. The allocation of nature as womanly is tied to the patriarchal cultural history. Nature, seen either as a set of principles to which all life must adhere, or as a spatial entity to be explored, was in both cases effectively “allegorized as either a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production, or as the site of sexual enticement and ultimate seduction” (Soper [1995] 2000, 141). This juxtaposition of nature as both mother figure and a potential lover places fleeting boundaries on man’s relationship with nature. Nature is his nurturing caretaker, but also the object of his desires, depending on the situation. In both cases though, it is a rather passive character exhibiting primordial beauty and serenity. Veronica Strang, who has written extensively on water and our relationship with it, notes how wetlands were originally feminized as essential life-giving milieus, before “humanized and masculinized religions and economies focused on dryland agriculture” cast them in a more menacing light as unruly primal bogs that needed stern masculine guidance and control (Strang 2015, 60–61). Ironically, the mixed composition of wetlands and the fluidity their plentiful water element renders them rather androgynous in the end.

If colonizing male domination at times seems to rule over the free and nurturing feminine nature, I contend there are occasions when these gender roles are reversed. When humans test themselves against the environment, does the landscape retain the same tonality and gender? There are many situations where we pit ourselves aggressively against natural obstacles. In such confrontational situations, such as when mountain climbers struggle to reach the summit, is the imagined entity of loving Mother Earth still valid, or is it replaced by a fatherlier figure, judgemental and unforgiving? Admittedly, a colonizing attitude may apply here from a male subjective perspective as “a man’s chief interest is to conquer a woman, and because of his nature he seldom stops at one conquest” (Jung 1970, 42). This portrays the rush attained from extreme sports in a new light. Adrenaline gained from encounters in this adversarial relationship would spur further conquests. But what kind of desire can be projected onto harsh landscapes? The no longer arable land that denies a farmer and family their essential food lies still, dry and wicked in its ugly, corrupted form. When one wrestles with cruel nature for survival it does seem plausible that the adversarial environment could be viewed as having

more masculine characteristics. Hard rocky mountainsides are a far cry from the motherly embrace of green groves and calm meadows, and they arguably portray a more rugged, patriarchal exterior.

The sea, for one, is a curious subject, as it is often regarded as a woman with a temper, wild and unruly. Mysterious and unpredictable are characteristics which might be associated with female nature and that pertain to the seas as well. In *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Ernest Hemingway too contemplates on the issue of ‘sea’ via gendered Spanish articles, *la mar* and *el mar*, both of which are applicable. Whereas the old man “thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them”, the younger men see it as masculine and “spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy” (Hemingway 1952, 29). This description adheres to the idea that sea – and by extension nature – is viewed competitively as male rather than female. When being viewed from a male perspective, that is.

In the U.S., meteorologists used women names for storms exclusively from the early 1950s to the end of the 1970s. This curious personification led to weathermen describing the powerful natural phenomena as if they were merely temperamental ladies, before women’s rights activists successfully got male names back in the fold again (Little 2020). Even though the feminists attempt at an equal naming pool is said to have been resisted based on women names being more suitable as inducing fright, a study in 2016 found evidence to the contrary. By both analysing storms from 1950 to 2012 and measuring the reaction of test subjects to storms of both male and female names, the study concluded that storms with female names were far deadlier, mainly due to the lack of perceived threat (Jung et al. 2014). People would consider a storm called Eloise as less dangerous than a storm called Charley, which makes Eloise far deadlier since preparations would not be adequate. It should be noted that the study includes over two decades when storms only had female names. Due to this possible bias, the results should be accepted with a grain of salt, but it is still worth considering the possible life and death consequences that old stereotypes related to gender might have. This study also demonstrates how social sciences are relevant for studies of ecology and natural disasters. Additionally, it showcases how personification and attitudes towards it borrow from a long-running cultural continuum.

In *The Broken Earth*, reader comes to face to face with different entities struggling with their identity and the question whether they count as ‘human’. In many ways this issue is racialized, and it has been studied as such. The ancient Niess were dehumanized through their differentiating looks and their effective use of magic. The stone eaters that stem from the Niess

are hardly human anymore after living eons both within and on the surface of the Earth. Their true appearance also unnerves those more human than them, such as orogenes central to the story like Essun and Alabaster, who also struggle with being designated a lesser species due to their abnormality. However, in *Broken* there are Others that are so far unlike humans, such as planets and beings of stone, that a theoretical perspective that deals with systematically unhuman entities might have some merit here.

Perhaps the most crucial Other in relation to man is the animal. Human evolution stands solitary in the annals of the animal kingdom. *Homo sapiens* have distanced themselves from nonhuman animals by rising to walk on two feet and developing relatively larger brains than other vertebrates. Our large brains have allowed the development and use of tools and the formation of complex social structures. In turn, other animals that developed in a different direction have become domesticated pets, objects of study, and food. Evolved humankind has developed a scientific discipline to analyse the condition of being a human, from which a field called animal studies has risen to answer to queries related to nonhuman animals. Animal studies in this sense are interested in the study of “the relationship between human beings and other animals” and in fact among other things question the ethic nature of other kinds of animal studies, such as animal testing (Gordon 2009, 331).

Animal studies share a lot in common with science fiction as they both seek to showcase and understand the Other and what is alien to humans. Science fiction “literalizes metaphor through its speculative situations, allowing one to write from the point of view of an animal or an alien consciousness” (ibid.). Animals are often used cleverly in sci-fi and fantasy as tools to question human superiority. In George Orwell’s satirical classic *Animal Farm* (1945), the livestock and domestic pets take over the farm from Mr. Jones and form a society that does not live up to its expectations of freedom and equity, but instead falls victim to human political woes like authoritarianism. This tale mirrors the rise communism in Russia and the dangerous concentration of power it resulted in, and as such makes human readers both see the folly of political bravado and wonder about the possible social structures that farm animals may have. Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), on the other hand, gives us a glimpse of post-apocalyptic urban decay, where real organic animals are rare status symbols that act as mementos of pure nature and sources of empathy.

Studies of hybrid creatures found in fantasy and sci-fi may need to rely on animal studies to examine the interactions between humans and other species. Specifically seeing others as subjects is hard through a lens of *speciesism* where one considers own race as superior. Several thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, and Cary Wolfe have questioned human

exceptionalism and “the notion that humans, however defined, are the only beings who can stand in the position of the subject” (Gordon 2009, 333). It seems we are in the midst of a process of unobjectifying members of the animal kingdom, and there is definite impetus for change in this regard. Increased advocacy of animal rights in face of factory production is proof of this (ibid.) While contemporary rise of veganism and shunning of animal products are patterns that suggest our relationship with animals is evolving once again, placing animals in the position of the subject is a difficult task, as it strives for an untainted representation of their real character. Arguably the medium that comes closest to achieving this is nature documentaries. Their unobtrusive rendering of animal life shows dolphins, bees, antelopes, and marmosets at their most natural state.

Studying beings in fantasy and science fiction with similar approach as animals is often founded, since the imaginary creatures and alien races repeatedly draw inspiration from the animal kingdom. The author is also usually forced to make this connection known with a more or less direct reference to an animal, noting for example, the ‘squid-like elongated form’ or ‘rocky turtle shell of a skin’ in their creation. Yet although animal studies can help in examining liminal beings, they are strained when it comes to entities like planets and other things that we traditionally view as objects. To get further into the being of objects and particularly large objects of evident agency, I am afraid it is necessary to go beyond the visible structure onto what is a quite metaphysical level.

### 3.1.2 Hyperobjects and Object-Oriented Literary Criticism

Object-oriented ontology (OOO), a more recent philosophical trend, rejects the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology where a human subject is required for objects to be real in their existence. Stepping outside of this anthropocentric viewpoint, OOO asserts that things do very much exist outside our understanding, in ways that may be totally incomprehensible to us. This thinking seeks to highlight the limitations of anthropocentrism; for if there is a world that was here before humans and will be there afterwards, how could humans claim central agency in this long narrative. It is necessary to dip if not a foot, then at least a toe into the shallow end of the deep pool that is philosophy, since analysing the setting of a novel as a subject and an actor is nothing less than redefining the very nature of ‘objects’.

Graham Harman, whose views on phenomenology and the metaphysical nature of objects have been instrumental in the rise of OOO and speculative realism, asserts that “the objects of object-oriented philosophy are mortal, ever-changing, built from swarms of subcomponents, and accessible only through oblique allusion” (Harman 2012, 188). Harman



positions that a structure of allusion pinpoints the phenomenological nature of things. The underlying true qualities of the object are rarely visible; we are not conscious of the breaking point of a hammer before the unfortunate event happens, as per Heidegger's example. Harman (2012, 187) names this structure of relation *allure*, since "it can only hint at the reality of the hammer without ever making it directly present to the mind" and maintains that it is "the key phenomenon of all the arts, literature included", as it "alludes to entities as they are, quite apart from any relations with or effects upon other entities in the world". The idea of an oblique allusion helps maintain that objects have properties of their own as well. Wordsworth (1896, 202) too considered objects to have a causal influence on the observer, but no inherent qualities in of themselves, but that they were derived from the subjective perspective of those who interact with said objects. Though this view hints at the effect of conditioning that environment has upon one's mind, it disregards the very nature of objects as dependent on the whims of the current observer. This gap demonstrates the structure of allusion that hides certain underlying features of the object from the viewer, while only hinting at the true nature of the thing through limited sensory perception.

OOO posits that all objects should "be given equal attention, whether they be human-non-human, natural, cultural, real or fictional" (Harman 2018, 9). Objects in object-oriented ontology are not stagnant separate entities nor are they relational beings dependent on the surroundings and the observer. Their form is fleeting unlike previously thought, which makes it harder to grasp their entire existence. They have a beginning and an end, but their non-relational nature resists both easy holistic interpretation as well as measurements from the sum of their parts. These are the qualities of *hyperobjects*. Hyperobjects are things that go beyond the ordinary human understanding of spatial and temporal dimensions. These include greater objects like biospheres, planets, the sum of microplastic residue or plutonium, and climate change. Things that are so vastly divided in space and time that they elude easy observation and instead come through to us in waves of recognition. Timothy Morton introduced the idea of hyperobjects in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) and later expanded it in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013).

Morton's hyperobjects have five defining aspects: they are viscous, molten, nonlocal, phased and interobjective. Viscosity means that hyperobjects stick to us and the world around them. They are hard to get rid of, like an oil spill that continues to damage an ocean ecosystem for years or radioactive materials that haunt us even from afar or when buried under ground, like a modern-day miasma (Morton 2013, 36). The non-immediate presence of hyperobjects may easily hide them from our sight, but they impact us semi-permanently, as if giving us

lasting wounds upon contact. Viscosity is not original to OOO, like Harman (2018, 234–235) admits, as Sartre and other modern philosophers have already seen the self effectively glued to the phenomenological world, but OOO expands viscosity to all objects.

Global warming sticks to us everywhere we go on planet Earth, across vast temporal and spatial dimensions, which also makes it nonlocal (Morton 2013, 48). Hyperobjects are both here and not, or more precisely, their effects are visible even though the object itself is not bound to a definite spatial location. This nonlocality blurs causal connections, such as with tobacco and pesticides contributing to cancer or extreme storms and hurricanes being the by-products of global warming. Nonlocality is inevitably tied to quantum theory, as it reveals the interconnectedness between things. Entangled photons and electrons may appear to affect each other across distances, confirming their nonlocality (Morton 2013, 44). The very structure of the universe is nonlocal according to quantum theory. Locality, in this sense is then merely an illusion, a perceived partial manifestation of larger being. The omnipresence of the effects of climate change renders any observed locality as a false immediacy (Morton 2013, 48). Hyperobjects like nuclear waste and climate change have promoted ecological thinking precisely because they implore us to grasp at the links between various phenomena.

Morton (2013, 81) argues that intersubjectivity hides the real phenomenon of interobjectivity, which takes note of the relation between different things from not just a human perspective, but an object-oriented one as well. Harman (2018, 239–240) sees interobjectivity as central to the core idea of OOO, that objects are imperfectly translated for other objects too and not only for humans, since “objects distort one another even in sheer causal interaction” (Harman 2012, 187). In this sense interobjectivity argues for the realist principles that human awareness is not a condition for the existence of external phenomena. Interobjectivity takes place everywhere since objects come into contact constantly. For example, a road, bus, and its passengers are parts of an interobjective system. Morton (2013, 48) calls this system of interconnectedness *the mesh*, a metaphorical web of threads between objects that allows their interactions. Echoing Martin Heidegger, Morton views notions like ‘the mind’ and ‘subject’ too rising from relationships that objects share. An abyss of relations that hangs around the objects themselves, it is this meshwork that creates hyperobjects.

The temporal scale of hyperobjects is comically referenced in such works as Tom Gauld’s comic strip *Two Rocks Converse* (2010), which shows two rocks having a brief conversation while life develops, evolves, and dies on Earth (Morton 2013, 58). This accurately showcases the geological timeframe, where human existence is but a split of a second. Rocks, oil, bacteria, human DNA, etc. are hyperobjects that stretch in time beyond easy

comprehension. “When you look at oil you’re looking at the past” says Morton (ibid.), and he is right; you are essentially witnessing a brief instance in an existence that spans eons. Organic compounds have a history that is separate from human history. However, though the timeframe of geology and ecology go beyond what we as humans can sense and experience, we still alter that timeline for millennia to come. Through the Great Acceleration and subsequent climate change we have created effects that will linger around for a hundred thousand years, and future fossils will be the plastics, concrete, and glass that we have made (Morton 2013, 59–60). Morton argues that the temporal dimensions of hyperobjects are difficult to comprehend exactly because they are not infinite, though they might as well be for all human intense and purposes. They will one day cease to be, but still outlive us by tens or hundreds of thousands of years. Therefore, we cannot simply consider them as being around “forever” but rather embodying what Morton (2013, 60) calls a “*very large finitude*”. Their existence escapes our understanding, rendering all planning for the future inconsequential.

Since hyperobjects emit time that vastly differs from that of smaller entities, Morton (2013, 68) considers them to interfere with each other, causing a phasing pattern. That is why they are so difficult to observe in their entirety. They “phase in and out of the human world”, occupying a space beyond our three-dimensional understanding, which is exactly why we cannot “see global warming” per se (Morton 2013, 70). Today, computer calculations and projections aid us in visualizing these kinds of ethereal phenomena, yet the transdimensional process remains there beyond the software images as a real thing, an object itself phasing in and out of human perception. Just like two sound waves that are out of phase cancel each other out so that we only hear a narrow representation of the original sound source, we only glimpse a partial reality of the object. It is the withdrawal of the objects that is invisible to the human eye. The aesthetic dimension rises in importance with hyperobjects, as the markings that they leave behind – their past – is the present tense of other beings that have been scarred by the fleeting presence of hyperobjects (Morton 2013, 90).

Morton weaves a convincing argument for the existence of hyperobjects with his poetic writing, drawing examples from physics and geology to art and music, then combining them with philosophical theorems that aim to sway the reader to imagine objects in an entirely different sense. Yet hyperobjects have faced scrutiny from critics. Ursula K. Heise (2014), for one, questioned the overall usefulness of the concept since virtually anything can be considered a hyperobject. Heise also notes the contradictions in Morton’s theories, though Morton does seem partly aware of them and at times merely seeks to provoke new discourse. It appears as though Morton is arguing for the fact that human recognition of hyperobjects is a signal that

future agency is out of human hands. This argument is arguably solid in the context of the nuclear age, and Morton (2013, 94) illuminates the qualities of a hyperobject by taking the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 as one example. No one could comprehend or experience the bomb in its entirety and live to tell the tale; therefore, the recollections from witnesses are but fractions of this massive phenomenon, yet they have haunted and shaped the lives of the survivors and all humankind. The lingering impacts of this unfathomable event are evidence to the hyperobject's viscosity. Hyperobjects stick to us and affect us beyond a single interaction: "[w]e are living textbooks on global warming and nuclear materials, crisscrossed with interobjective calligraphy" (Morton 2013, 88). For Morton (2013, 85), thinking in hyperobjects has value since they can signify complex realities such as interobjectivity. Since we see several interactive signs indicative of climate change, it is easier to grasp at the causal connections between various phenomena, even though the main one is withdrawn in this interaction.

Hyperobjects also have a use for rethinking objects overall, including in a literary context. Since objects cannot usually communicate in an understandable way, their activity on the written page remains elusive. I imagine that examining them using Morton's outlined qualities could therefore prove useful. At the very least recognizing their presence helps to see the effects they have on other characters. Possibly they can be even on occasion be raised to the position of subject, which allows visualizing their real importance within the narrative. Morton (2010, 8) admits that what he is quite possibly aiming at is "an upgraded version of animism", as his ecological thought seeks to view "beings as people even when they aren't people". Animism is indeed another key phenomenon when it comes to exploring the inner life of the material world, so to speak, and therefore now is a good point to move on and engage with the concept more directly.

### **3.2 Breathing Life into the Inanimate**

While these ecological and philosophical perspectives illuminate the physical and to some extent mental dimensions of objects, their cultural and spiritual properties have not yet been sufficiently considered. In this section, I wish to explore how the agency of the inanimate relates to this study of how a setting comes alive in a fictional work. Established cultural traditions, more contemporary inventions, and psychological influence of the environment are all aspects of Nature's agency that this section deals with. Aside from projecting human characteristics onto the natural world, envisioning intellect and psychological constitution in natural objects and milieus brings them one step closer to being distinctive, thinking entities.

### 3.2.1 Postmodern Anthropology and Resurgent Animism

One of the trends in postmodern anthropology has been to go against the grain vis-a-vis Cartesian subject–object ontology that modernism leaned upon so heavily. The clear-cut separation of subject from object is viewed in critical light especially regarding *animism*. Introduced by E. B. Tylor in his 1871 book *Primitive Culture*, the concept of animism is among the earliest in the field of anthropology (Bird-David 1999, 67). The concept refers to the belief that in addition to living organisms, seemingly inanimate objects and places too have a spirit or life force of their own. Examples of animistic practices are today found particularly though not exclusively among indigenous peoples and tribes. Tylor’s own view of animism is a product of its time, now dated among contemporary anthropologists due to its implications of evolutionism and cognitive underdevelopment (Bird-David 1999, 68), but since those days increasing attention has been paid to understand animism without projecting modern Western conditions onto it in every turn. Even so, examining it as an ecological practice is contested issue, as Greg Garrard (2012, 142–145) outlines, since animistic worldviews did not automatically align with environmental responsibility, though there is a tendency to link eco-awareness and sustainability with indigenous beliefs.

The French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour has been influential in the re-evaluation of the concept of animism for the postmodern era. The re-evaluation is based on the view that the modernist scientism was ill-equipped to grasp the differentiating ontologies of the non-Western world, such as animism (Hornborg 2006, 21). Unlike Morton (2013, 94), who declares that “[h]yperobjects bring about the end of modernity”, Latour famously asserted that we had never been modern to begin with. Latour writes that, in fact, while “the official philosophy of science takes [deanimation] as the only important and rational one, just the opposite is true: animation is the essential phenomenon; deanimation a superficial, ancillary, polemical, and more often than not vindictory one” (Latour 2014, 7). Cultural backgrounds and learned belief systems shape the both the conscious and the unconscious mind for which they give a frame of reference. Latour notes how Isaac Newton too delved deep into angelology while defining traits for the instantaneous force of attraction (ibid.). Culture and the natural environment are similarly explicit influences in formation of thought, yet modernity has tried hard to separate the two – a distinction that is itself paradoxical because its ultimately cultural (Hornborg 2006, 23). How much longer would it have taken humankind to wonder what it is like to fly and set about doing so if there were no birds or flying insects on Earth to inspire us? Nature is filled with agency and inspiration that constitute a world of meanings not separable

from cultural paradigms.

As discussed before, animism is not dead in modern context, but rather just buried. Contemporary technological nova are verging on being granted agency, and the rise of artificial intelligence will likely push the envelope for non-human subjectivity to new unknown heights. By looking at animism in a more historical sense it is possible to find traditions and concepts that relate more closely to those in Jemisin's trilogy. While the spread of Christianity largely extinguished native religions and subverted local deities, places where European settlers and their religious doctrine did not take root in maintained their indigenous belief systems where the environment was revered and the veil between the spiritual and physical worlds was thin. Such can be said for the Inuit belief systems that revolved around the awesome natural forces present in their locale, mainly the endless ice. Klaus Dodds (2018, 98) notes how for the Inuits, "[t]he ice that occupied and travelled through and over the mountainous landscapes was a living, moving force capable of agency, and sense including hearing and smell". Our global relationship with ice is undergoing a transformation, since the thing that was before a distant constant is now fluid and flowing ever closer. As if the actual hyperobject was withdrawing slowly, we are losing sight of its condensed form in its gigantic state. This transformation is perilous for the Earth system, since as the luminescent ice is melting away to become one with the deep blue sea, it is simultaneously diminishing Earth's natural albedo and contributing to the gathering heat (Hamilton 2013, 2).

Earth system science (ESS) is the scientific model that corresponds to a lot of what I engage here in metaphor. Because the Earth's climate is a complex non-linear system, sudden local changes may push the whole system past a tipping point (Hamilton 2013, 12). Latour (2014, 3) argues that the ridiculing of the Earth system science is the work of "the new Inquisition (now economic rather than religious)" who do not recognize "the discovery of the new – also very old – agitated and sensitive Earth". The holistic approach of Earth system science envisions all the feedbacks found in nature under one collective banner, which may be represented by imagining an emotive Earth. Agitation through the actions of variety of living organisms has given rise to new emotions as well as motions, which geological and biological studies have attempted to organize into facts. Climate news have increasingly passed the news threshold, an indicator that "Earth has now taken back all the characteristics of a full-fledged actor" (ibid.). Though the body is failing, or more likely exactly because of that, old planet Earth is once again invigorated in spirit.

The question of Earth's agency is crucial in contemporary context. It seems that we are in the midst of a confusing reordering of modernity's subject-object dichotomy. World is

changing both here and out there where we are not around to experience it directly. This is evident in constant updates stating that the rate of species extinction and global warming are faster than feared, telling of how scientists are struggling to keep up with the changes to the Earth system. It is as Latour (2014, 11–12) proclaims: “Through a complete reversal of Western philosophy’s most cherished trope, human societies have resigned themselves to playing the role of the dumb object, while nature has unexpectedly taken on that of the active subject!”. This impending realization that it may be too late to act in the face of climate change would indeed suggest that humanity has been left devoid of agency in the global geostory, as Latour calls it, whereas Nature is now driving the narrative. This planetary animism can appear terrifying, but it serves a scientific and ethical purpose in denoting Nature’s agency, which can be best conveyed by one contested metaphor in particular.

### 3.2.2 Gods and Gaia

While working for NASA in the 1960s, eminent British scientist James Lovelock began to wonder how the changes in Earth’s atmosphere affected life on the planet only to a relatively small degree. To explain how vastly increased solar luminosity was not more fatal to the vegetation and wildlife on Earth, Lovelock began to develop his Gaia hypothesis, which suggests that Earth functions as a single organism able to regulate its own atmosphere. In Lovelock’s ([1979] 2016, 10) words, Gaia is “a complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet”. Originally inspired by the work of biogeochemists and the perspective that then novel space travel offered on our planet, the Gaia theory has continued to be contested topic of scientific discussion to this day. Though initially dismissed especially by biologists who were strongly opposed to the idea of global self-regulation, Lovelock has since further defined his theory to a wider acceptance. After gathering additional evidence of nature’s feedback loops in support of his argument during the 1980s, Lovelock (2003, 769) proposed a revised theory which stated “that organisms and their material environment evolve as a single coupled system, from which emerges the sustained self-regulation of climate and chemistry at a habitable state for whatever is the current biota”.

Taking its name from the primordial earthly deity in Greek mythology, the Gaia theory is a provisional framework for understanding our planet that continues to be refined and tested, but both its scientific and metaphorical acceptance have grown as means of analysing and showcasing climate change. Lovelock has referred to the ongoing ecological crisis as “revenge

of Gaia”, signifying that we are fighting a war against nature that we lose even if we win (Latour 2011, 75). If the Earth were a single organism, the modern human race has made her extremely unwell. The most pessimistic predictions by Lovelock foretell nothing short of the destruction of most of the human population while the Earth adjusts to its new state of being. Lovelock even goes as far as to suggest the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as Gaia self-regulating the exponentially grown human population (Watts 2020). Like a body that has been suffering from a virus that has upset the unstable bodily system, the planet will eventually shake off the residual pathogens, to continue the earlier analogy of an ailing being.

Gaia’s revenge is an extremely valuable allegory of how unsustainable and inconsiderate economic practices are turning the planet against humanity. To illustrate Gaia’s effectiveness as a metaphor, I will present another one. Like Tolkien’s dwarves of Moria, we have delved too deep, too greedily, awakening our Balrog in the form of a vengeful environmental god. Roused Gaia is a being of shadow and flame, concealed but consisting of our worst fears, all trapped in a heat-death spanning eons. Our mithril is the promise of ceaselessly continuing economic growth, the very idea of which is by definition unsustainable. Lovelock has criticized contemporary sustainability thinking and initiatives as clearly insufficient methods to curb climate change. Unlike many environmentalists, he has long advocated the use of nuclear energy as a solution to our energy needs (Lovelock 2006, 119–120). Yet many countries are currently closing down their nuclear power plants, and the prevalent attitudes towards nuclear energy are telling of how an immediate, though in reality inconsequential, possibility of danger outweighs that of a looming certain disaster. Instead – and despite of diminishing energy return on investment – fossil fuels like coal, which Gaia has hidden away to keep the planet’s temperature within safe limits for the life on it (Lovelock 2006, 184), are still extracted eagerly.

Discussions of Gaia are characterized by a desire to misunderstand. Latour (2017, 74) sees that the confusion derives from how people think that “when [Lovelock] introduces Gaia, he introduces a *live planet in addition or in supplement* to the organisms and their environment”. Gaia itself equals the whole biosphere and everything inside, which amount to one global feedback system. Gaia is just natural processes by another name, and one can read Gaia as an alternative sign for Nature. In *Our Angry Earth* (1991), sci-fi authors Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl discuss Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis as a bridge between supernatural religion and science and as a new hope for humanity, noting how the seemingly supernatural concept from a reputable man of science embarrassed many in the scientific community. They also note how while Gaia theory “does suggest that life is likely to continue”, it is foolhardy to see it as a



fixing force to solve the problems we have created ourselves (Asimov and Pohl 1991, 21). There is indeed a danger in projecting too much agency for Gaia. Asimov and Pohl (1991, 13) acknowledge how we would all like to believe there is a superior something that can save us from impending disasters like the environmental crisis; before God increasingly filled the role of this benign superbeing, but scientific need to explain the world as natural occurrences necessitated less divine interpretations. One could argue that modern need to suppress the magical only created the worst ecological crisis in history, and while calculations alone will not solve the issue, neither will overt spiritualism be of use.

Lovelock admits that his Gaia is a hypothesis, this is true, yet maintains that “she has already proved her theoretical value, if not her existence, by giving rise to experimental questions and answers which were profitable exercises in themselves”, such as further study of atmospheric carrier compounds (Lovelock [1979] 2016, 10–11). Alongside its usefulness in other fields, the Gaia theory is also valuable to literary analysis. And although cause and effect relationships of nature and their representations can be found all over the literary canon, Gaia is particularly suitable for fantasy and speculative fiction. It is even likely that many science fiction novels of the last forty years were directly or indirectly inspired by the theory. For example, Chris Pak (2016) identifies the Gaia hypothesis as a great influence on the terraforming tradition in sci-fi. Vivid traces of Gaia are visible in *The Broken Earth* trilogy as well. While the gender of the planet differs from the ancient Greek goddess, Father Earth in Jemisin’s novels is still eerily reminiscent of the theory. They both work to maintain balance of their respective systems. Consideration for the wellbeing for one species is secondary to the overall health of the system. Akin to Lovelock’s proposed model of a vengeful ecosystem, the fictional one, too, is driven by revenge over what the humans did to him. By trying to harness the power of the inner Earth, the ancient inhabitants of the Stillness not only took away Father Earth’s only child but also compromised the entire biosphere. While other works like Scott Russell Sanders’s *Terrarium* (1985) have implied Gaia (Murphy 2009, 376), Jemisin builds her work around the concept of a living planet that actively rages against those who live on it.

It should be noted that the goddess Gaia is not a passive character in Greek mythology either. In turn, she schemes against her son and partner Uranus, her son Cronos, and her grandson Zeus, exhibiting the guile, cunning, and agency that the gods of Olympus are remembered for. Similar instance of an earthly spirit in grieving as in *Broken* can be found from Māori mythology. The Earth Mother, Papatuanuku, was separated from her partner, Sky Father Ranginui by their offspring. According to the myth, their shared grief is manifested to this day as the tears of Ranginui fall down as rain, while Papatuanuku creates earthquakes in order to

tear apart the earth and bring them together again (Daniels 2019, 25–6). It is vaguely like the tale of love and loss that *Broken* deals with.

The explanation as to why many Earth-deities across the world were often feminine is quite likely related to the life-giving nature of the Earth. But also, like previously discussed, in a harsher ungenerous world a male-personified god might be more fitting. This is what the existence of Geb in ancient Egypt suggests. Geb was one of the rare male deities of the Earth, whose laughter was said to set off earthquakes. Considering the desert landscape of Egypt, it is possible that the lifeless land (away from the life-giving Nile) was more attuned to a male deity than a fertile female one. Indeed, many ancient cultures of Western tradition held that female gender was the fertile one; goddesses like Demeter contributed directly to fertility of the landscape, which becomes arid after the loss of her daughter Persephone (Roth 2000, 188). Here again the loss of the offspring of a deity works as the catalyst that sets off ecological impacts. Yet studies of language and mythology have identified emphasis given to male fertility in ancient Egypt (Roth 2000, 189–190). This partly argues against the conclusion that Geb was the god of an infertile land due to his sex. Nonetheless, further studies of comparative mythology are sure to find many more similar instances and tales from around the world, which present an inspirational origin and a hypotext basis for Father Earth.

### 3.2.3 Earth Souls and Localized Spirits

Considering how many similar myths about impassioned earth spirits exist throughout the world suggests a deep cultural bond with the earth which influences the way humans think about the ground below our feet. Jung's interdisciplinary and eclectic approach to understanding the world caused him to develop a nondualist worldview which saw the natural world as having greater spiritual dimension than what most scientists could entertain with a serious mind. Exploring the relationship between the ego and the unconscious, Jung surmised that in fact there was a larger dimension to the unconscious that had previously been thought. Reversing Freud's idea that the unconscious was a suppressed portion of the ego, Jung considered the opposite; that the ego actually stems from the collective unconscious, a larger shared psyche, one that possibly "envelops the whole of creation" (Tacey 2009, 16). Jung saw myths as products of the collective unconscious, as if it was an account of entire human history and a reflection our true sense of self (Cashford 2018, 322–323). Joseph Campbell notably used Jung's theories on collective unconscious to formulate the notion of *monomyth*, a universally recurring hero motif. How human experience everywhere has been influenced by the earth can explain how chthonic deities and myths around the world also have a lot in common.

Jung's archetypes are vital for this field of study. He described them as "hidden foundations of the conscious mind" or "chthonic portions of the psyche" that link the unconscious to nature, noting that "psychic influence of the earth and its laws is seen most clearly in these primordial images" (Jung 1970, 31). To Jung, one of the central primordial images in the unconscious is that of the mother, which is also the most immediate archetype for a child (Jung 1970, 35). This explains the importance of the image of the mother and the significance that it brings to metaphorical entities such as Mother Earth, Mother Nature, or Motherland. Jung recognized the Earth Mother as an archetype, a common deity appearing in several mythologies. The primordial image takes on different forms in different cultures, like those of Mat Zemlya, Houtu, Terra, and Gaia. However, alongside the archetype of the mother is that of the father, which to Jung (1970, 35) acts as the opposite of the mother:

It determines our relations to man, to the law and the state, to reason and the spirit and the dynamism of nature. "Fatherland" implies boundaries, a definite localization in space, whereas the land itself is Mother Earth, quiescent and fruitful. The Rhine is a father, as is the Nile, the wind and storm, thunder and lightning. The father is the "auctor" and represents authority, hence also law and the state. He is that which moves in the world, like the wind; the guide and creator of invisible thoughts and airy images. He is the creative wind-breath – the spirit, pneuma, atman.

Here Jung acknowledges the image of the father as the representation of the true forces of nature like storms and hurricanes. Likewise, whereas Russian defence in WWII emphasized protecting 'the Motherland', Germans deemed 'Fatherland' more suitable for offensive warfare. It appears that while Mother Earth accounts for the serenity of nature, all the dynamic agencies and aggression of the natural world can be considered expressions of the will of the father. Interestingly Jung also bestows creativity to the father, dubbing him the "auctor", the originator of the world in spirit and the authority that holds up its natural laws, while he maintains that Nature itself is feminine.

Upon realizing the immensity of the collective portion of the unconscious outside of any possible influence of the ego, Jung theorized that "human psyche could be one aspect of a psyche the size of the world" (Tacey 2009, 16.). His theory was a rediscovery of sorts, of the Neoplatonic ideas of *anima mundi*, a world soul. Jung considered that the world soul was "a projection of the unconscious" and since there was no way to "provide an objective experience of this kind and thus furnish objective proof of the world's animation", it remained as "nothing more than an analogy of the animating principle in man, which inspires his thoughts and acts of cognition" (Jung qtd. in Cashford 2018, 330). In reversal of what was discussed before, here

quite remarkably the world that has been largely considered inanimate is instead the one with a spirit and the one who is in turn animating us.

Jung was evidently intrigued by the idea that the earth affects us through a psychic connection. Indeed, he saw the foundations of human psyche rooted in the earth in what he calls “conditioning of the mind by the earth” (Jung 1970, 30). Based largely on his sessions of psychotherapy and knowledge of primitive foreign cultures, Jung hypothesized that the human psyche is affected by the soil that it inhabits, noting as an example “the mysterious Indianization of the American people” (Jung 1970, 46), theorizing that, in fact, it is the land that ultimately conquers the newcomers and not the other way around. Where we live has an undeniable effect on our identity, but we can debate on the extent of that effect *ad infinitum*. It is also worth considering what other entities may have a hand in shaping our unconscious. Morton (2013, 85) ponders on the ontological possibilities that if in thinking about hyperobjects we are thinking into existence the mind itself, asking that “is it not highly likely that the way our minds are is to some extent, perhaps a large extent, influenced by hyperobjects”. On a more concrete level, certainly growing up near farm animals can influence one’s attitudes towards the dairy industry, for example. Since global warming has been a present issue for as long as I can remember, it has arguably granted me a disposition that could be seen as a form of conditioning.

One last intriguing spiritualistic concept that relates to this study is the *genius loci*. This Latin expression originally referred to the Roman religious spirits who were identified as dwelling specifically within the bounds of a certain place, which an altar, shrine, or temple in their honour would signify. Similar concepts of protective spirits have existed throughout the world, aside from the Roman Empire in many parts of Asia and Americas especially. *Genius loci* has different connotations depending on the circumstance, mainly understood metaphorically in the modern Western sense as related to architecture, design, and the arts. The concept has taken on a new life in modern fantasy where imaginary creatures may embody the place of their dwelling. Similarly, places like magical forests, lakes, even entire planets or ecosystems may seem to have a spirit of their own.

Marilena Vecco (2020, 225) defines *genius loci* as “the intangible quality of a material place, perceived both physically and spiritually”, revealing “itself through visible tangible and perceivable non-material features”. Any place has both a tangible quality as well as a more intangible character, intangible being the signified reality formed through religion, mythology, national history, cultural portrayal, and individual experience. It is debatable if the intangible structure is only revealed through first-hand experience, as Vecco (2020, 227) writes that “[g]enius loci should be understood in reference to human perception and sensation”, though

this could be considered to include seeing enough images and videos or reading extensively about experiences of that place. Vecco (2020, 229) posits *genius loci* as a meta-concept “based on the assumption that it is made of different layers”, being “a multidimensional construct of the natural, the social, the empirical and the cultural”.

Some critics have studied *genius loci* as a representation of national ethos in literature. The guiding principles and key features of a nation’s literature may be shaped by its perceived spirit, a national character if you will. It grants an aura to the writers of that land as if conditioning them through invisible ties to places in memory. Jonathan M. Kertzer (1991, 73) writes: “Literature, at a further remove, is an epi-phenomenon, a network of symbols that give tangible expression to an intangible spirit”. In this sense, I relate the concept of *genius loci* to a *zeitgeist*. Whereas *zeitgeist*, ‘the spirit of an age’, is concerned with the temporal dimension, *genius loci* corresponds to the spatial. The genius, the spirit of a land, is a shared, continuous experience passed on throughout the pages of countless works. Akin to a hyperobject, once experienced, it sticks to an individual persistently through its inseparable ubiquity in relation to the experienced place. Kertzer (1991, 74), in his search for the ghostly spirit in Canadian literature, also likens the *genii* to national minds or entities, such as Uncle Sam in the case of United States. Uncle Sam is the embodiment of the unified whole of the American people, reflection of a shared sense of place and purpose. In this instance, the concept comes to resemble a distinct entity with morals and a code of conduct.

On a national level, Marvel’s superhero Captain America, a supersoldier who drapes himself in the colours of the flag of the United States, seems to be a younger militarized rendering of Uncle Sam. He embodies the American values of freedom and self-governance in battles against supervillains that have embodied other ideological locations such as communist Russia and Nazi Germany. As an extension of the military-industrial complex, he also seems to represent less noble ideals like interventionism, imperialism and exceptionalism. While Captain America may be considered to embody ideas attached to a locale, he is perhaps not bound to a location like *genius loci* is often thought to be. Aside from distinct entities, abstract *genius loci* can also work on a national level. Here in Finland, akin to conditioning effect, we may see the harsh winter and rural landscape interwoven with our national spirit *sisu*, the ability to maintain resilience and determination even under duress. Traditional folk legends also play their part in associating spirits within definite boundaries.

In relation to modern fantasy, *genius loci* is a term that is sometimes applied to sentient places. Technological *genius loci* may occur when a developed AI portrays a credible level of sentience to be considered alive. In *2001: Space Odyssey* (1968), HAL 9000 is integrated into

the spaceship to the extent that it controls virtually all its functions, effectively embodying the spacecraft. Genius loci of a more magical or scientifically unexplainable nature can be found embodying places, houses, and larger locales in fantasy literature and film. These may manifest in more subtle ways, like surroundings ‘calling’ to wanderers, or in a more obvious and direct manner with a single specific intellect or form rather than disembodied voices in the dark. More often than not, the quality of being alive is merely hinted at and not made explicit.

For example, haunted houses are often portrayed as if the building itself is somehow evil. This may manifest as physical danger or via oppressive mental influence that drives the inhabitants insane, aka cabin fever. In *The Shining* (1980) the solitude of the Overlook Hotel presses on Jack Torrance and makes him vulnerable to the hotel’s eerie manipulation. In the television series *Lost* (2004–2010), the island where the survivors live after their plane crash is a mystical place that seems to have a will of its own. The genius loci of the island – eventually anthropomorphised as a caretaker entity – comes through in various ways, influencing the survivors through other agents and guarding itself from the rest of the world. Certainly, the genius loci can also manifest as a more benevolent character, and often the localized caretaker aspect is then emphasized. A solid case can be made for Tom Bombadil as a genius loci of the Old Forest in Tolkien’s legendarium, for example (Jacobs 2020, 81), and also Old Man Willow as well as the Ents and Huorns may fit under this categorization. Suffice it to say, there are numerous instances of different sorts of uncanny powers stemming from the surrounding environment found in literature and film that can be seen to represent genius loci.

Yet planetary genius loci are not that common. Among the most significant examples is the ocean planet in Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* (1961). Lem’s novel is concerned with the difficulties in communicating with lifeforms totally alien to us. In it, the planet Solaris is formed of single liquid mass, which is theorized to be a living entity. Scientists are puzzled by the extent of the mental functions and properties of the entity: “The ocean lived, thought and acted. The ‘Solaris problem’ had not been annihilated by its very absurdity. We were truly dealing with a living creature. The ‘lost’ faculty was not lost” (Lem 1970, 171). While they struggle to communicate with the living ocean, it in turn creates perfect human simulacra to interact with the humans, demonstrating its psychic powers while eluding human contact and understanding. A similar instance of a planetary genius loci may be observed in Arthur C. Clarke’s short story “Crusade” (1968), where a planet-scale artificial intelligence inhabiting a far-off planet explores space via probes of itself to see whether relocation is achievable. Both of these examples defy anthropomorphic representation, while underscoring the incomprehensibility that an alien intelligence of this magnitude is likely to portray. Lem (2002) commented later that it was his

intention to “cut all threads leading to the personification of the Creature, i.e. the Solarian Ocean, so that the contact could not follow the human, interpersonal pattern”. Although he does acknowledge that the entity “appears quite stubborn” (ibid.), which is itself an admission of human character. Though the distinct genius loci remains largely incomprehensible, its psychic, conditioning influence is discernible.

In the end we are left with two different adaptations of genius loci: other is loose and abstract, the other condensed. I would like to tie these together with each other and the concept of personification and see what they can add particularly to fantasy literary criticism in that sense. If the abstract genius, the spectral spirit of the land that influences artists’ hands, can be concentrated into a tangible form like that of Uncle Sam, is it possible to condense other localities into material beings based on perceived characteristics? Consider, for example, the river in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha* (1922), which teaches the protagonist and is treated as a being with a voice and plenty of wisdoms to share. Living by the river, Siddhartha eventually finds what he is looking for by communicating with the spirit of that place, embodied in the “esteemed river” (Hesse [1922] 2008, 113). A passage such as “its voice rang out strangely. It was laughing, it was distinctly laughing! The river was laughing clearly and merrily at the old ferryman” (Hesse 1922 [2008], 102) cannot be written off as a mere pathetic fallacy, because the personification there goes beyond a mere passing metaphor. Admittedly *Siddhartha* is a novel fundamentally concerned with spirituality, but that should be of secondary importance here. In fact, precisely its focus on a culture outside of the Western deanimation paradigm gives *Siddhartha* the ability to express the agency of the river. Since the book is situated in Buddha’s lifetime, when animism in Europe was still far from being extinguished, for Hesse merely travelling back in time could have sufficed to escape the zeitgeist that was suppressing the distinct genius loci in the early 1900s.

I believe that genius loci should be considered as a method of translating the obviously animated world and its agencies so that they can be better represented via characters of more tangible dimensions. Thus, the concept of genius loci becomes tied to being a subject. Wherever definite agency appears among the objectified landscape, influencing other beings but existing despite of them, distinct genius loci can be observed. In that regard, even entire planets or worlds can be viewed as genius loci if they exhibit sentience. Elsewhere more subtle conditioning of the mind by the environment may be regarded as influence deriving from abstract genius loci. Coincidentally, the measure of how clearly the genius manifests within the literary work is innately linked with the categorization of the work. The more explicit the genius loci, the more fantastical the work. In her following work, Jemisin has chosen to delve into

personification further through cities, starting a series where Earth's major cities are personified as avatars with *The City We Became* (2020). This to me suggests a fitting place for the continued exploration of the concept of the distinct genius loci.

### 3.3 Narrative Element

All the preceding theoretical aspects illustrate the background and methods of lifting objects onto a subject state and a position where they can act independently. Accordingly, I theorize that it also supports the reasoning of why they may be studied as actors and characters in literature. Thus, what remains is to examine what sort of agency and what kind of roles they may inhabit in narratives. All in all, *The Broken Earth* trilogy features several narratological features worthy of note, including extensive use of second person narration. Chapters written in this more unusual perspective alternate with those in the first and third person, which may be a method to counter the difficulty associated with sustaining second person narration. All the different points of view also happen during different timeframes, making the narrative order non-linear, although this fact is largely obscured by the use of present tense. The chronology does not become clear until the episteme revelations of Damaya taking on the orogene name of Syenite, and Hoa's vague recounting of Syenite's fate after the battle of Meov that reveals she took on the identity of Essun to live a new ordinary life in the town of Tirimo. In many instances the narrative voice relishes in forms of "deferred identification", where the reader can only later establish the identity of an equivocal character (Jannidis 2009, 21). These aspects of the trilogy make it fascinating to study with a narratological approach. It is also useful for building a case for the setting as an actor and more specifically as a character, which is another extraordinary narratological feature of the books and the primary focus of this study. That is why narratological concepts are embedded into other sections of this thesis a well.

The very first thing to consider is agency. Commonly, humans are the entities in stories who exhibit most agency. They have goals, their viewpoints are focalized, and they initiate most of the action in a narrative. But it is possible to see agency in the natural and artificial world around the main characters as well: "Actors are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human" (Bal 1997, 5). Actors can be found everywhere, both big and small, fish and mammal, plant or spaceship. The size of the entity is not a limitation for being an actor, nor is the number of human traits. Actors are plenty within most narratives or stories. It is through individualisation and distinctive features that they become *characters*, however (Bal 1997, 9). Fotis Jannidis defines character as "a text- or media-based figure in a storyworld, *usually* human or human-like" (Jannidis 2009, 14; emphasis added). Uri Margolin (2007, 66) similarly notes



that characters are “normally human or human-like”. Studies of characters have tended to regard characters in narratives as people and analyse them accordingly. Certain concepts regarding characters are somewhat problematic in this case, since for example the idea that characters are inferred from a cultural code implies a fundamental difference between living entities and objects. The basis type used to outline the “inside” and “outside” of a character is built on the notion that “early on, humans distinguish between objects and sentient beings” and to the latter they project inner life “such as intentions, wishes, and beliefs” (Jannidis 2009, 18). Yet all characters are ultimately textual constructs and abstract ideas, and as such “they are not open to direct perception by us” (Margolin 2007, 68), much like hyperobjects. If the reality of every character is at least partly obscured, inferences from visible features and actions are what we are left with, which work with *Father Earth* as well. In this case, the process of characterization is obviously linked with that of ecocentric personification.

If a character is not featured in the fabula or the story as an actor, then we may speak of an external narrator, whereas in the other case Mieke Bal (1997, 22) uses the term *character-bound narrator*. A character-bound narrator differs from an external narrator in that they are themselves part of the events that they are describing. This type of narrator is often called an intradiegetic or a homodiegetic one, as they exist within the narrative and participate in the unfolding of the story. However, being part of something factors into a range of issues, such as credibility and bias. Can a character-bound narrator even be objective if they have a horse in the race, so to speak, or will they tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth even if it sheds an unflattering light on them? As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2009, 59) point out: “Our understanding of a text is pervaded by our sense of the character, trustworthiness and objectivity of the figure who is narrating”, which equals that our reading experience changes drastically with revelations concerning the narrator. These are critical things to keep in mind when focusing on the voice that tells the story. Sometimes the act of telling has been labelled *discourse* to distinguish it from the actual events, the *story* that is recounted and communicated onward. Russian formalists called the plot of the narrative *sjuzet*, which is distinct from actual events of the story, the *fabula* (Baldick 1990, 206). In *Season*, *sjuzet* is intentionally non-chronological, but in the latter two books the anachrony becomes clearer with flashbacks being narrated as happening long ago.

The flashbacks of Hoa recounting the final days of the Syl Anagist empire are in the first person, whereas elsewhere he narrates omnisciently through the eyes of others. It has been said that traditional typologies for the “narrative points of view” fail to make a distinction between the presented vision of the events and “the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that

vision” (Bal 1997, 143). Therefore, the term *focalization* has been employed to refer to the “relationship between the ‘vision’, the agent that sees, and that which is seen [...], the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula” (Bal 1997, 146). In Jemisin’s trilogy, Hoa maintains what Bal calls *character-bound focalization*, presenting the storylines of Essun and Nassun, most importantly, through their eyes to give a view “how differently the various characters view the same facts”, which “can result in neutrality towards all the characters” (Bal 1997, 148). Thus, there is an argument for fair representation of all focalized viewpoints, although the most central focalized character, Essun, is narrated more directly in second person.

While contemporary fiction might be much more at ease with use of second person narrators, it is still a marginal feature. Yet writing in second person usually serves a clear purpose. According to Joshua Parker (2012, 173), it may be a way to distance the self of the author from the text, an alternative form of ‘I’ as such, also giving space for the reader to fill in the character left vacant by the author. Third person may feel too distant, and the text might gain newfound rhythm or immediacy through the use ‘you’ instead of ‘he’ – a reason why second person narration is also commonly in present tense (*ibid.*). Thus, as a balancing act of sorts, the second person seems to offer middle ground between the uncomfortably personal first and the detached third. French novelist Georges Perec remarked that the use of second person blends the author, the reader, and the character all together (Parker 2012, 167). Some regard the narrative mode so off-putting that they cannot engage with a novel that incorporates lots of it. The strangeness of the second person may just result from its lack of use. It has been suggested that after some initial difficulties, readers quickly proceed with a second person text by turning *you* into *I*. However, Parker (2012, 172) states that “[w]hat on the surface seems simply changing a pronoun is actually a complex reconfiguration of the writer’s relationship with her own experiencing self”; a relocation of the writer from the position of “experiencing” to that of “telling” via a narrator that directly addresses “someone else”, giving the author external control of the storyworld.

If we consider that “in any given instance of narrative discourse, someone has chosen (or agreed) to tell someone else that something happened” (Smith 1980, 233), second person narration turns into an engaging transaction. Hence, *Broken* becomes a memory recounted by Hoa to you, Essun, and to you, the reader. The intricacies of the narrative mode are bountiful, and I am afraid this thesis cannot give all of them the proper attention they warrant. I want to acknowledge this fact and refer to other authors such as Kim Wickham (2019) who have engaged more closely with the narrative mode. With a focus on slavery and its effects on intergenerational identity, Wickham (2019, 393) sees the narrative approach as a critical

element of the story, noting how “Essun, as the internal audience of the ‘you’ address, learns the story of her own life at the same time that the reader does”, and that this remarkable use of an already uncommon narrative mode “serves as a crucial tool for Jemisin to make further arguments about slavery and the Black experience”. As such, the unravelling mystery around past identity is a self-discovery that empowers the formerly oppressed.

Lastly, a note on the concepts of *protagonist* and *antagonist*. The protagonist is “the chief character in a play or story” (Baldick 1990, 180). It is a preferable, more neutral alternative to *hero*, which has connotations of inherent virtue, and often “the leading character may not be morally or otherwise superior” (Baldick 1990, 98). The antagonist is “the most prominent of the characters who oppose the \*protagonist or hero(ine) in a dramatic or narrative work. The antagonist is often a villain seeking to frustrate a heroine or hero” (Baldick 1990, 10–11). To find the antagonist, usually the protagonist must first be identified, since the antagonist works against them in the narrative. In *Broken*, these narratological roles are somewhat difficult to appoint clearly to one entity considering how characters change throughout the novels. Essun’s past lives as Damaya and Syenite in *Season*, and Schaffa’s amnesiac rebirth in *Obelisk* are fragmentations of the self that redefine the characters. That is why I want to consider the term *villain* here as well, since it may be more applicable in the end than antagonist. The villain can be defined as “the principal evil character in a play or story”, often the antagonist but also on occasion the protagonist (Baldick 1990, 238). Since the antagonist is defined in opposition to the protagonist, a character that is not situated against who we are inclined to regard as the protagonist can be identified more easily as the villain. Another concept to keep in mind is that of *nemesis*, derived from the Greek goddess who takes vengeance on human hubris, similarly to Gaia (Lovelock 2006, 185). Defined as “retribution or punishment for wrongdoing; or the agent carrying out such punishment” (Baldick 1990, 148), *nemesis* is valuable here particularly because it applies both to the action and the actor.

## 4 Interpreting the Earth

In this chapter, it is time to look more closely at the text and the evidence therein. This is divided into three separate sections. The first one looks at the character of Father Earth and how it manifests throughout the novels. The second explores his relationship with other characters and why he can be considered the antagonist of the story. The third and final section ponders the implications of this villainization and how it relates to the overall thematic context of the work. The overall structure therefore first seeks to establish agency, then see how this agency is utilized and finally asks to what end.

### 4.1 Beneath Broken Earth: Setting as a Character

The Earth in Jemisin's trilogy is an animate one. Even ordinary people that live on the planet – the stills – recognize this because of the volatility in their place of dwelling. Stability is a luxury, and people have come to resent the Earth for its ruthless nature. The very name of their planet has become a curse suitable for all sorts of situations that demand a strong verbal reaction: “What in the rusted burning Earth did you just do?” (*Season 166*) demands Syenite from Alabaster after the latter saves himself from being poisoned through orogenic control over his own bloodstreams. “Evil Earth” is a common expletive in the Stillness, telling of the fact that people regard the Earth as having malevolent characteristics in of itself. Depending on the situation and the individual, they may or may not be addressing the planet directly as they vent out their frustration, but evidently, they do consider the Earth as being alive to some extent, as if it acts out of its own accord.

The orogenes are also on the receiving end of this enmity and sometimes deservedly so. Their harnessing of the kinetic energy of the Earth is often enough to set off wider cataclysms that affect the lives of many who happen to be near such an event. The destruction that their carelessness – or in some cases more deliberate action – leaves in its wake has been enough to earn them the derogatory nickname “rogga” (*Season 11*) and the subsequent ire of society. The orogenes have organs dubbed *sessapinae* in their brainstem that allow them to sense, or “to sess” (*Season 465*) the Earth's tectonic activity. By having larger *sessapinae* than the average people, orogenes are more tuned to the subtle vibrations of the ground, some even able to perceive benign ‘microshakes’ and quell them with ease. Aware of the Earth's constant movement, the orogenes are also more conscious of its presence. From an evolutionary point of view, orogenic abilities in the Stillness could have developed as a natural adaptive measure to the volatile and dangerous environment, lest the whole species wither away in the famine

and clouds of ash.

Upon passing a large area of “rocky, ugly shatterland” caused by “an active fault nearby” (*Season 87*), Schaffa and Damaya gaze at the shift in the landscape. Though not trained in orogeny yet, Damaya is still able to perceive a change in the atmosphere of the locale after the fault line has been “churning out new land over years and decades, which is why in places the ground seems sort of *pushed up* and bare” (*ibid.*). She acknowledges her altered perception of the environment as follows:

Old Father Earth does feel closer, here, than in Palela – or, not *closer*, that’s not really the word for it, but she doesn’t know what words would work better. Easier to touch, maybe, if she were to do so. And, and...it feels...fragile, somehow, the land all around them. Like an eggshell laced with fine lines that can barely be seen, but which still spend imminent death for the chick inside. (*Season 87*)

This could read as Damaya sensing the *genius loci*, ‘the spirit of a place’ in her active surroundings. Though the “visible tangible layer” of the Earth is always relatively close, cracks in it modify the “invisible experience of the place created in the human mind” (Vecco 2020, 229). The omnipresence of Father Earth comes through more clearly amidst the broken landscape, and she is intrigued by the felt change as they pass through the area. The location features an active fault, which is as if the tectonic plates were like the exerted muscles of Father Earth that have exposed an open vein that periodically pulses out inner gases and heated blood within. In this instance, Damaya gains insight beyond the tangible structure of Old Father Earth, seeing the Earth vulnerable for the first time. People fleeing from active faults and shakes rarely witness this exposure close and long enough to experience such awareness. Damaya’s childish curiosity and sensibility grant her a vision not steeped in survivalist pragmatism which sees that the cracks in the Earth are signs of a damaged interior.

According to Kertzer (1991, 81) “*genius loci* is not just the sprit [sic] of place, but the spirit of the history and culture of that place”, a figure blending myth into history and vice versa. One element of Jemisin’s world-building for *Broken* is the creation of *stonelore*, a set of quasi-religious writing offering wisdom from the history of the Stillness. Quotes from *stonelore* are inserted at the end of chapters and occasionally characters recall certain tenets fitting the situation they find themselves in. Aside from samples that read like survivalist aphorisms, such as “Honor in safety, survival under threat. Necessity is the only law” (*Stone 231*), *stonelore* offers insight to the created cultural history of the world. It also features passages where the Earth is personified: “Father Earth thinks in ages, but he never, ever sleeps. Nor does he forget” (*Season 231*). This particular mythopoeic piece of prose comes from the second verse of “*Tablet*

*Two*”, titled “*The Incomplete Truth*” (ibid.), indicating that there is a rich cultural lore fittingly first written on stone tablets, though much is also lost. Nevertheless, it is no wonder that a culture whose fate was so tied to the movements of the land would be heavily influenced by it.

Vecco (2020, 228) asserts that “*genius loci* creates an environmental character via an overall atmosphere and then leads the relations between this and the community”. This environmental character for the majority of Stillness is a harsh, inhospitable and volatile Father Earth. The immense power that Father Earth has demonstrated time after time to those who reside upon his surface has obviously made him a deified entity. “Maybe this is fate, or maybe there really are gods other than Father Earth – ones who actually give a damn about us, that is”, Lerna sighs to Essun after they meet again in Castrima (*Season* 401). Based on this, it can be surmised that at least part of the people of the Stillness subscribe to a monotheist religion where Father Earth is the prime deity. “Earth knows how they learned to do that”, Alabaster casually remarks when discussing the mystery of Guardian origins with Syenite (*Season* 288). The Stillness equal to ‘God knows how/what/why’, the turn of phrase incidentally happens to be very true in this case, since the Earth is the agent responsible for the creation of the Guardians and the oppressive system that they have installed in place. For thousands of years, Father Earth has worked to undermine orogene agency in the world likely both as a means of self-preservation and vengeance.

The physical manifestations of geological power have added to his renown throughout the history of the Stillness. The overpowering geological entity is the most visible and felt godly power on the continent, and the world and its people are conditioned by his omnipresence. Such an ecocentric religious disposition is not far from the indigenous belief systems in our world that have come face to face with the sublime nature. The now thawing ice of the polar regions for one has been a source of awe for generations to the people living in contact with it, such as for the Inuits, whose religious views “were literally rooted in the unpredictability and environmental extremes encountered in the Arctic” (Dodds 2018, 95–96). It is not hard to see why native understanding would regard icesheets the size of skyscrapers as things to be treated with respect and moving glaciers as having agency or even being – for all intents and purposes – alive.

Father Earth is anthropomorphized both in mental and physical proportions. The rift Alabaster tears into the earth at the beginning of trilogy is described akin to a wound ripped open. “Magma wells in its wake, fresh and glowing red” (*Season* 7), like the blood of the earth. This is not the first time Father Earth has been cut deep. These continental rifts are eventually mended, “the wound will scab over quickly in geologic terms”, which is to say not very quickly

in human terms, followed by “the cleansing ocean” that will close the wound and divide the body anew (ibid.). The supercontinent will split into two or more smaller continents, but before this “the wound will fester” (ibid.), spitting out planetary antibodies in the form of heat and gas. The ash clouds will block out the sun, enclosing the world in darkness for what to humans will be a very long time. To Father Earth, ancient as he is, it will be the day of rest after an illness.

Father Earth’s unrivalled age compared to other entities in the trilogy gives him one of the qualities Morton (2013, 62) ascribes to hyperobjects: “Molten, Gaussian temporality ceases simply to be an analogy when you’re thinking about some hyperobjects such as planets, which really do have time melting and rippling along their surfaces and out into space through their gravitational field”. In the science fiction film *Interstellar* (2014), the astronauts spend time on a planet where an hour equals seven years on Earth due to the proximity of a black hole – the supreme hyperobject in some ways. Einstein’s theory of relativity helps us understand the temporal undulation that massive hyperobjects like planets exhibit. Earth’s gravity well and the spacetime vortex bend time so that it passes differently upon the surface of the planet and when traveling in high atmosphere. Hyperobjects are testament to the fact that time and space are relative and not “absolute containers” where entities exist, but rather that they originate from the objects themselves (Morton 2013, 64–65). Thus, Father Earth is the master of his own time, so to speak, and having own personal experience is one of the defining aspects of being a subject.

But what is Father Earth? In Latour’s terms, he is a ‘quasi-object’ borne out of both culture and nature. He is inherently a natural phenomenon, an ancient creature who has the volcanic core of a planet for a heart and rugged stony plateaus for skin. Phasing in and out of human experience, he is also rather evidently a hyperobject. But why is this worthy of note – as noted, hyperobjects are all around us, so what makes this classification significant? It is because defining something as a hyperobject is nothing short of a restructuring of the world of objects. A hyperobject breaks traditional boundaries by proving itself more multi-dimensional, resilient, and active than what the human mind can care to think. To analyse Father Earth – or any place or setting for that matter – as an actor and a character, they cannot be thought of as one-dimensional products of human cognition. In almost every way, the antagonistic setting surpasses human limitations: it is older, larger, sturdier, wiser, and more powerful. Is Father Earth being portrayed with human characteristics then another anthropocentric method of reducing a powerful being that thinks in eons to the same level with humans? Yes and no. Certainly, Father Earth embodies traits that we may view as rather human, such as his speech pattern, his rough exterior, and the way he holds on to a grudge. Yet within the universe of

*Broken*, Father Earth is a primordial being who has obviously influenced the societies on the planet, *on him*, for so long that it would be plausible to say that the humans are quite earth-like instead. Even names like Alabaster and Syenite are evidence of this. Father Earth retains the agency in his interactions, as they happen on his terms. Therefore, human understanding of Father Earth attained through anthropomorphism is not an anthropocentric way of elevating him to our level as much as Father Earth lowering himself by reaching out to the inconsequential beings that travel his world.

By breaking the traditional qualities installed upon objects they come ever closer of becoming subjects. As “the primary interest of Western science is not to get to know living organisms as subjects, but as objects” (Hornborg 2006, 26), it seems science fiction is indeed what we need to break the confines asserted by modernist science. How much can literature help in this is relative to how ‘real’ we consider the fictional entities. Anthropomorphic representation aids in relating to something foreign and alien by giving it human characteristics. Like Essun, Father Earth has lost his child, which aids us in sympathizing with him. Same holds true for every fictional character: we must feel either with them or against them to make them truly stand out and stick to us. Meaningful characters are essential to effective stories, and “so intense is our relationship with literary characters that they often cease to be simply ‘objects’” (Bennett and Royle 2009, 63). Like a setting, so does every character ‘come alive’ in the act of reading. Though he may only exist within a text that is fundamentally fantastical, in a manner Father Earth is as much alive as any literary character. The philosophical debate concerning the true reality of characters is extensive and “though there is currently a broad consensus that character can best be described as an entity forming part of the storyworld, the ontological status of this world and its entities remains unclear” (Jannidis 2009, 17). Nevertheless, being a central entity who performs actions and has goals within the narrative is enough to establish Father Earth as a character in his own right.

## **4.2 The Revenge of Father Earth**

While stories of personal loss are humanizing, Father Earth is still villainized among the cultures of the Stillness. It may be because his tales of loss are just that, tales. The Moon is mostly a myth. Not until legends can be verified can people sympathize with the environment that troubles their lives. They see the symptom, but not the cause, and the original cause is the greed of the planet’s inhabitants. This fractured relationship between nature and culture is what makes the setting of the novel the villain of the story. Like any good villain, the Earth has a tragic backstory. The wound created by the loss of its child, the Moon, has festered and turned



Father Earth into a resentful entity with a lingering vengeance over the exploitation of its resources. Gradually, it begins to fill the role of the antagonist within the story. At the beginning of the third book, it starts to directly take part in the events, even communicating with some of the main characters.

Nassun first comes into contact with it after her use of the obelisks against her father Jija. The Earth seizes control of the two nearby Guardians of the Found Moon comm, Nida and Umber, and Schaffa and the stone eater Nassun refers to as Steel are forced to fight against them. In the midst of the altercation, Nassun becomes aware that “this is [not] quite Nida anymore” (*Stone* 36). Suddenly calm, Nida acts as an outlet for the Earth’s message, voicing that though “it” is angered, “even now it may be willing to compromise, to forgive. It demands justice, but—” before being permanently silenced by Steel who states that “[i]t has had its justice a thousand times over” and that he does not owe it any more (*ibid.*). Steel, aka Remwha, heads the stone eater faction who have been solidified in the belief that the Earth cannot be appeased, and instead seek to destroy most of its life. They cannot do it directly, and so they seek to guide an orogene to do their bidding; Steel’s goal is to manipulate Nassun to use the Obelisk Gate to bring the Moon back with force. To him, the war and the cycle of vengeance, which have continued for tens of thousands of years, deny any other alternative.

This greyish stone eater, Steel, is a potent malevolent force in the trilogy. Though he is known as Steel by Nassun and as Gray Man by her mother, I shall use Remwha since Hoa recalls that being his original name – Hoa himself was Houwha once upon a time. Though Remwha is absent in *Season*, during *Obelisk* he shows up in both Essun’s and Nassun’s storylines. Essun sees him outright as a potential enemy, who shows up in Castrima to feed the dread of the population, encouraging them to surrender to Rennanis. Claiming that Hoa led them to Castrima, Remwha shows off the blood-stained arm of Hoa as proof, which prompts an enraged Essun to use orogeny to slice off his hand in return. While stone eaters regenerate their form with ease using the magic woven into their essence, this initial encounter still sets up Essun and Gray Man, as she calls him, on a collision course from the start. To Nassun, like stated before, Remwha works as a manipulative force rather than a direct opponent. Nassun does not trust him but follows his guidance in the belief that their goals are aligned.

Remwha is distinguishable among the stone eaters in both his age and appearance. His “torso is finely carved with male human musculature rather than the suggestion of clothing that most stone eaters adopt” (*Obelisk* 250), which sets him apart from the others in that, though more statue-like, he wants to signify his lost humanity through an emulation of gender. He is one of the original stone eaters, but his opinions diverged from Hoa’s, and the two formed a

rivalry during the millennia of their lives in stone. Though he at times plays the villain in the narrative, he is not ultimately a force of evil. In fact, he also works to establish a sort of an equilibrium in the Earth system, albeit with the expense of most of its life. “There are those of my kind who believe this world can safely bear only one people”, Hoa explains (*Obelisk* 291). The methods are too extreme to label him an eco-warrior or an advocate of deep ecology. For Hoa, he arguably works as the antagonist since Hoa recognizes that Earth itself is not the enemy. In the end, they reconcile after the Moon has been returned and peace made with the Earth. The wearied and failed Remwha laments how he just “wanted it to end” (*Stone* 391), which suggests he acted out of frustration rather than malevolence, though this does not really prevent him from being an antagonist.

For Essun, Guardian Schaffa is the one who took her from her parents when she first demonstrated a gift for orogeny. He raised her in the harsh controlling manner of the Fulcrum, as a tool that must serve a purpose or be cast off as dangerous. Despite how cruel Schaffa’s intentions may seem, Remwha wagers that he ultimately cares for everyone he has guarded during his long existence, which has outlasted most Guardians. By “loving his charges”, Schaffa has remained at least in part “*human*, where otherwise time would have long since transformed him into something else” (*Stone* 306), he theorizes. While to Essun Schaffa is the permanent image of oppression, to Nassun he is the father that does not hate her for being what she is. Schaffa has been part of the malevolent system of Father Earth, acting as his agent in controlling the orogenes. Only after his corestone connection is compromised after *Season* he attains some freedom of will, and released of Earth’s control, he seeks to correct mistakes of the past by truly helping one orogene, Nassun. Therefore, he can be viewed to be a substitute antagonist, an agent of the real thing.

Traveling to the ancient Syl Anagistine city of Corepoint later on via the ecotechnological mechanisms of the long-dead civilization, the route of Schaffa and Nassun takes them through the inner core of the planet. There, they at last come physically face to face with the heart of the Earth, the immense presence of which renders Schaffa paralyzed because of his lingering connection to it. There Nassun comes to the realization that “*a planet* is a living, breathing thing” and that “the stories about Father Earth being alive are real” (*Stone* 242). Maliciously holding Schaffa in a state of crippling agony, the Earth speaks to Nassun, tauntingly greeting her as “*little enemy*” (*Stone* 245). Hoa emphasizes that this is roughly what the Earth said in human words, since he talks through vibrations that overwhelm all senses. Their meeting only solidifies their animosity; both wish the other dead for what they represent – the loss that they have endured. When it becomes clear to Nassun that she cannot save her gradually

weakening father-figure, she vents to Remwha: “If he dies, I’ll hate you more than I hate the world” (*Stone* 302). Like most of the Stillness, she has come to view the planet as an enemy. She is among the few with the power and knowledge to act against it. As its anger mirrors hers, Nassun comes to see herself in the Earth: “[D]oes she not resonate with the Evil Earth’s wrath, herself? She does. Earth eat her, she does” (*Stone* 249).

There is an undeniable connectivity between the Earth and other actors in the storyworld. Stone eaters and Guardians are both extensions of the Earth, though in a different manner. When Alabaster is wounded in the battle on the island of Meov, a stone eater begins to pull him under ground, causing immediate alarm in Syenite. Upon seeing the stone eater’s hand come up, her first instinct is to defend herself before realizing that the creature is grasping “the back of Alabaster’s head with remarkable gentleness. No one expects a mountain to be gentle” (*Season* 434). Her predisposition is telling of the norms so prevalent and long-ago established that the generalization seems justified. No one among the humans of the Stillness remembers a time when things were different. Now the animated environment necessitates alertness that supersedes any notion of comfort.

The Stillness is largely bereft of the fruitful, quiescent features associated with Mother Nature. There are glimpses of such instances. At one point, when passing through the woods in a group without talking Essun thinks how “silence of the forest, save for the rustling of small creatures through the undergrowth and the occasional tap-tap of wood-boring animals in the distance, demands more of the same” (*Obelisk* 131). She recognizes that hearing these voices of nature requires more silence on their part. There might be more of these instances where we can see nature speak, but the narrative focus on world-shaping events overshadows them. The animal relationships in the Stillness are largely pragmatic – we do not see much in the way of pets or farm animals outside of the Equatorials, and most of the comms seem to operate on a hunter-gatherer level during a Season. Living off the land is not ensured, and shortages may lead to drastic measures during Seasons. Thus, there is no fruitful providing Mother Earth to rely on.

It is plausible that Jemisin made her world masculine to emphasize its aggressive and dynamic role. Replacing ‘Mother’ with ‘Father’ also sheds the most immediate connection to our cultural history regarding the concept of nurturing Mother Earth. Patriarchal association gives Father Earth definite control over his estate and instant authority over the lands. Jung (1970, 36) considered that the father archetype in a child’s psyche is at first a godlike image, and while the reality of the humanness eventually sets in, the archetype dissolves into the powers of society and law, always representing a higher authority beyond control:

The father goes about, talks with other men, hunts, travels, makes war, lets his bad moods loose like thunderstorms, and at the behest of invisible thoughts he suddenly changes the whole situation like a tempest. He is the war and the weapon, the cause of all changes; he is the bull provoked to violence or prone to apathetic laziness. He is the image of all the helpful or harmful elemental powers.

As such, the archetype of the father embodies most of the qualities of a volatile setting like the one in *Broken*. Father Earth lets his bad moods loose in earthquakes, and his fatherly effect forces people to travel and hunt for food. Yet his male personality does not explain his entire being: “Self-control is a typically masculine ideal, to be achieved by the repression of feeling” (Jung 1970, 41), and Father Earth can only control himself for so long before another Season. Father Earth’s emotional side stems from his *anima*, the feminine figure of feelings, which his rugged exterior conceals and tries to suppress. Yet eventually in his grief he must let loose the tempest in him.

The theory that a land conditions the mind is rather applicable to fantasy literature where this usually invisible entanglement can be made more explicit. Jung (1970, 49) saw that “the unconscious chains us to the earth” and noted how precariously unrooted we become once this connection becomes alien to us. The silvery magic that flows out of Earth’s core and out onto the world to tie it together is in essence a connection to the Earth itself. In Jung’s words: “That is the danger that lies in wait for the conqueror of foreign lands, and for every individual who, through one-sided allegiance to any kind of -ism, loses touch with the dark, maternal, earthy ground of his being” (ibid.). This illustrates the difference between the Sylanagistine conquerors and the Niess who they conquered. Whereas the Niess were once in touch with the Earth, attuned to its magic in an unparalleled way, the people of Syl Anagist labelled this connection unnatural in their state of envy. The Niess did not want to power increasingly complex machinations with that power, like they did in Syl Anagist. By not laying a claim on the magic of the Earth, their connection to it remained pure. Sylanagistine conquerors did not give the land time to conquer them, instead rejecting the guiding foreign genius. Thus, they became rootless, left with a one-sided allegiance to the promise of Geoarcanity, “an energetic cycle of infinite efficiency” (*Stone* 97), which obscured a potential true connection with the Earth. The all-encompassing empire was hence unfounded in the land it habited, and the ascending technological marvels that fed on the land deepened the friction in this relationship.

The power-hungry rulers of Syl Anagist sought total domination over nature by advancing inwards to seek the lifeforce of the deep Earth. This silvery magic, if thought of as

energy, mirrors the immense resource value of geothermal heat that is coming within humanity's technological grasp. That final push toward a Type I Kardashev scale civilization proved disastrous, however, since it resulted in the calamity of the Seasons. By pushing the Moon off its orbital pattern, the original opening of the Obelisk Gate tilted the non-linear system onto a new state and compromised the Earth system in more ways than one. "Father Earth keeps his own equilibrium" (*Obelisk* 68), notes Essun when pressured about the severity of the current Season. They always end, she knows, but it might take up to ten thousand years for the rifting to mend and stop venting out the ash, which aside from clouding the skies and polluting clean breathable air also might cover and cool the oceans, bringing about an even harsher Season of long winter, if not an ice age (*ibid.*). The world would survive, but people likely would not. In this, the Seasons are Jemisin's version of Gaia's revenge. Alike Gaia, Father Earth can weather the storm that will cleanse the unruly creatures if that brings some peace and stability.

The two beings resemble one another in many ways. In *Revenge of Gaia*, Lovelock (2006, 16) suggests that Earth is already an elder being that may be too worn to regulate its own atmosphere, too tired to adapt to the drastic changes that the Industrial Revolution jumpstarted. Like too much sun ages us humans, same goes for Gaia (Lovelock 2009, 154). It is possible that "Old Father Earth" could even be older than our Earth. Like Gaia, it probably also became a parent when the Moon detached from its surface after a cosmic collision. In Greek mythology, the goddess of the Moon, Artemis, and the personification of the Moon, Selene, are Gaia's great-granddaughter and granddaughter, respectively. Though Gaia is the primordial originator of all life, here she differs from Father Earth who is portrayed as the father of the Moon. Though even so, Zeus, the father of lunar goddess Artemis bears a resemblance to Father Earth.

Nemesis, another Greek deity, is who enacts the retribution of the gods upon mortals who have offended them in their hubris. As such, we may consider Nemesis as the executor of Gaia's revenge. After experiencing the truth about Father Earth first-hand, Nassun reflects on the arrogant ways of the ancients:

It may never have occurred to them that so much magic, so much *life*, might be an indicator of...awareness. The Earth does not speak in words, after all—and perhaps [...] these builders of the great obelisk network were not used to respecting lives different from their own. [...] So where they should have seen a living being, they saw only another thing to exploit. Where they should have asked, or left alone, they raped. (*Stone* 247–248)

The similarities between the ancient Syl Anagistine practices and those of modern capitalism are rather evident here. The highly ecological tone at the end reads like an environmentalist

manifesto that judges the ill practices of corporate greed. It seems the advanced Syl Anagistine biotechnology could have given them sufficient mastery over the renewable energy in nature, so why the hunger for more and why was it harmful? Though their planet is likely an open system in regard to energy, if the lifeforce i.e., magic, is not energy but matter, then there was only so much of it available. Supposedly the system, Father Earth, realized how insatiable their appetite was and decided to protect the entire biosphere from what would ultimately destroy it.

The magic in the trilogy is the life that animates the world. The malevolence of the Sylanagistines is materialized in how they trap the souls of other magically adept races in the Plutonic Engine that fuels their civilization. When they were forcing Hoa and others to master the Obelisk Gate, he came to the realization that the “secret of magestry” was a non-rational component: “This is magic, after all, not science” (*Stone* 332). The obelisks themselves were alive, and only with their permission could he use them. Why the gate had not worked until then was due to a practice of deanimation on the part of the Syl Anagist people. In that, their scientific worldview mirrors ours. “Better to enslave a great inanimate object that cannot feel pain and will not object” (*Stone* 334), Hoa mockingly comments on their attempt to harvest the power of the Earth. The lifeforce – energy, fuel, geothermal heat, whichever the metaphor – there is not “limitless” either, he acknowledges, and therefore “Syl Anagist is ultimately unsustainable” (*ibid.*).

It is “the ancient war between life and Father Earth” (*Stone* 11) that sets up the narrative in the present of the storyworld, but the analepsis into the past reveals the origins of the conflict. Father Earth has been the enemy, the antagonist of the Stillness for forty thousand years, ruining civilizations as revenge for the loss of his child. However, the flashbacks tell of an unjust empire that should have known better than to push the planet past its breaking point. Thus, Father Earth has been villainized in the lore of the Stillness, which considers him a malignant deity bent on destruction, but the surviving narrative is not the whole story. The gaps would reveal the humanizing tale of love and loss, but without them the Stillness stands against him.

### **4.3 A Narrative against the World**

In many ways, *The Broken Earth* subverts the usual fantasy trope where a world on the brink of destruction is in need of a hero to save it. This is evident right from the start of *Season*, when the first character introduced decides to break the Earth in half. To him, Alabaster, the world – or his world – is a cruel, wicked place filled oppression and enslavement that needs to be washed away. This is true for many of the central characters the reader comes to know. Most of the focalized characters are orogenes who echo Alabaster’s sentiment towards the world. Evil

Father Earth has taken everything from Nassun, and she decides to destroy him for it. We follow her on this quest, not knowing if to root for her success or failure. Jemisin gives us a world that seems to warrant destruction. But when Alabaster breaks the world, it is actually the first act of mending it. He tears the rift open in the Equatorials, starting from the capital Yumenes that he sees as the root of all evil as it houses the Fulcrum and oppressive governmental structures. The ensuing Fifth Season will be horrible, and many will die, he knows this, but it will cleanse the world if they can at last bring the Moon back. A glimmer of hope and the end of the Seasons lingers on the prospect that the people can fix their broken relationship with Father Earth by giving back what was taken from him.

The narrative of *Broken* is quite captivating and creative: the combined use of first, second, third person narration; a non-chronological narrative order; the setting's antagonistic role as the of the story. *Season* is told from the perspectives of Essun, Syenite and Damaya. Essun's chapters are in second person, while Syenite's and Damaya's are in third. *Obelisk* continues Essun's second person narration, adding a third person account of her daughter Nassun's journey and a brief one for Schaffa until she meets Nassun. *Stone* additionally features extended interludes where Hoa recounts the distant past in first person. One of the central narratological questions in *Broken* concerns the perceived protagonist of the story. While Essun might be the obvious candidate, her storyline is fragmented by the parallel narration of her earlier life where she was known by another name, first Damaya and then Syenite. To Wickham (2019, 394), Essun's fractured narratives signal the fragmentation of her identity post-slavery. There is an element of finding oneself in her storyline, and the reader experiences it alongside her since the fragmentation is revealed only later on. Since how a character is narrated is crucial to how we perceive and relate to a character (Jannidis 2009, 15), the protagonist of a narrative is largely created by the narrator.

Hoa presents another fascinating point of study as the narrator of *Broken*. Him being the narrator is not evident immediately either, but gradually we come to learn who he is and what he is working towards. As an intradiegetic narrator, he could also be the protagonist, but in the first two books he would have to be considered something of a hidden one, if that. In *Stone*, he assumes a more central role within the narrative, recounting his involvement in the onset of the Seasons. For the better part of the trilogy, his origins are an enigmatic gap in the narrative. He lays out the story (fabula, the actual events) in a way that pleases him. While Hoa was originally human, his transformation into the stone eater form also altered his perception of time. With increased longevity, the passing of time has become inconsequential to him: "So I wait. Time passes. A year, a decade, a week. The length does not matter" (*Stone* 397). He thinks in ages

like Father Earth, reflecting the timeframe of geology where a human lifespan is but a split second. Therefore, it follows that the temporality of the narrator differs from that of the narratee, Essun, and the reader who is interpreting the storyworld through her eyes. At the start of *Stone*, Hoa mentions the strangeness of his storytelling experience – “it feels of now as I recall myself of then” (*Stone* 2) –, lamenting that his “memories are like insects fossilized in amber. They are rarely intact, these frozen, long-lost lives” (*Stone* 1). Alabaster too wagers that after living for thousands of years it is difficult to remember even one’s own name, which is why they rarely talk about who they are, as they have forgotten this. He is of the opinion that it is their lifespan and not their composition that eventually renders them unhuman (*Obelisk* 168). Memory is notably a fickle source to be trusted, and it seems even more so in Hoa’s case. Are we not then dealing with an unreliable narrator?

According to Wickham (2019, 405), Hoa’s interludes in first person can be read “as a type of rememory: as Hoa narrates Essun’s life of oppression, pain, loss, and finally a type of freedom, his own memories intrude upon his storytelling, demanding that he also tell his own story that is different from, but also the same as, Essun’s”. Wickham draws our attention to how the storytelling seems to refresh Hoa’s memory, as Hoa remarks at one point: “Fascinating. All of this grows easier to remember with the telling” (*Stone* 143). These intrusive comments can be regarded as *metanarration*, which “refers to narrator’s reflections on the act or process of narration” (Neumann and Nünning 2009, 204). Such remarks are prevalent throughout the trilogy, growing more common towards the end. Since they “may also contribute to substantiating the illusion of authenticity that a narrative seeks to create” (Neumann and Nünning 2009, 205), they are instinctively problematic. Ultimately, we cannot verify the truthfulness of anything that Hoa has recounted about Essun’s life, though like Wickham points out, we have no explicit reason to distrust him. The reason why Hoa focuses on the pain and hardships in Essun’s life, passing “a time of happiness” as “unimportant” (*Season* 361), is because these are the experiences that shape us and therefore shape the future (Wickham 2019, 407). However, I contend that weighing the narrator’s credentials is crucial in the context of a world where knowledge has survived sparsely in the time after a cataclysmic event some 40,000 years before. If all there is to go by are the distant and often ambiguous legends of stonelore and the fragmented memories of stone-beings, much of history remains unverifiable.

Hoa is effectively a hyperobject distributed so vastly in time that it is nigh impossible to grasp his whole timeline. His agency has affected the Stillness during tens of thousands of years, longer than almost anyone else. His contemporaries Antimony or Remwha could have narrated a vastly different account of events. Because Essun is central to the story and Hoa has



taken an interest in her, her life is the window through which Hoa illuminates the history and major events of the Stillness. Remwha, who sought to destroy the Earth as payback, would have likely presented Father Earth in an even more antagonistic manner: “Commonly, a narrator will design his tale so as to lead his audience to make certain more or less specific and stable inferences appropriate to the nature of his *own* interests in the narrative transaction” (Smith 1980, 231). Near the end of *Obelisk*, Hoa admits that telling the story “in your mind, in your voice, telling you what to think and know” is selfish, he know this, but imploringly asks to “continue a bit longer”, as otherwise “it’s difficult to feel like part of you” (*Obelisk* 280). Since storytelling seems to serve a mnemonic purpose for Hoa, the narrative discourse arguably grows more accurate during the trilogy. Ultimately, however, I consider Hoa an intrusive narrator whose subjectivity may affect his reliability. Since he is romantically interested in the person he narrates to, the extent of narrative power should be acknowledged in this interaction.

The present Essun is narrated in second person, so the reader assumes her position within the story: “You are she. She is you. You are Essun” (*Season* 15). Is the reader, then, the supposed protagonist? Wickham (2019, 397) identifies the narrative mode so that “the story is being told by an I-narrator, who was present for the events being narrated, not to ‘you the reader,’ but to ‘you,’ an intradiegetic narratee Essun, who will receive the story of her own life”. While I agree with this conjecture, I believe there is also a sought-after evocative effect achieved with the second person narration. Unlike Wickham who focused on the portrayal of slavery in *Broken*, I have centred my attention on its intrinsic ecocritical message. I believe that placing the reader into the position of a character trying to save the world evokes the ecological conscience of the reader. Parker (2012, 173) summarizes aptly that “[i]f readers empathize with these ‘you’ characters, it is because, like many literary techniques, they put us and the narrated self in a position of a seemingly shared subjectivity”. This added immersion makes us visualize ourselves in the story, which is an effective method for reflecting on our actions and attitudes toward our environment.

There is an evident parallel between the characters of Essun and Father Earth. Both act out the anguish that loss of their offspring has caused, and the hope of reunification is the driving force behind their actions. The narration of one of the short interludes in *Obelisk* suggests this parallel too by way of a metaphor that Hoa lays out. In it, he postulates what Essun would have done if an otherwise inconsequential vermin infestation would have taken part in her son’s demise. She would have tried to destroy them no doubt, but they might survive and continue to remember her vengeful might, splitting into factions after generations that would either try to destroy or appease her. Hoa inclines he belongs to the latter, implying that Essun

in this metaphor is Father Earth, and the vermin are stone eaters (*Obelisk* 75–76). His reasons for trying to reconcile with the world rather than destroy are obvious in face of his realization that “[l]ife cannot exist without the Earth. Yet there is a not-insubstantial chance that life will win its war, and destroy the Earth. We’ve come close a few times” (*Obelisk* 76). Throughout his eons-long existence, Hoa has recognized the symbiotic relationship between the planet and the life on it as parts of the biosphere that must adapt to each other.

In a world where most see the larger locale as hostile, Hoa works to correct this perception and tries to heal the relationship between nature and society. We too as readers follow how Essun learns why and how the world could be healed, first struggling to get past the notion of hating it. Nassun, whose storyline moves against the Earth until the very end, is young and misled, and therefore from her subjective position Earth is the villain, the very evil incarnate, and she is prepared to go to great lengths to destroy it. Only Essun’s sacrifice is a strong enough catalyst to break the spell that the long cultural narrative of the Stillness has cast on her. Hoa’s sublime character and his role as the intradiegetic narrator are instrumental textual elements in *Broken*. Stone eaters were once humans, but they have been cursed with eternal earthly existence, becoming liminal hyperobjects that act on the fringes of human society. They are quasi-objects, made of natural minerals and memories of being human, and the mediators who communicate how to fix the world. In essence, they *are* technology, made of rare earth metals like computer chips and batteries. Hornborg (2006, 30) ponders about the strange object nature of technology, noting how after being “classified as object, technology is automatically immune to political critique. For how could ‘pure’ objects be conceived as sources of malign agency?”. Thus, stone eaters effectively challenge a plethora of conceptions regarding the agency of technology and objects. The omniscient narrative mode can be explained by their uncanny chthonic connection: in Earth all beings share subjectivity. That is how Hoa is able to narrate the thoughts of Essun after she ultimately assumes the same stony essence. The way that the Earth has also absorbed beings past their corporeal form suggests a collective unconscious. In eventually becoming one with the Earth, all life joins the silvery flow that feeds the future with its energy.

The human–Earth relationship during this new millennium has become intertwined with the concept of Anthropocene, a proposed new geological epoch that signifies human effect on the environment. Particularly employed in the humanities, Anthropocene is a framing device that tries to force us to think planetarily. Timothy Clark (2015, 13) writes that “the Anthropocene enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time, something which alters significantly the way that many once familiar issues appear.

Perhaps too big to see or even to think straight (a ‘hyperobject’, certainly)”. It is also a politicizing tool to make every action an environmental action to some degree (Clark 2015, 9). The widespread use of Anthropocene is a curious phenomenon since geological timespans are like those of hyperobjects – so massive that often it is questionable if using them when not necessary introduces anything of value. Embedding geological time into a fictional story certainly gives it an uncanny yet scientifically sound element. Like hyperobjects, in its unfathomableness the Anthropocene begs recognition of a transformative era in human history.

In short, the Anthropocene suggests that humans have become a geological force. To those who have read the *The Broken Earth*, this might seem eerily reminiscent. Orogeny is human geological power manifested in an uncannily direct manner. Jemisin’s orogeny effectively mirrors the controversial emerging science of geoengineering that proposes we could modify our climate artificially to save the human race. Clive Hamilton (2013, 18) writes how “climate engineering is intuitively appealing to a powerful strand of Western technological thinking and conservative politicking that sees no ethical or other obstacle to total domination of the planet”. In *Alabaster*, we have what Hamilton labels Prometheans, the advocates of climate engineering: “He takes all that, the strata and the magma and the people and the power, in his imaginary hands, Everything. He holds it. He is not alone. The earth is with him. Then *he breaks it*” (*Season 7*). While his ultimate motivation is noble, he also knowingly seals the fate of countless people with his actions. Hamilton (2013, 18–19) goes on to “suggest that climate engineering is the last battle in a titanic struggle between Prometheans and Soterians”, those aspire for technological mastery and those who advise caution, erring himself on the side of caution due to “a conviction that the Earth is unlikely to collaborate in our plans”. This unchecked Promethean urge towards geoengineering must be weighed with Soterian caution as not tip a non-linear system past a point-of-no-return. One of the furthest-out-there interpretations of *Broken* is the one where we are hearing the veiled story of Howard, a leading geoengineer in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century who is partly to blame for the experiments that accidentally tilt the Earth’s orbit and disrupt its seasonal patterns.

Why what is on the surface level a narrative against a world is ultimately an advocacy for healing it is the question at the heart of the trilogy. That is why it is also worthwhile to ponder on the future of the world in *Broken*. Now that the Earth is once again whole and the Seasons have been brought to an end, it is conceivable that there will be a period of rebuilding. The capital Yumenes and countless other cities fell to the shakes, but now there is stability to erect them anew. New construction might not need to happen under the ethos of practicality and survival, provided that the Stillness will now live up to its name without the irony. The

appeased Earth should have no immediate cause to keep the cycle of destruction going, though careless or rogue orogenic actions might disrupt the newly acquired peace. How well will history be taught matters a great deal, or future civilizations may develop an unchecked hunger for power yet again, prompting them look inwards to the Earth's core for resources. Possibly even towards the Moon for its minerals when it eventually becomes within reach. Harvesting operations upon Father Earth's child would no doubt incite his anger once again. This wanton act of greed could be possible if the lessons from the time of the Seasons are forgotten after eons come to pass. It is quite probable that Father Earth's significance in the culture of the Stillness will diminish and slowly wither away in the absence of his visible actions. Like Latour writes: "existence and meaning are synonymous. *As long as they act, agents have meaning*" (Latour 2014, 14). The unorganized system of faith built around his presence could stand the test of time in the vein of a monotheistic religion like Christianity, but rather likely new gods will spring up to cover other lesser natural phenomena, and they too will lessen in importance after technological revolutions. Bar it that Father Earth is a vain god that needs worshippers and will remind everyone of his presence every now and then, it seems reasonable that his agency in the world will weaken until such a time that humanity comes close breaking the world once again.

This line of reasoning admittedly borrows from progressions familiar to us, and the world of *Broken* may chart a drastically different course through history. Following in our footsteps would certainly be a rather unfortunate path to take, since it would effectively lead to the establishing of a "deanimated view of the world", which Latour (2014, 13) asserts has been incorrectly dubbed "the scientific worldview". In the world of the Stillness, Earth's agency is a very real thing as we have seen during the trials and tribulations of Essun and her peers. Deanimating this incredibly animate world can be dangerous for all who dwell there. It would be foolhardy to build with disregard for a just-in-case failsafe considering the possibility that Father Earth will shift restlessly once again:

Preserving the genius loci as the cultural and architectural identity of a place, ensuring its permanence in the collective memory and transmissibility over time, means fully understanding the functional, typological, stylistic and constructive reasons from which a place originates. (Vecco 2020, 230)

The comms of the Stillness have been born out of necessity to keep together in the face of an ecological crisis. Building too high and digging too deep would both be in violation of the cultural history and genius loci. "Living with a world that has not been previously deanimated

will make a big difference for the Earthbound” (Latour 2014, 16), the ones who do not adhere to the Nature/Culture divide but rather to the conditions of the Anthropocene. Ultimately, how well the stone eaters can make the world better greatly hangs on their ability as historians and storytellers. Whether they choose to embrace or deny the reality of Father Earth is a decision that shapes the future of the Stillness.

## 5 Conclusion

Natural sciences are not the only ones responsible or capable of responding to the threats that global change proposes. While they can reveal the exact tipping points that have to be avoided or altered, it remains the task of all to do so. Literary fiction can challenge the patterns of thinking that have created this crisis, imagine a way out, a different form of human existence, and inspire the subsequent change. Where natural sciences are concerned with explaining the how and the why, they cannot be solely relied upon to make us understand our role in the world of complex systems and causal connectivity. Neither can they process the great emotional flux that changes of such magnitude bring forth. That is a task where the humanities and literature excel. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that interpreting *The Broken Earth* as a mere allegory – a parallel world that reflects the politics and society of ours in every turn – is a reductionist strategy of reading. Such an interpretation is but one dimension of a literary work and we should steer clear of any intentional fallacy here. Thus, we can also avoid the risk of ‘over-allegorizing’ a text (Ulstein 2009, 15). It is understandable for the mind to relate things both magical and inexplicable to something more easily understood, yet it partly defeats the purpose of fantasy in what Ursula K. Le Guin (2007, 86), a champion for the value of the fantasy literature, calls reducing “the radically unreal to the secondhand commonplace”. Surely fantasy can and should be read as political or ideological allegory from time to time, but the escapist functions of otherworldly affairs should not be neglected because of their lack of realism.

One of the leading science fiction critics, Darko Suvin pinpointed “*presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*” as the guiding principles of science fiction writing (Suvin in Roberts 2006, 7). In Suvin’s view, science fiction needs to balance the estrangement or alienation with cognitive aspects, the understandable science and logical rationale that ground the work. The interplay between the familiar and the alien is vital to any science fiction novel, *Broken* not being an exception to this. *The Stillness* is so unremarkable in many ways that it could well be our planet Earth the characters journey through in the novels, but the magical elements of orogeny and the living, breathing essence of the planet make it clear that this is indeed not our world. Yet the parallels are enough to elicit the question: could it be? I agree with Roberts (2006, 9) on the notion that science fiction often seeks to answer the question ‘what if’ by working out the impacts of *novums*, thus acting like a literary thought experiment by building futuristic or otherworldly scenarios out of an innovative idea. Jemisin’s trilogy effectively brings us face to face with the idea of a planet alive in the same manner as we are, bridging the gap to the uncanny with a cognitive similitude.

What the introduction of new novum does is it opens the subject for further discourse. Technological apparatuses that have appeared in sci-fi staples like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* have prompted further study from the scientific community, currently researching the possibilities of moisture farming and medical tricorders. Presenting dystopian scenarios is meant to elicit reflection about our current values and the direction of our societal development. There is a reason that Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is a touching point in virtually all discussions about increased governmental surveillance, found in the novel's ability to present an uncanny yet realistic vision of a future of censorship, thus advancing discourse on the subject by providing a worst-case scenario should all not go according to plan. Similarly, irresponsible resource extraction from foreign planets works as critique of both historical colonialism and present-day business practices. Ostracized alien races act as candid reminders of our not-too-distant history, making us redefine Otherness and its implications time and time again. Orogeny and the unstable state of the world in *Broken* warn of unchecked geoengineering and how such practices may only turn the world against the engineers. Lovelock's Gaia acts as an intermediary in this reflection, a semiotic sign that guides such far-off forecasting.

Like Le Guin (2007, 87) points out: "What fantasy generally does that the realistic novel generally cannot do is include the nonhuman as essential. The fantasy element of *Moby Dick* is *Moby Dick*". I would add that in the same manner of thinking it is also the places of fantasy that are often quintessential to it. The realms of Middle-Earth are on equal footing with the beings that dwell there, whether they are human or non-human. The central fantasy element of *Dune* is the planet Arrakis, aka Dune, the only place that spawns the spice melange around which that literary universe revolves. Comparably, *Broken* is a story that revolves around the mistreated and malevolent being that is Father Earth. It has tragedies of its own to bear on par with those of the humanoid creatures that dwell on it, and its wellbeing dictates their survival. The ultimate value of fantasy and science fiction literature may very well lie in highlighting the Other both as a reflection on humanity and as a being of itself.

All in all, Father Earth is among the latest examples in a long and varied cultural continuum of places alive. Remarkable is how well this expression is tied to the omnipresent climate crisis today. Hamilton (2013, 5) writes hauntingly of how "[f]or a few, the reasons to be afraid have prevailed; for most, hope fights on valiantly. Yet hope wages a losing battle; as the scientists each month publish more reasons to worry, and the lethargy of political leaders drains the wellsprings of hope". Many see the ecological crisis has already passed a point of no return, and that "[w]ords such as *symbiosis*, *harmony*, *agreement*, *accord*, all those ideals of deep ecology smack of an earlier, less benighted time" (Latour 2014, 5). It is debatable if there

are still ways to remedy the situation. This undoubtedly requires a radical rethinking of our established cultural and industrial habits, a new social contract for the coming age of Gaia, and still climate refugees will number in the millions.

It is possible some technological solution will come along, if not to solve the crisis, to ease the transition period. Increasing the Earth's albedo and reflectivity by artificial or natural whitening could maintain existing glaciers or even help establish new ones. Some have proposed that covering even parts the Sahara Desert with solar panels could easily provide all the needed energy. The idea is becoming more plausible every year, as photovoltaic technology is fast becoming more efficient and cheaper, whereas the EROI for fossil fuels is declining. Alternatively, it might be advantageous to cover water canals, rivers or possibly lakes with solar panels, which eliminates the often-problematic need for vast amounts of land reserved for energy production. India, the disappointingly coal-powered nation that is planning on carbon neutrality only by 2070, initiated the Canal Solar Power Project a decade ago, covering the Narmada canals with solar panels, which both generates energy non-intrusively and, importantly, reduces evaporation. While projects such as these are admittedly a step in the right direction, they may be too little too late. Scientific consensus has been established and the political is beginning to take form, yet the will seems to wither away when pressed. How the fourth biggest emitter of carbon dioxide still insists on 'phasing down' rather than 'phasing out' does not bode well for the future of the planet.

While Gaia and metaphorical planetary genius loci do not have the means to save us, in their personification they underscore interrelatedness and the perils of deanimation. Advocating communal sustainability development and "valorisation of the spirit of place", Vecco (2020, 229) states that "[t]o take care of a place and its *genius loci*, it is necessary to know how to see and recognise them; furthermore, we need to know how to interpret their value". Thinking planetarily, and nowadays we are always thinking planetarily, recognizing local spatial spirits and signs of their wellbeing is a step on the way to acknowledging the presence of a global genius loci, a worldly spirit of interconnectedness consisting of countless local networks. Imagining a figurative planetary body can raise the immediacy concerning a seemingly localized issue. Polar ice will melt onto distant shores, heat waves in one place will send people to another, and no longer fertile soil will feed hunger elsewhere as well. It is adamant to recognize that now since our interobjectivity has reached a worldwide level, local thinking will not suffice anymore, however seemingly sustainable. The Gaia theory is built to underline this fact.

What a setting like Father Earth as an antagonist suggests is more troubling. There are



several places that essentially thrive on the misery of others, since megacities and factories are polluting the skies of the surrounding countryside as well, and waste is transported to countries where it can be processed more cheaply. These are ‘evil’ places in a sense, their modern genius loci corrupted in its material and social dimensions by technological hubris and artificial life. “Current cultural debates, dominated by the triumph of the economic dimension, tend to separate the ecological system from the social and cultural” (Vecco 2020, 230), which breaks the mesh of interrelatedness apart. The complex holistic reality of a place is more than its tangible economic value (ibid.). Intangible spiritual dimension of a place is the sum of its practices and attitudes, a code of ethics sustained by the genius loci. Its relation to the holistic reality of the planet is important for “[t]he great reality of Gaia, you see, is that all our destructive practices are interconnected” (Asimov and Pohl 1991, 143). The dangers of deanimation are real and recognizing what it suppresses is essential, lest the uncontained local malignant agencies corrupt the whole of the system, turning the planet hostile.

*Broken* is a heightened fictional portrayal of the reality of the Anthropocene. Its orogenes are stronger and its Gaia brims with more malice, but the deeper layer of the trilogy reveals the underlying message of ecological and social justice. What began as an eschatology and continued as a post-apocalyptic novel concludes as an optimistic vision of a better future. Whereas Tolkien animated his trees to emphasize their inherent agency, Jemisin animates her entire planet in a grand manoeuvre designed to break the subjective spell of anthropocentrism that modern capitalism has long continued to sustain. Father Earth can be considered the antagonist of the trilogy, and his villainization in the storyworld supports this, but readings in the context of the current ecological awareness are likely to see his analogous and suggestive nature in relation to a wounded Gaia, a genius loci only as evil as humans have made him. Perhaps the best way for a milieu-character to exist is a metaphorical state. But metaphors are incredibly powerful tools – OOO considers them integral in our understanding of the world – and there is little doubt that “we do need new metaphors capable of sustainably *relating* us to the rest of the biosphere” (Hornborg 2006, 28). In this task the power of the metaphor will have to be enough, since the end of anthropocentrism is likely not a bang but a whimper, “a lingering coexistence with strange strangers” as Morton (2013, 95) puts it. So that we do not have to abandon this world by climbing aboard a spaceship like Neil Young dreamt and sung over half a century prior, we will have to contend with the post gold-rush realities of the agency of the inanimate.

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## Finnish Summary

Ilmastonmuutoksen myötä ekologisesti orientoituneet teokset sekä ekokriittisesti valveutuneet luennat ovat alati lisääntyneet. Modernistinen dualismi, joka jakaa maailman subjekteihin ja objekteihin, ja sen päälle rakentunut kapitalismi nähdään usein nykyisen ympäristökriisin pääsyyllisinä. Luontosuhteemme on eittämättä muuttumassa, mikä myös kuvastuu tänä päivänä julkaistussa kirjallisuudessa. Eräs viime vuosien vaikuttavimmista tieteisfiktio puolella julkaistu teoksista on ollut yhdysvaltalaisen N. K. Jemisinin vuosien 2015–2017 välillä julkaistu *The Broken Earth* -trilogia (suom. *Murtunut maailma*), jossa ekologinen katastrofi toimii tarinan keskiössä. Sen kolme osaa, *The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016) ja *The Stone Sky* (2017) (*Viides vuodenaika*, *Obeliskiportti* ja *Kivinen taivas*) kertovat tarinan selviytymisestä post-apokalyptisessa maailmassa, jossa äiti etsii tyttärtään ja yrittää samalla korjata kauan sitten rikkoutuneen luontosuhteen planeetan ja sen asukkaiden välillä omilla yliluonnollisilla kyvyillään.

Jemisinin trilogian päähenkilönä toimii Essun, orogeeni (*orogene*), joka pystyy hallitsemaan ympäristönsä kineettistä ja lämpöenergiaa oman orogeniansa avulla. Tämä antaa hänelle kyvyn muun muassa paitsi vaimentaa maanjäristyksiä ja tektonista toimintaa, jotka ovat ironisesti nimetyssä Tyynimaassa (*The Stillness*) arkipäivää, myös mahdollisuuden tehdä valtavaa vahinkoa. Orogeniaa ei tästä syystä suvaita, ja tiedostetut orogeenit ovat systemaattisen järjestelmän alistamia ja valvomia. Paettuaan tämän järjestelmän alaisuudesta vuosia aiemmin, Essun elää hiljaiseloa, kunnes hänen aviomiehensä surmaa heidän poikansa ja sieppaa heidän tyttärensä etsiäkseen parannusta periytyneeseen orogeniaan. Samaan aikaan toisaalla voimakas orogeeni repii maailman kahtia, aloittaen jälleen yhden katastrofaalisen Viidennen vuodenaajan, joka syöksee planeetan ilmaston tolaltaan. Essunin pitkä matka saada tyttärensä takaisin jatkuu läpi trilogian, jossa maailman historia valottuu pala palalta.

Oma huomioni tarinassa keskittyy itse miljööseen, planeettaan, joka henkilölistyy Isä Maa (*Father Earth*) -nimisenä entiteettinä. Planeetan ainoan supermantereen Tyynimaan asukkaat ovat vuosituhansien aikana kehittäneet uskonnolliset järjestelmänsä ja mytologiansa, joissa planeetta on elävä, pahamielinen jumalolento, joka kantaa kaunaa siitä, kun sen ainoa lapsi Kuu on muinoin riistetty siltä. Viidennet vuodenaajat ovat kuin hänen toistuva kostonsa tästä väärinteosta. Tässä opinnäytetyössä käsittelem sitä, miten trilogian hahmojen ja ympäristön välinen viallinen luontosuhde ilmenee Isä Maan hahmossa, ja samalla tutkin sitä, miten miljöön tähän tapaan pitkälle viety personifikaatio luo oman hahmon tarinan sisälle ja mikä on tämän hahmon lopullinen merkitys narratiiville. Koska Isä Maa on tarinassa

ylivoimainen paha entiteetti, minua kiinnostaa paitsi miljöön näkeminen hahmona, myös se, että voiko se täyttää antagonistin rooliin narratiivissa. Mielenkiintoisen lisän Jemisinin trilogian tarinankerrontaan tuo sen enigmaattinen kertojaääni, joka vasta myöhemmin paljastuu yhdeksi tarinan hahmoista. Lisäksi siinä missä muiden hahmojen näkökulmasta kerrotut kappaleet kirjassa kerrotaan kolmannessa persoonassa, Essunin kappaleet poikkeuksellisesti ovat toisessa persoonassa, mikä tuo ne lähemmäksi lukijaa. Siksipä on myös tähdellistä tutkia tämän kerronnallisen valinnan merkitystä kirjan lukukokemukselle ja sanomalle.

Aloitan kartoittamalla Jemisinin luomaa maailmaa ja sitä ympäröivää tarinaa. Tyynimaa kuvaillaan ensimmäisen kirjan alussa heti melko tavallisena paikkana lukuun ottamatta sitä seikkaa, että se on tektonisesti erittäin aktiivinen ja käyttäytyy kuin levoton vanha mies, joka kääntää koko ajan kylkeään sängyssä. Tästä on huomattavissa, että kirjassa miljöö esitellään heti antropomorfisesti, joskin vasta myöhemmin tulee selväksi, ettei kuvailu rajoitu vain metaforan tasolle. *Viides vuodenaika* myös alkaa kryptisen kertojan toteamuksella, että tarinankerronta on parasta aloittaa siitä, miten maailma loppuu. Lähes kaikki mitä kirjoissa kerrotaan, tapahtuu tämän toteamuksen tuolla puolen, maailmassa, joka on periaatteessa loppunut sen asukkaiden näkökulmasta. Tietyt hahmot kirjassa tiedostavat, että Viidensien vuodenaikojen geologinen ja ilmastollinen myllerrys, jolloin planeetan kuoren aukaisseet lohkosiirokset suoltavat kaasuja ja tuhkaa ulos muodostaen tuhkapilviä, ovat planeetan eliöille tappavia, mutta itse planeetta todennäköisesti palaa ennen pitkää entiselleen.

Planeetta alkaa ottaa aktiivisemmän roolin tarinassa vasta trilogian myöhemmässä vaiheessa, jolloin se kommunikoi suuremmin hahmojen kanssa. Sillä ovat kuitenkin jo aiemmin omat kanavansa ja agenttinsa, joiden kautta se toteuttaa tahtoaan, kuten orogeeneja alistavat Valvojat (*Guardians*). Kirjan monia olioita yhdistää ktoninen yhteys maahan. Valvojien lisäksi esiintyvät kivensyöjät (*stone eaters*) ovat vanhoja patsasmaisia kiviolentoja, jotka pystyvät matkaamaan maan läpi. Niiden jakautuminen eri lahkoihin vuosituhansia aikaisemmin on merkittävät taustatekijä kirjan tarinassa. Planeetan ja sen päällisen elämän välinen sota on jatkunut 40 000 vuotta Kuun menetyksen jälkeen. Toiset kivensyöjistä ovat luovuttaneet rauhan suhteen, kun taas toiset uskovat, että Kuun palauttaminen voisi korjata välit Isä Maan kanssa. Tarinan kertoja, Hoa, kuuluu jälkimmäiseen ryhmään. Kivensyöjät yrittävät ohjata orogeeneja käyttämään planeetan muinaisen teknologisesti edistyneen sivilisaation jälkeen jättämiä obeliskeja väylänä lopettaa konflikti tavalla tai toisella, ja Hoa ohjaa ja avustaa Essunia yrityksessä korjata kauan sitten murtunut maailma.

Ekosentrinen personifikaatio on lähes yhtä vanha ilmiö kuin kirjallisuus, mutta suhtautuminen siihen on vaihdellut. Romantiikan aikaan sen liikkäyttöä alettiin pitämään kliseenä, mutta näin



voidaan nähdä tapahtuvan minkä tahansa kerronnan välineen kanssa. Ilmiöitä tutkineet henkilöt, kuten Bryan L. Moore, osoittavat miten luonnon esittäminen ihmismäisessä valossa on ollut keino viestiä ihmisten ja luonnon välisestä yhteydestä. Näin se on ollut myös vastakeino kartesiolaiselle dualismille ja maailman jaottelulle subjekteihin ja objekteihin. Objektien uudelleenarviointi on keskeinen osa prosessia, jossa ihmisten ulkopuolinen maailma saa oman toimijuutensa takaisin, ja näin ollen myös tärkeä metodi esimerkiksi miljööän analysoimiseen kirjallisuudessa.

Luonnon ihmisellistäminen antaa sille väistämättä tiettyjä piirteitä, kuten usein sukupuolen. Luontoäiti on lähes universaali maailmassa vallinnut arkkityyppi, joka on edustanut hoivaavaa ja rikasta luontoa. Luonto on usein nähty naisellisena, jolloin miehille se on ollut objektina valloituksen kohde. Tähän käytäntöön löytyy myös kiinnostavia poikkeuksia. Rauhallisen luontoäidin lisäksi on nähty myös raivovia naisellisia henkilölistymiä: esimerkiksi myrskyt saivat temperamenttisten naisten nimiä. Silti luonto vaikuttaa saaneen miesmäisen assosiaation useammin, kun kyseessä on ollut tyynen ja antoisan maan sijasta karu ja kylmä, ja näin patriarkaaliseksi koettu, ympäristö.

Objektien, ja erityisesti massiivisten objektien kuten planeettojen, uudelleenarvioinnissa keskustelu ottaa vääjäämättä sängen filosofisia piirteitä. Ontologinen kysymys objektien oikeasta luonteesta ajaa eteenpäin nykypäivän filosofiasuuntausta, jota muun muassa Graham Harman ja Timothy Morton ajattelullaan edustavat. Mortonin lanseeraamat *hyperobjektit* ovat valaiseva työkalu massiivisten objektien tarkasteluun, sillä niiden ominaispiirteet voivat valaista kaikkien objektien todellista ulottuvuutta. Hyperobjektit ovat ajassa ja paikassa massiivisesti jakaantuneita kappaleita, jotka vaikuttavat meihin etenkin tänä päivänä. Mortonin mukaan niitä ovat esimerkiksi ilmastonmuutos, öljyvuoto tai radioaktiivinen jäte, mutta myös lukuisat muut asiat, joiden vaikutus on useimmin aistittavissa vasta välikäsien kautta. Hyperobjektit ovat tahmeita, sulia, aaltoilevia, vaihteittain paljastuvia entiteettejä, jotka vetäytyvät suorasta havaintoyhteydestä niin, että niitä voi tarkastella vain vaikutussuhteiden välityksellä. Objektien väliset suhteet eli niiden interobjektiivisuus muodostaa verkon, joka luo todelliset objektit. Objekti-orientoituneen ontologian ajattelu perustuu paljon Martin Heideggerin ajatuksiin ja on pohjimmiltaan erittäin realistinen ajatussuuntaus, joka nostaa arvoon ihmismielestä riippumattoman todellisuuden.

Kartesiolaisen dualismin ja siinä sivussa myös länsimaisen tieteen uudelleenarviointia on myös nähty postmodernin antropologian saralla, jossa animismin kitkeminen materiaalisesta maailmasta on nähty virheenä. Bruno Latour kuuluu tutkijoihin, jotka ovat argumentoineet, että moderni länsimainen tiede oli liian harjaantumaton ymmärtääkseen eriäviä

ontologiajärjestelmiä, mikä johti maailman systemaattiseen deanimaatioon. Luonnon toimijuuden kieltäminen ja sen esineellistäminen palveli kaupallisia tarkoituksia, mutta kapitalismin myöhempi kritiikki on nähnyt maailman jaottelun luontoon ja ei-luontoon erittäin keinotekoisena prosessina. Ihmisistä riippumattomat maailmassa vaikuttavat voimat ovat olleet kaikkialla nähtävissä, mutta niiden havainnointi on nyt hyperobjektien aikakaudella vasta herännyt uudelleen voimiinsa. Muuttuvat sääilmiöt ja myöhäisheränneisyys ilmastokriisin kohdalla viestivät Latourin mukaan siitä, miten ihmiskunta on vajonnut itse umpisilmäiseen passiivisuuteen, kun taas maapallo on ottanut ohjokset käsiinsä ja asettautunut subjektin rooliin.

Tätä maapallon omaa toimijuutta kuvastaa hyvin Gaia-hypoteesi. James Lovelockin kehittämän teorian mukaan maapallon historiassa on havaittavissa merkittävää itsesääätelyä, jonka avulla luonto on onnistunut pitämään elinolosuhteet maapallolla kaikille eläville oliolle mahdollisimman sopivina. Teoriaa leimaa sitä ympäröinyt halu väärinymmärtää – rationaaliseen järkeilyyn nojaavat vakavasti itsensä ottaneet tiedemiehet ovat kokeneet ajatuksen Maasta elollisena olentona kammottavan spiritualistiseksi. Lovelock kuitenkin painottaa, että Gaia on metaforamainen viitekehys, jonka avulla voidaan ymmärtää, että kyse on lukemattomien toimijaverkostojen muodostamasta kokonaisjärjestelmästä. Se miten Lovelock on kuvaillut ilmastonmuutosta Gaian kostoksi ja koronaviruspandemiaa itsesäätelyn viimeisimmäksi muodoksi antaa vertauspohjan Jemisinin trilogian vihaiselle planeetalle. Historiallisesti monet luonnonilmiöt on nähty jumalallisina kostoina, jotka ovat olleet seurausta ihmisten hybriksestä, ja muinaisten jumalten piirteissä voidaan nähdä yhtäläisyyksiä Isä Maan kanssa.

Kysymys siitä, että onko planeetallamme sielu, saattaa vaikuttaa New age -henkiseltä mystiikalta, jolla konkreettisissa asioissa halutaan nähdä henkisiä ominaisuuksia. Kysymys on kuitenkin koettu Gaia-hypoteesin lailla ja kenties sen varjolla joidenkin mielestä olennaiseksi. Todistusaineisto viittaa siihen, että olemme suuttaneet maapallon. C. G. Jung kuuluu ajattelijoihin, jotka ovat kirjoittaneet maailmansionelusta, *anima mundista*. Jung näki, että ihmisten asuttamalla maaperällä oli piilevä vaikutus ihmismieliin, ja hän teorioi, ettei niinkään ihminen valloittanut maata vaan toisin päin. Maan ktooninen vaikutus juurruttaa meidät elinympäristöömme ja vuosien saatossa muokkaa identiteettiämme. Kollektiivinen alitajunta saattoi vuorostaan kattaa koko maapallon, mikä antaa sille maailmansionelun kaltaiset piirteet. Jung näki luontoäidin arkkityypin lisäksi patriarkaalisen voiman luonnossa, joka näkyy esimerkiksi isänmaa-ajattelussa. Siinä missä tyyneys oli äidillinen piirre, luonnon dynaamiset voimat, kuten myrskyt ja tulvat, olivat maan isäisiä ulottuvuuksia.

Ajatus siitä, että elinympäristömme vaikuttaa meihin on helppo hyväksyä, mutta tämän

vaikutuksen todellisesta luonteesta on hyvinkin eriäviä näkemyksiä. Monet hengellisyyteen tai aistikokemuksiin perustuvat näkemykset nähdään usein epätieteellisinä. Mielenkiintoinen ja moniulotteinen konsepti paikan henkeen liittyen on Antiikin Roomasta lähtöisin oleva *genius loci*. Alun perin sillä viitattiin lokalisoituneisiin henkiolentoihin ja paikkojen suojeluspyhimyksiin, joita saatettiin kunnioittaa pyhäköillä ja temppeleillä. Konsepti on kuitenkin periytynyt nykypäivään esimerkiksi arkkitehtuuriin linkitettynä, ja sitä on tarkasteltu myös kulttuurin ja kirjallisuuden ilmiönä. Osa tutkijoista on nähnyt, että *genius loci* kuvastaa sitä paikallisuuden henkeä, joka vallitsee alueellisen kirjallisuuden ja taiteen sisällä. Samalla alueella alkunsa saaneita teoksia yhdistää inspiraation tasolla paitsi alueen todellinen kouraantuntuva rakenne, myös sen aineeton aistitason kokemus.

Myös *genius loci*in ruumiillistumia on havaittavissa. Esimerkiksi Yhdysvaltain Setä Samuli -hahmo kuvastaa kansallista henkeä ja arvomaailmaa. Marvelin toisen maailmansodan aikaan luoma Kapteeni Amerikka voidaan nähdä tämän hahmokonseptin jatkumona, joskin siinä eivät kuvastu *genius loci*lle yleisesti tärkeäksi koettu luontosuhde tai paikallinen yhteys niin vahvasti. Fantasiakirjallisuuden yhteydessä *genius loci* on erittäin käyttökelpoinen käsite, jolle löytyy lukuisia tulkintoja. Esimerkiksi Tom Bombadilin hahmo *Taru sormusten herrasta* -trilogiassa on usein nähty *genius loci*na, paikallisen metsän suojelusolentona. Paikallisesti linkittyneet tekoälyt myös mahtuvat mielestäni käsitteen teknologisemman tulkinnan alle. Abstraktimpia henkiolentoja löytyy lukuisia, esimerkiksi näennäisesti elossa olevien kummitustalojen ja metsien muodossa. Niiden yhteydessä konsepti linkittyy vahvasti animismiin. Se kuinka eksplisiittisesti luonnon toimijuus esitellään saattaa olla raja, joka määrittelee teoksen fantasian puolelle.

Kaikki edellä mainitut teoreettiset suuntaukset taustoittavat sekä laajalti puoltavat luonnon nostamista objektin tasolta subjektiksi, joka pystyy toimimaan ihmisestä riippumatta. Näin ollen myös yleisesti objekteiksi luokitellut tapahtumapaikat kirjallisuudessa voidaan nähdä omina vaikutusvoiminaan narratiivin sisällä. Niiden funktion tarkempi analysointi tässä mielessä vaatii avuksi narratologian käsitteitä. Koska Isä Maa epäsuoran toiminnan lisäksi tekee suoria toimintoja ja kommunikoi muiden hahmojen kanssa, esittää hän selvää toimijuutta. Hänestä kuitenkin muodostuu varsinainen hahmo vasta tarkemman luonnehtimisen kautta, mikä tässä tapauksessa saa väistämättä myös antropomorfisia piirteitä. Kysymys siitä, onko Isä Maa tarinan antagonistiksi, on haasteellinen ja monitulkintainen.

*Murtunut maailma* pitää sisällään myös muita hahmoja, jotka täyttävät antagonistin roolin ainakin paikoittain toimiessaan päähenkilö(it)ä vastaan. Valvoja Schaffan suojelun nimissä tapahtuva hallinta Essuniin hänen formatiivisina vuosinaan on jättänyt heidän välilleen

vihamielisyyden, mutta se kuitenkin unohtuu pitkälti Schaffan osalta, kun tämä menettää muistinsa ja vapautuu osittain Isä Maan hallinnasta trilogian ensimmäisen osan jälkeen. Hän päätyy sattumien kautta Essunin tyttären Nassunin korvaavaksi isähahmoksi, joka suojelee tätä sangen pyyteettömästi. Näin ollen Schaffaa voidaan pitää *Viidennen vuodenajan* virkaatekevänä antagonistina, joka toimii tosiasiallisen antagonistin eli Valvoja hallitsevan Isä Maan välikätenä.

Kivensyöjien joukosta löytyy toinen varteenotettava vaihtoehto antagonistiksi. Harmaansävyinen Remwha, jonka Essun ja Nassun tuntevat kumpikin muilla nimillä, johtaa kivensyöjien lahkoo, joka ei usko rauhaan Isä Maan kanssa, vaan on vajonnut liian syvälle koston kierteeseen. Remwha yrittää manipuloida Nassunia tuhoamaan planeetan sen korjaamisen sijaan. Hän myös tiedostaa Essunin leirin aikeet yrittää saada aikaan sopu, ja toimii aktiivisesti heitä vastaan tarinan jälkipuoliskolla. Näin toimiessaan Remwha muodostaa aktiivisen antagonistin Essunille sekä tarinan kertojalle Hoalle, joka edustaa kivensyöjien toista, rauhaa ja luontosuhteen korjaamista ajavaa ryhmää. Hoa kuitenkin osoittaa ymmärrystä myös Remwhan toimintaa kohtaan ja antaa tälle lopulta anteeksi, vaikka onkin taistellut vuosituhansien ajan tätä vastaan.

Isä Maa astuu tarinaan vähitellen mukaan, kun häntä ympäröivät legendat paljastuvat unohdetuiksi totuuksiksi. Monet sivilisaatiot ovat nousseet ja kaatuneet tuhoisien Viidensien vuodenaikojen myötä vuosituhansien saatossa. Niiden perintönä on jäljellä alun perin kivitauluihin kirjoitettu tarusto, jossa Isä Maa kuvataan planeetan vihamielisenä herrana, joka muistaa ikuisesti sitä kohtaan tehdyt vääryydet. ”Paha Isä Maa” on vakiintunut sananparsi Tyynimaassa, ja useat hahmot tarinassa kiroavat tämän nimeen. Pitkien kulttuuristen perinteiden myötä maailman asukkaat ovat asennoituneet pysyvästi sitä vastaan. Tyynimaan uskomukset yliluonnolliseen ovat pohjimmiltaan monoteistisiä, koska näkyvin siellä vallitseva voima on planeetan äkillinen geologinen liikehdintä. Yhteisöt vakaata päiväntasaajaa lukuun ottamatta elävät sen armoilla: taloja ei rakenneta korkealle, ja jokaiset pitävät kotonaan repussa olennaisia selviytymistarpeita sitä varten, että koti täytyy hylätä äkillisesti.

Vanha ja kokenut orogeeni sekä Essunin mentori Alabaster paljastaa tälle *Obeliskiportin* keskivaiheilla, miten tarusto pitää paikkaansa: hän on omakohtaisesti todistanut, että mytologia perustuu tosiseikkoihin; planeetta on nimittäin oikeasti elossa. Alabaster kuitenkin asettaa Essunin rauhan tielle, ohjaten tämän lopettamaan minkä hän aloitti repimällä maan kahtia: nappaamaan kiertoradallaan Maata lähestyvän Kuun obeliskiportin avulla, kun se ohittaa Maan läheltä. Alabasterin aluilleen laittama ekologinen katastrofi ei ole maailman lopullinen loppu. Se on vain päätös sille epäoikeudenmukaiselle maailmalle, jossa orogeenit

alistettiin ja jossa vallitsi pysyvä vastakkaisasettelu. Näin hänen tuhoava suunnitelmansa on todellisuudessa yritys korjata murtunut maailma. Siinä missä Essun työskentelee Maan korjaamiseksi, hänen tyttärensä Nassun on perheensä menetettyään päättänyt tuhota maailman, joka on riistänyt häneltä kaiken. Kun tämä matkustaa Schaffan kanssa maan läpi kohti muinaista Corepointin kaupunkia, he kulkevat maan keskipisteen läpi, jossa Nassun kohtaa planeetan sykkivän sydämen. Isä Maa tervehtii Nassunia vihollisenaan ja halvaannuttaa Schaffan Valvojiin omaamansa psyykkisen yhteyden kautta. Tämä kohtaaminen kasvojen vain lietsoo Nassunin vihaa planeettaa kohtaan.

Hoa kertoo ensimmäisessä persoonassa omasta menneisyydestään *Kivisessä taivaassa*, paljastaen miten Isä Maan ja planeetan asukkaiden välinen vihanpito sai alkunsa. Muinainen teknologisesti edistynyt Syl Anagistin sivilisaatio yritti ahneudessaan saada haltuunsa planeetan kaikki voimavarat, lopulta kaivautuen planeetan sisään yrityksessään siepata sen mahtavat energiavoimat. Tätä hopeaista aaltoilevaa energiaa nimitetään kirjassa taikuudeksi, joka virtaa maailman kaikkien osien välillä, ikään kuin Voima *Star Wars* -universumissa. Sitä voidaan sen sijainnin puolesta myös ajatella viittauksena geotermiseen energiaan, joka on kaikessa runsaudessaan vielä pitkälti ihmiskunnan ulottumattomissa. Syl Anagistin valtaapitävät olivat alistaneet muut kansat alaisuuteensa, mukaan lukien maagisesti kyvykkäät Niessit, joista Hoa ja muut alkuperäiset kivensyöjät periytyvät. Heidät valjastettiin käyttämään obeliskiporttia maailman alistamiseen Syl Anagistin viimeiseksi jääneessä hankkeessa, joka epäonnistui, kun planeetta asettui vastarintaan.

Tarinan voi nähdä vertauskuvana moderneille kestämättömille talouskäytännöille, jotka eivät ole ottaneet huomioon planeetan hyvinvointia. Luonnonvarojen ehtyminen ja uhkaavasti jo miljooniin ihmisiin vaikuttava ilmaston lämpeneminen ovat saaneet vasta alulle teollisen vallankumouksen myötä rakentuneiden toimintaperiaatteiden uudelleenarvioinnin. Monista nyt on jo liian myöhäistä. Olemme kaivautuneet liian syvälle ja liian ahnaasti, ja niin kuin Morian kääpiöt muinaisen Balrog-hirviön herättäessään, olemme havahduttaneet vihaisen Gaian levoltaan. Planeetan kokonaisuus on uhattuna ja sen immuunijärjestelmä toimii tuhotakseen patogeenin, joka on altistanut koko ruumiin vaaralle. Nämä vertauskuvat pätevät kieltämättä paitsi nykytodellisuuteen, myös *Murtuneeseen maailmaan*.

Trilogian omintakeinen kerronta toisessa persoonassa muodostaa tarinasta suuremman viestin, joka kohdistuu suoraan lukijalle. Hoa kuvailee Essunin mennyttä elämää omien muistojensa kautta, mikä osittain kyseenalaistaa narratiivin ja kertojan uskottavuuden, sillä välikommenteissaan Hoa toteaa itsekin unohtaneensa paljon vuosituhansien aikana. Hänen merkillisen pitkä ikänsä tekee hänestä hyperobjektin, jonka aikakäsitys poikkeaa ihmisten

kokemuksesta. Häntä myös motivoi rakkaus Essuniin, mikä nostaa kysymyksen tarinankerronnan valtasuhteesta olennaiseksi. Toisaalta meillä ei ole suoranaista syytä olla uskomatta häntä, mutta on hyvä tiedostaa, että hän kertoo maailman ja Essunin menneisyydestä tarinan, joka sopii hänen agendaansa. Voidaan ehkä olettaa, että heidän välillensä lopulta vallitseva kivinen yhteys on verrattavissa eräänlaiseen kollektiiviseen alitajuntaan, jossa tietoisuus on jossain määrin jaettua, mikä luo jonkinasteisen totuus pohjan narratiiville. Maallinen yhteys ja sen suoma suurempi tietoisuus toimii myös selittävänä tekijänä kaikkitietävälle kerronnalle mitä tulee kirjan muidenkin hahmojen ajatuksiin.

Se, miten Jemisin luo trilogiansa keskiöön elossa olevan planeetan, puoltaa mielestäni sen ekokriittistä tulkintaa. Kirjan henkilöiden maagiset voimat ja niiden suoma suuri ekologinen valta ja vastuu viittaavat niin nykyajan teolliseen toimintaan kuin myös ilmastonmuokkaus-tekнологiaan, jota on ehdotettu ratkaisuksi ilmastonmuutoksen tuomiin ongelmiin. Isä Maan toiminta vastaa monella tapaa Gaian kosta, ja tämä rinnastus myös auttaa näkemään tämän paremmin hahmona, jolla on omat motivaationsa ja tavoitteensa. Kuten ekosentrisessä personifikaatiossa yleisesti, planeetan humanisointi auttaa näkemään meidät itsemme sen paikalla. Essunin tavoin myös Isä Maa on murheen murtama, epätoivoinen, ja sen seurauksena vihainen vanhempi, joka on menettänyt lapsensa. Toisen persoonan käyttö taas puhuttelee suoremmin lukijaa, kehottaen tätä arvioimaan omaa luontosuhdettaan ja tekojaan kriittisemmin.