

COMING OUT OF THE DARK: TRAUMA IN R.A. SALVATORE'S
DARK ELF TRILOGY

by

Jason Berry Eisenmenger, B.A.A.S.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
May 2022

Committee Members:

Suparno Banerjee, Chair

Teya Rosenberg

Graeme Wend-Walker

COPYRIGHT

by

Jason Berry Eisenmenger

2022

FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT

Fair Use

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

Duplication Permission

As the copyright holder of this work I, Jason Berry Eisenmenger, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Samantha. Her support throughout this entire process has meant the world to me. Thank you for always encouraging me to be the best version of myself. Anything cool I can claim to have done would not be possible if you were not in my life. I love you.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to Bob Salvatore. I picked up the first Drizzt book right after coming out of a group home and I found in the character of Drizzt something familiar as I struggled to find my place in a world that I did not feel I belonged. I wish I could tell the fourteen-year-old me that one day I would write a thesis about my favorite book series.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this project to the amazing instructors and mentors I have had throughout my time at Texas State. I may repay my student loans, but I will never repay everyone for their kindness and patience. Thank you all for sharing the most important thing, (time) anyone has to give with me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express a sincere thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Banerjee. I appreciate your patience and hard work in helping me get this thesis where it needed to be. You are a brilliant person and I count myself fortunate that you agreed to be my advisor.

I would also like to thank Dr. Rosenberg for all the guidance and support over my graduate school experience. It was you that gave me the idea for this thesis. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Wend-Walker for agreeing to be on my committee and helping me be a better writer. Thanks to all of you for your help through this process. It has been challenging, but also rewarding. I could not have accomplished anything without the help of such bright and thoughtful educators such as yourselves.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| II. RELIGION IN THE DARK..... | 15 |
| III. RACE IN THE DARK..... | 37 |
| IV. WORDS AS SWORDS: TRAUMA IN THE UNDERDARK..... | 59 |
| V. CONCLUSION | 81 |
| WORKS CITED | 85 |

I. INTRODUCTION

We all have our Grendels and dragons. Traumatic experiences can be a tool that shapes us into the people we become. Literature and folktales are a way in which cultures express their ideals and work through generational traumas. In some ways passing down stories can be a mental practice for dealing with real-life traumas. The word “trauma” originates from the Greek and originally meant a wound or external bodily injury. Later, as psychotherapy began to gain traction, the definition broadened to include psychic injury as well. Much has been written on the subject of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is usually associated with soldiers in war, which is brought on by inflicted traumas. It was officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. Fantasy literature as a genre can be especially violent as it is usually set in a Medieval or Bronze Age setting. Fantasy is often about a hero overcoming tremendous trauma to triumph over some generational evil in the world. But when one looks deeper, fantasy is about healing.

The fantasy genre has a history of violence as a plot device. That said, there are many different varieties of fantasy in the genre. The corner of fantasy that I will be discussing is that which is closely related to and spawned from fantasy role-playing games like, *Dungeons & Dragons*. Through characters like Drizzt, readers can work through personal trauma. It can take the reader to dark places, but most of the genre is in fact hopeful, showing us that there are better days ahead and that the hero will overcome adversity. Amber Shields best explains how trauma is interpreted in fantasy in the abstract to her dissertation, *In between Worlds*:

While fantasy as a genre is often dismissed as frivolous and inappropriate, it is

highly relevant in representing and working through trauma. The fantasy genre presents spectators with images of the unsettled and unresolved, taking them on a journey through a world in which the familiar is rendered unfamiliar. It positions itself as an in-between, while the consequential disturbance of recognized world orders lends this genre to relating ...fantasy succeeds in representing and challenging histories of violence, silence, and irresolution. Further—the genre itself is transformed in relating stories that are not yet resolved. (Shields, abstract)

Shields related the work of Sigmund Freud to fantasy by looking at how individual trauma is represented in characters in a fantasy story (Shields 26). Sigmund Freud's 1920 work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, presented a new way to look at trauma. He summarized that the real trauma does not take place at the time of the incident as the victim of the trauma will not receive it at the time of the action, but instead the memory of the trauma is what haunts the victim, especially when the survivor cannot fully process the event. This cycle comes on as a frequent reliving of the original trauma and stays with the survivor. Ruth Leys' book on PTSD, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), explains:

The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present. All the symptoms characteristic of PTSD—flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence, or tendency to hyper vigilance—are thought to be the result of this fundamental mental dissociation. (Leys 2)

Building on the work of Freud, Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi was one of the

first to study trauma in the form of shell-shocked soldiers in World War I or the condition “war neurosis” as it was known at the time. It is now more commonly referred to as the aforementioned PTSD. Jay Frankel’s article in *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* delves into Ferenczi’s work on this topic. Frankel says,

Ferenczi's work as a medical officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War provided the basis for his first systematic study of psychological trauma. His observations of shell-shocked soldiers led him to conclude that “sudden affect that could not be psychically controlled (the shock) causes the trauma.” (Frankel 41)

Trauma is a common experience in human lives. The severity of traumatic events can differ greatly by circumstances, or the way individuals interpret it. To this day, scientists are still trying to unravel how trauma affects people and how to treat it.

Trauma as a central theme in literature is common. Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1991) is a story about this type of research as otherwise physically sound soldiers come to Craiglockhart War Hospital for “nerve regeneration” therapy. One of the principal characters of the novel, a psychiatrist named H.R. Rivers, treats shell-shocked officers that are afflicted with psychic traumas that prevent them from returning to action. This research was just coming to the forefront as a recognized condition in World War I and Barker looks at issues of trauma, class, and gender in her book.

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1971) was a veteran of World War I. As a soldier, he witnessed the horrors and atrocities of war firsthand. And though he adamantly insisted that the events of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-55) was not wholly allegorical to the war, it is not hard to argue the similarities. Tolkien writes on this subject in which he

shares his opinion: “Personally I do not think that either war (and of course the atomic bomb) had any influence upon either the plot or the manner of its unfolding. Perhaps in landscape. The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme” (qtd in Hammond 303). It is precisely the kind of trauma that a war can inflict that will influence the writing. In the foreword to *The Lord of the Rings* he even acquiesces to this point: “An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience [...]. One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression” (qtd in Hammond xvii). The listless behavior of Frodo in *Return of the King* (1955) certainly looks a lot like what Tolkien would have understood to be shell shock. And after the fall of Sauron’s forces, Frodo returns to the Shire with wounds that will never heal. This trauma is going to live with him for the rest of his days.

Tolkien is commonly recognized as the father of modern Western fantasy, or to be more accurate, Anglophone fantasy since many other types of fantasy literature exists that will not be discussed here. This means that *The Lord of the Rings* is a foundation for much of the work we see today from television shows like *Game of Thrones* (2010) based on George R.R. Martin’s *Song of Ice and Fire* (1996) series to video games like *The Elder Scrolls: Legend of Skyrim* (2011). Tolkien’s LOTR established modern fantasy hegemony. Many of the tropes in fantasy are based on Tolkienesque templates of behavior as accepted tropes in the genre. Things like the separation of good and evil based merely on if the character is a hobbit or an orc are an example of this kind of trope. Creatures of light are good. Creatures of dark are evil. Only recently has the public consciousness of modern society started to question these tropes.

In the late twentieth-century a number of writers pushed back on this idea of a singular culture being represented as one dimensional. R.A. Salvatore was one of the first to do this in the fantasy corner of *Dungeons & Dragons* related literature. The popularity of his *The Dark Elf Trilogy* series would change not just the Forgotten Realms setting but would also change the way role-playing games are approached by the fan base. His main character, Drizzt Do'Urden, is a Drow¹ elf that flees the dystopian, subterranean Underdark² to live on the surface world. Drizzt is a hero and a good person but is always initially judged by his skin color before his deeds. Salvatore tells the podcast *The Dungeoncast* how his sister gave him Tolkien's books and it inspired him to write fantasy as well:

My sister gave me *The Hobbit* and *Lords of the Rings* for a Christmas present.

There was a big blizzard out there in 1978 out here in New England and I was trapped in my mom's house for a week, so I read those books and fell in love with reading again. I gobbled up all the fantasy books I could and when I ran out, I wrote my own. (*The Dungeoncast* 1:48)

The Dark Elf Trilogy (1990) is a fantasy series written by R.A. Salvatore that explores the backstory of one of the characters in his earlier published *Icwind Dale* trilogy (1988), Drizzt Do'Urden. Drizzt is a Drow of the Underdark and secondboy of House Do'Urden, the ninth house of the Drow city of Menzoberranzan. Drizzt was the surprise protagonist of the story as it was originally supposed to be about a human

¹ Drow is a kind of an elf in the Forgotten Realms setting of which Drizzt is a part. It is capitalized as a proper noun in some texts and lower case in others. I will capitalize it for uniformity throughout this thesis.

² The Underdark is described in *A Reader's Guide to R.A. Salvatore's The Legend of Drizzt* (2008) as a world spanning network of caverns, tunnels, and vaults, home to millions of sentient creatures and millions more terrifying creatures out of the darkest nightmares (Athans 39).

barbarian named Wulfgar and not a renegade Drow elf. Technically, it is a sequel to the original books, but it is the origin story of Drizzt and his life up until the point he enters the *Icewind Dale* story. (Now, it is most often read first when new readers discover the works.) Drizzt was such a different character than anything else in *Dungeons & Dragons* fantasy up to this point. Gary Gygax, the creator of *Dungeons & Dragons* and writer of much of the original game supplements that subsequent novels would be based upon, built the foundations of how players were supposed to view the Drow. The earliest history of the Drow was established in the *Fiend Folio*, a monster supplement added to the *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game in 1980. Here Gygax expounds on the lore he created in the original *Dungeons & Dragons* supplement to include the Drow, *Descent into the Depths of the Earth* (1978):

Ages past, when the elvenfolk were but new to the face of the earth, their number was torn by discord and those of better disposition drove from them those of the elves who were selfish and cruel. However, constant warfare between the two divisions of elvenkind continued, with the goodly ones ever victorious, until those of dark nature were forced to withdraw from the lands under the skies and seek safety in the realm of the underworld. (Gygax 9)

Gygax, like Tolkien, was a student of mythology and folklore. Reference to dark elves comes from Norse mythology and the Dökkálfar or “dark Elves” as they are mentioned in the *Prose Edda*.³ Akin to the Svartálfar or “black elves” they were combined into one to form the fearsome Drow in Salvatore’s stories and modern *Dungeons & Dragons*.

³ The *Prose Edda* is a handbook for young poets, written in Iceland by the Christian master-poet and chieftain, Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241). It summarizes the pagan Germanic myths and reviews the rules of scaldic rhetoric (Campbell 285).

Though Ed Greenwood, author of many fantasy books in *Dungeons & Dragons*, is responsible for much of the early lore of the Forgotten Realms, he had little impact on the historical culture of the Drow. He did make mention of them in his introduction to *The Dark Elf Trilogy* with the first book in the series, *Homeland*. In the foreword to *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, Greenwood describes the Drow as “The obsidian-skinned, lithe, beautiful, and ruthless dark elves...” (Greenwood). The bulk of what we know of the Drow in *Dungeons & Dragons* has come from Salvatore. He was tasked with creating the societal structure and history of the dark elves for his series on the outcast Drow, Drizzt Do’Urden, in his series, *The Dark Elf Trilogy*⁴. Salvatore based the culture of the Drow on Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather* (1969): “I’m trying to think of a society that from the outside would look incredibly evil, but still has enough basic codes within it; codes of honor” (*The Dungeoncast* 16:20). He then explains that he based the city of Menzoberranzan on the five mafia families in Puzo’s version of New York. Menzoberranzan occupies a huge cavern and is bathed by light from a strange magical clocktower called Narbondel that is a massive central stalactite hanging down in the middle of the city. The inhabitants of Menzoberranzan are mostly the dark elves, but also other monsters that they use as slave labor or are summoned from the evil planes of existence to do the bidding of the Drow. The society is matriarchal, and each house is led by a matron mother, a high priestess of the evil goddess known as Lolth, the Spider Queen. The daughters of the matron mothers enter service to Lolth and become priestesses. The sons become part of the house defense as soldiers or magic users.

⁴ As a note to the reader, henceforth when I cite the three books in *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, I will be referring to the combined collector’s edition of all three books for simplicity of following page numbers. I will cite the book I am referring to when I first introduce it.

When Salvatore created Drizzt, there was something different about him.

Salvatore opens his *The Dark Elf Trilogy* with a foreword looking at one of the most popular characters in modern fantasy. He told *The Dungeoncast* about how he developed into something more than he first imagined: “He was supposed to be a sidekick, after all, a curiosity piece with a slightly different twist. You know, like Robin to Batman or Kato to the Green Hornet” (Salvatore 18:45). Instead, what was supposed to be a supporting character became the star protagonist of a series of books that spans thirty-nine novels and several short stories up to the time of this piece of writing.

In doing my initial research for this topic I realized why I was drawn to the story as a child. In the main narrative, Drizzt suffers as an outcast in his family. He never fits in to Drow society as a whole. He rejects the choices before him and ultimately follows his own moral code and leaves the world of his family to find his own path in life. This is similar to my own life in a lot of ways. Though I did not grow up underground per say, a lot of my youth was lived in hiding and on the outskirts of society as my parents were both drug dealers and addicts. At the age of fifteen I had the epiphany that I could choose to become a product of my environment, or I could choose to leave said environment and find my own way in life. I chose the latter and left behind that life and the caustic relationships that defined it. In this way, I identified with the character of Drizzt Do'Urden who also chose a different life than the only one he had known. Some innate characteristic made him different than his people. I was the same. We both had help and friends along the way to be a North Star for navigating life's obstacles. My leaving a broken family had me gravitate to a religious community where I experienced another kind of trauma and which, as does Drizzt, I chose to leave behind. This subliminal

connection to a fictional character was an important part of my development. It shows how literature can speak to the individual and when one is alone in the proverbial Underdark of one's life, one knows that one is never truly alone. Others share your experiences and heroes show one the way out.

The Dark Elf Trilogy is an example of what scholar Farah Mendlesohn calls immersive fantasy in her 2008 book, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Here Mendlesohn defines "immersive fantasy": "Often labeled 'high fantasy,' immersive fantasies take place in worlds, cultures, and civilizations entirely separate from our own, existing 'in place,' as it were, in their respective storyworlds" (Mendlesohn xiv). The Seven Kingdoms in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996), the world of Krynn in the *Dragonlance* (1984) series, and the world of islands in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* (1968) are examples of immersive fantasy settings where the stories take place in their own self-contained worlds as opposed to a "portal-quest" fantasy setting like the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950) in which characters from our world step into a fantastic setting. These different kinds of fantasy approach problems like trauma in different ways due in part to their settings and the characters that inhabit them. In some way, all kinds of fantasy can be used as a tool for dealing with trauma.

The usefulness of fantasy as a tool for understanding trauma is important. Jan Alber wrote in "Impossible Storyworlds—and What to do With Them" that, in the case of fictional stories set in places where the events could not happen, they: "widen our cognitive horizon by urging us to create mental models that move beyond real-world possibilities, it also challenges our limited perspective on the world and invites us to address questions that we would perhaps otherwise ignore" (Alber 456). For the

countless people that deal with everyday traumas, Neil Gaiman connects the dots to the purpose of healing trauma through fantasy. In a paraphrase to G.K. Chesterton, Gaiman begins his novel *Coraline* (2002) with the following statement: “Fairy tales are more than true” not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten” (Gaiman v).

Overcoming fear of something like dragons or other monsters of fantasy is part of the subconscious therapy that fantasy provides. The topic of the science of the scary was discussed on the podcast, *Startalk Radio* hosted by Neil Degrasse Tyson in October of 2021. The guest, Mathias Clasen, associate editor of *Evolutionary Studies and Imaginative Culture* at Aarhus University and author of *Why Horror Seduces* (2017), discusses a study of how people use simulated traumas to prepare for real life stresses. Clasen uses the term “recreational fear,” to describe a mental state reached when a person is suspending disbelief. Recreational fear is described by Clasen as, “A type of activity in which people derive pleasure from fear” (Science of the Scary 2:50). He goes on to explain that horror is the prototypical type of recreational fear:

Horror movies, Stephen King novels, horror video games, haunted attractions, but also activities like extreme sports, or pretending you’re a monster and chasing your kids through the apartment is a kind of recreational fear in which the child gets to experience what it feels like to be a little bit afraid while realizing there is no real danger. (The Science of the Scary 3:13)

Simulated trauma such as this is exactly what trauma in fantasy is doing. A person reading a harrowing tale of a hero fighting with a sword where life and death are on the line is experiencing a recreational fear. People come back to these compelling stories and

it reinforces the notion that as Gaiman said, the “dragon can be beaten.” One can survive the micro encounter in the fiction and gain experience points like in a *Dungeons & Dragons* game to become more efficient in dealing with this kind of trauma in the future.

Storytelling is a common human experience where people often use myths and folklore to make sense of the world around them. Jonathan Gottschall writes in *The Storytelling Animal* (2012) that: “Fiction is like a flight-simulator.” He continues that it is “A powerful and ancient virtual reality technology that simulates the big dilemmas of human life” (Gottschall 67). Gottschall adds that it: “allows our brains to practice reacting to the kinds of challenges that are, and always were, most crucial to our survival as a species” (Gottschall 67). And Stephen King says in his book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000) that: “Only *through* fiction can we think about the unthinkable, and perhaps obtain some kind of closure” (King 268). The real dangers are in the physical world we live in. Whether it is abuse or neglect or the very real threat of death for many in the world, humans are the real monsters in most situations, as in the case of the fictional setting of the card game *Magic the Gathering*’s expansion set world of Innistrad (2011), a Lovecraft-inspired world of gothic horror. In *The Art of Magic: The Gathering* (2016), James Wyatt describes it this way: “Horrors stalk in the shadows and scratch at the door at night. Humanity is beset on all sides.” And he adds that in this fictional mirror of our world, “the tragedy of Innistrad is that all its evils, all the scourges that threaten humanity, actually spring from humanity itself” (Wyatt 53). No longer are people banding together for protection from wild animals because the monsters in the dark are other people. Growing up with trauma is a wall to scale that can be an obstacle to functioning as a healthy adult. Mental training in the form of heroes versus villains and

monsters teaches us that there is a path forward even in the darkest depths of the Mordors or Underdark that we must traverse in order to overcome. This is why trauma in fantasy can be important for individual development in dealing with adverse situations brought on by traumatic events.

In this thesis, I will look at trauma using the story of Drizzt Do'Urden in the *Dark Elf* (1990) trilogy. There are specific topics to explore in the trilogy. In all three books, *Homeland* (1990), *Exile* (1990), and *Sojourn* (1991), Drizzt endures various form of trauma. *Homeland*, tells the story of Drizzt's birth into the ninth house of Menzoberranzan and his early years learning the ways of the Drow. *Exile* (1990) is the story of a young Drizzt rejecting the culture of his people and struggling to survive in the caverns of the Underdark, a vast network of caves where fantastical monsters and civilizations live beneath the surface world. He is pursued by dangerous monsters and even his family as they seek to make an example of the traitor to their cultural ways. Lastly, in *Sojourn* (1991), Drizzt escapes the Underdark and struggles to find a place in the unfamiliar society of the surface world where he is subjected to hatred and racism for merely being a dark elf. The Drow have a terrible reputation as killers among the surface dwellers and Drizzt's outward appearance causes several problems for him before he finally finds a place in the furthest outreaches of the civilized world in the area of Icewind Dale and the dwarven community that lives alongside the humans of the settlement of Ten Towns.

In chapter two, I will examine how religion relates to his trauma and the trauma that religion can bring upon an individual such as Drizzt and a society such as the dark elves of the city of Menzoberranzan. Under the dystopic rule of a chaotic demon goddess,

the society constantly exists on the edge of collapse where the hierarchy of priestesses serve the goddess Lolth and push a xenophobic worldview on the residents of the city. As with a cult, the dark elves of Menzoberranzan are cut off from the outside world and radicalized into hating any outsiders. Rejection of this dogma is tantamount to total rejection of the Drow society. Usually, a heretic such as Drizzt would be punished by being slain or turned into a drider, a half Drow/half spider creature with little to no memory of how it came to be and then cast off into a ghetto of sorts called the Claw Rift. Instead of being a place of solace, the Drow religion is the primary source of chaos and trauma. I will look at how Salvatore talks about religious trauma through the lens of his fictional society and discuss the theory and how religious trauma works in the real world.

In my third chapter, I will address the issue of race as it pertains to the trauma that Drizzt faces in the story. I will examine themes in Western literature that may indicate a predisposition towards racism toward characters that are dark-skinned such as Drizzt. In the work, the issue of the Drizzt's race is central to his story. His own people exhibit racial bias towards the other denizens of the Underdark and are dangerously hostile to the surface races such as the elves that live there. As part of their culture, they are taught that Drow are superior to others. Inverting the trope, the matriarchies of Drow women are more powerful than men and dark skin is preferable to light. Drizzt moves from one culture to another and struggles to find his identity as he is constantly a victim of racism once he reaches the surface where he comes into contact with men and surface elves along with other races of the fantasy genre.

Finally, my last chapter will deal with language as it relates to trauma. There is a predilection for using language that has a racial bias. Language can also be a huge source

for trauma. I will look at how language functions and is dependent upon relationships that are deployed from a position where words can be used to inflict trauma. Language has been used as a tool for inflicting trauma on others. I will examine specific linguistic structures in the text as well as historically in literature and language to form a context for my theory that language is a form of trauma.

In conclusion, this thesis will examine the forces of trauma in *The Dark Elf Trilogy* as it applies to the main character of Drizzt Do'Urden and his journey from his home in the dystopian landscape of Menzoberranzan, deep beneath the earth to the surface world. His adventures take him on a physical and spiritual journey in which he endures religious and racial trauma all the while trying to be a hero to the people that shun him. Drizzt abandons the culture of his people and chooses to live in a totally foreign world under the sun amongst peoples that hate and fear him for his race. As Drizzt will learn through his experiences in the story, trauma and its consequences are paramount to social development. Trauma shapes people. Heroes endure trauma and use it to overcome obstacles in life. This is crux of my thesis: everyone has the potential to be a hero.

II. RELIGION IN THE DARK

Storytelling and religion are tightly interwoven parts of the human experience since ancient times. The worship of deities has always been a part of the human consciousness. The passing on of values using myths and folklore are an integral part of cultures going back as far as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2100-1200 BCE) in ancient Mesopotamia. After the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, it is regarded as the oldest written literature. This worship of celestial beings is also seen in the genre of modern fantasy as many popular settings have a mythology of gods and goddesses that are involved in the events of their respective worlds. From The Seven in *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996) to Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950), the mythopoeia in these fictional settings is important to the narrative. They help address issues of moral standards for the characters in the story and for the reader. The same can be said of the many deities that populate the universe of fantasies inspired by Dungeons & Dragons where *The Dark Elf Trilogy* takes place.

To begin to understand the hero Drizzt Do'Urden and one of the major traumas in his life, one must understand the world of the Drow and their religion. The Drow of Menzoberranzan worship an evil spider-goddess, Lolth. In the beginning, Lolth was formerly Araushnee, the lesser elven goddess of destiny and artisans. She was Corellon Larethian's "creator of the elves" consort, and the main goddess of the dark elves. Araushnee tried to kill Corellon and usurp his power. When Araushnee was unsuccessful, she was casted out of the Seladrine, "pantheon of elven gods,"⁵ and made into a tanar'ri, a demon of the Abyss, one of the allegorical versions of Hell in the *Dungeons & Dragons*

⁵ In the Forgotten Realms, Seladrine is Elvish for, "fellowship of brothers and sisters in the wood."

game. She would go on to change her name to Lolth and conquer the sixty-sixth layer of the Abyss known as the Demonweb Pits, thus beginning her reign. After securing control over her layer, she plotted to exact vengeance against Corellon. Being unable to directly strike at him, she planned to be worshiped as a goddess by the elves, bringing misery to them and therefore to their "father."⁶ The three writers of the game module *Out of the Abyss* (2015), Perkins, Lee and Whitter, introduce Lolth this way:

Rather than the sun-dappled Sword Coast, this adventure begins in the Underdark, a terrifying world of tunnels and caverns far below the surface. This is the domain of the Drow, the infamous dark elves, among the most fearsome of enemies in the Forgotten Realms. Here, rather than the Dragon Queen, players must defeat the horrific Lolth, the Demon Queen of Spiders, goddess of the Drow, and “a villain as deranged as the Queen of Hearts. (Perkins et al 2)

The first known document regarding Lolth is in the *Fiend Folio* (1980) game supplement. Editor of the *Fiend Folio*, Don Turnbull, describes Lolth’s physical appearance, “The demoness Lolth is a very powerful and feared demon lord. She usually takes the form of a giant black widow spider when she is in the Prime Material Plane and she sometimes assumes this form on her own plane (The Abyss) as well, but she also enjoys appearing as an exquisitely beautiful female dark elf (Turnbull 24).

Historian and literary critic, René Girard is the subject of Jennifer Bashaw’s essay, “Jesus, Girard, and Dystopian Literature” (2008). In this essay Bashaw discusses what Girard has to say about the importance of religion forming a cohesion to keep a society from coming apart. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard has this to say about

⁶ History of the Seladrine paraphrased as told in *Evermeet: Island of the Elves* (1998) by Elaine Cunningham

conflict and violence: “Endemic conflict among the members of a society cannot persist; it must be restrained. So, to alleviate mass violence, humans form religion, a social structure that attempts to curb mimetic rivalry and its resulting violence that prohibition, ritual sacrifice, and myth” (qtd. in Bashaw 74). Now imagine a society predicated on the opposite. The glue that holds them together is indeed mimetic, but also chaotic. All the matron mothers of each Drow house vie to move up to the position of first house of the city by taking that which belongs to the houses in front of them and at the same time the favor of Lolth. Thus, Drow society is in constant chaos as they work the will of their deity. Salvatore, through the character of Drizzt, wrote soliloquies in the mode of journal entries to understand his place in the world and give greater context to the story at hand. In *Homeland*, Drizzt describes Lolth as an agent of chaos: “Station is the way of Lolth, the ambition she bestows to further the chaos, to keep her Drow "children" along their appointed course of self-imprisonment.—Drizzt Do'Urden” (Salvatore, *The Dark Elf Trilogy* 36). How would a society like this continue to survive? Girard looks to the ritual aspect of the chaos: “Ritual is the reenactment of an original act of violence, often the founding murder of a society, which serves to curtail mass violence with its “little doses of violence, like vaccination” (*Violence and Sacred* 290).

In the game lore of *Dungeons & Dragons* Lolth is listed an evil goddess. This is in contrast to the goodly deities that work for the noble causes of the realm. Evil is an often-overused term and hard to quantify. Writer, professor, and scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell comments on how evil can be perceived relative to one’s perspective in *The Power of Myth* (1988), “In other traditions, good and evil are relative to the position in which you are standing. What is good for one is evil for the other” (Campbell 65).

Defining evil is a daunting task. For this topic, I turned to Terry Eagleton's *On Evil* (2010) for a definition. Eagleton paraphrases Immanuel Kant while looking at some of literature's famous evil characters:

It might be argued that any definition of evil which excludes such a rogues' gallery is self-deflatingly narrow. Isn't such a sense of evil too technical and precise for its own good? It defines evil, in effect, as what Immanuel Kant calls, "radical" evil. It sees it as willing wickedness for wickedness's sake, which Kant did not in fact think was possible. (Eagleton 95)

An example of this type of character would be Iago from *Othello*. Iago has no real motive in his hatred of Othello. Othello has certainly never done anything directly to him. Other than jealousy and racism, there is no reason Iago should be Othello's arch enemy. Iago seems the perfect lieutenant. He even tells fellow soldier, Rodrigo, "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.45).

In this example Kant argues that Iago's form of "radical" evil only really exists in fiction. Wickedness for wickedness's sake could only be achieved in a character of fiction because Kant did not believe "radical" evil was even possible in real people. Wicked and evil are two different things. Wicked has a motive, or some kind of reason for the act, while evil harms for no reason at all. In this sense, Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is merely wicked, while Lolth would be considered evil. According to popular tropes, an argument could be made that Satan exhibits the qualities of a hero in *Paradise Lost*. He rebels against what he perceives as oppression and desires to be the ruler of his own destiny instead of accepting the role God gives him in Heaven. In the right context, he is a freedom fighter, leading a rebellion for the freedom of his own will.

Satan has a motive. Iago has none. If we accept this argument, then in the same light, Drizzt is rebels against Lolth in much the same way as Satan does against God. Worship of Lolth was forced on Drizzt as worship of God was forced on Satan. Both characters choose to abandon the only religion they know in favor of self-determination.

Establishing that Lolth is, in fact, evil, we can see the kind of trauma this inflicts on a population that holds her chaotic views as holy. Furthermore, Eagleton summarizes Arthur Schopenhauer's definition of evil with his typical flare for dry wit:

In that great monument to human gloom *The World as Will and Idea*, the nineteenth-century philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer distinguished between what he called the good, the bad, and the evil. Bad actions, he taught, were selfish ones; but evil actions did not fall under this heading. They were not just displays of ruthless egoism or fanatical self-interest. By evil, Schopenhauer meant more or less what I have been meaning by the term. He saw evil deeds as motivated by a need to obtain relief from the inner torment of what he called the Will; and this relief was to be gained by inflicting that torment on others. In psychoanalytic terms, evil is thus a form of projection. (Eagleton 107)

Now imagine a society devoted to the worshipping and promoting of the agenda of a being of Lolth's temperament. Imagine the kind of trauma that comes with living day to day in this kind of chaos where a powerful physical threat is actively causing trauma without a definitive reason. That is what English philosopher Peter Dews points to, when he quotes from André Green's book *The Idea of Evil* (2007): "Evil is without 'why' because its *raison d'être* is to proclaim that everything which exists has no meaning, obeys no order, pursues no aim, depends only on the power it can exercise to impose its

will on the objects of its appetite” (Dews 133).

Drizzt is born into trauma in an act of trauma that is religiously motivated. More than just the trauma of childbirth, his mother, Matron Malice intends to sacrifice him to Lolth in return for adding power to a spell to overthrow a rival house in the city of Menzoberranzan. At his birth at the time of his receiving his name, his sister poised above him with a dagger to end his short life. Only the murder of his eldest brother Nalfein by his middle brother Dinin saves his life. As a royal place in the house is only available to the first and second boy of the house, Drizzt is elevated to second. A male child’s life is not worth much to the noble houses: “Briza lifted the instrument above the baby’s chest. ‘Name the child,’ she implored her mother. ‘The Spider Queen will not accept the sacrifice until the child is named!’ Lolth was appeased at the treachery and the chaos for the cost of the spell” (Salvatore 13).

How this relates to real-world trauma is that, as Cowan explains, the unnatural narrative of a mythic evil goddess creates a horrific chaos in the lives of her worshippers. It reveals a real-world problem as religion, in certain circumstances can be a type of trauma that has echoed through humanity’s existence. Cowan says that as society evolves, “these narratives must be held progressively in greater tension” (23). He elaborates: “Consider the number of people who believe that the tribal god of a few Iron Age nomads spoke to one of their leaders from a small brush fire and issued commands which, more than three millennia later, continue to shape the lives of one-third of humankind” (Cowan 23).

Drizzt’s journey out of the dark is metaphorical as a better and brighter world awaits him as he ascends to the surface. Menzoberranzan is a pessimistic mirror of

human society. It is a place where the worst instincts of real-world people are represented in the fictional culture that lives in the dark, miles below the surface. Brought on by the edicts of their faith, the Drow are xenophobic, violent, jealous, and full of avarice.

Worship of Lolth requires domestic abuse. In Drow society the females are physically larger and more dominant. Only females can enter the priesthood in service to Lolth. Men are relegated to the more mundane tasks of warriors and wizards as these crafts are looked down upon. The priestesses of Lolth all carry a snake-headed whip which is magically imbued and comes alive to bite into the flesh of its victim. These scourges are usually only used on other Drow and usually they are the males of the various houses that have to be kept in line by the priestesses. Such is the life of a male Drow child. They will grow up to learn to fear the scourge and are viciously beaten at the slightest provocation. For example, Drizzt recalls the ordeal of getting whipped by a priestess of Lolth:

Whenever I hear the crack of a whip, another memory—more a sensation than a memory actually—sends a shiver through my spine. The shocking jolt and the ensuing numbness from those snakeheaded weapons is not something that any person would soon forget. They bite under your skin, sending waves of magical energy through your body, waves that make your muscles snap and pull beyond their limits. (Salvatore 28)

The nobles of each house are treated differently than a common Drow. A high priestess will be given the task of raising her brother and teaching him his place in society. This is accompanied by years of abuse under the whips of the priestesses. In the long life of a Drow, this abuse could last for decades.⁷ Drizzt reflects on his experiences being reared

⁷ According to *Dungeons & Dragons Lore Wiki*, the lifespan of a Drow can reach 750 years with some Drow high priestesses reaching 1000 years. Drow reach adulthood at approximately 80 years.

by his sister, Vierna. He knows that his fate could have been worse had the task been assigned to his oldest sister, Briza who was a cruel disciplinarian. Drizzt recalls, “Even though I count Vierna as the kindest of my sisters, her words drip in the venom of Lolth as surely as those of any cleric in Menzoberranzan. It seems unlikely that she would risk her aspirations toward high priestesshood for the sake of a mere child, a mere male child” (Salvatore 28). He continues to address the abuse of growing up in a Drow household, “I have more insight into the next six years, but the most prominent recollection of the days I spent serving the court of Matron Malice—aside from the secret trips outside the house—is the image of my own feet. A page prince is never allowed to raise his gaze” (Salvatore 28).

There are no shortages of accounts where religion has been a traumatizer. From human sacrifices in Mayan and Aztec cultures to burying soldiers with the leaders of ancient Egypt and China, many horrific stories of violence related to religion are documented in history. Then there are campaigns of genocide in the name of religion like the Crusades or the more modern, Armenian, Jewish, Bosnian and Rohingya cases. In all of them, religion has been an impetus or an excuse for inflicting tremendous trauma on human beings. Even if one drills it down to smaller cases, religion can traumatize an individual. While it is not an officially recognized diagnosis, Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS) is an area of therapy that is receiving more attention in recent years. In his article in *The New York Times*, Richard Schiffman explains, “Scientific research into the consequences of such religious condemnation remains at an early stage. But the potential for harm is clear. Many suffer for decades from post-traumatic stress disorder-type symptoms, including anxiety, self-doubt, and feelings of social inadequacy”

(Schiffman). Schiffman quotes a pastor of First Corinthians Baptist Church in Harlem: “We think of church as a place of healing and transformation, and it is,” but for some, “religion has been more bruising and damaging than healing and transformative” (Schiffman). Pastor Mike’s church is confronting RTS: “Some churches weaponize scripture and religion to do very deep damage on the psyche. Gay, lesbian and trans people are told that God condemns them, unwed mothers that they are living in sin, and many natural human desires are deemed evil” (Schiffman).

Religion as a source of trauma is an important one. Dr. Alicia Powell of Walden University writes that, “Religious trauma can lead to an individual believing that they are inherently bad or condemned (especially if they’ve experienced purity culture)—even after they have left the religion and their previously held beliefs” (Powell). Often when an individual begins to question their religious beliefs and considers leaving the body of worship, a controlling religious leader, or community, some of the symptoms are similar to traditional PTSD. Powell quotes Marlene Winell and compares religious trauma to PTSD:

Religious Trauma Syndrome is the condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination. They may be going through the shattering of a personally meaningful faith and/or breaking away from a controlling community and lifestyle. RTS is a function of both the chronic abuses of harmful religion and the impact of severing one’s connection with one’s faith. It can be compared to a combination of PTSD and Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) (qtd in Powell).

The separation from a religion is akin to separating a part of one’s identity. Even though

the religion is harmful to the person, they feel an extreme psychic injury by disconnecting from the familiar and stepping out into a new reality where the system in which one has been indoctrinated is no longer a support.

Now imagine the fictional setting of *Homeland* with a very real and very dangerous deity in Lolth. The kind of RTS that would be persistent in every member of Drow society would be palpable. For one that wanted to break away from the cycle as Drizzt does and to a lesser extent so does his father Zaknafein. The trauma would be incredible. Rejecting a religion and a culture that is all one has ever known is beyond difficult. It can have a lasting effect on the individual. Speaking from experience, leaving a cultish existence is scary and takes more faith in oneself than in a god.

As I have mentioned earlier, in the opening chapters of *Homeland*, Drizzt is born during a raid on a rival house. He was meant to be sacrificed to Lolth in order to power the spell until his older brother was killed instead. Ritual sacrifice, such as in the moments of Drizzt's birth, were practiced in ancient times: "Primitive religious rituals usually conclude with the killing of a scapegoat, a sacrifice that represents the conclusion of the mimetic crisis. This act separates a victim from the community as something "other." This "other" ...serves as a focal point of blame for the entire group" (Bashaw 75). This scapegoating still happens in the modern world. Maybe the sacrifice is not an actual killing of the scapegoat, but the shifting of blame that Powell and Winnel speak of in relation to RTS still takes place when an individual breaks away from their worship community. In many evangelical Christian worldviews, an individual that leaves the church is considered a "backslider" and has given in to "the world" or what they consider to be a dystopian reality that the rest of humanity lives in. This individual is unaware of

the fact that they are damned because they live and interact with people outside the safety of the church. The individual is ostracized from the community for fear of bringing outside influence into the core of the church. It is a control measure designed to segregate individuals and keep them dependent on the church and its leadership. In this sense, the person that becomes “othered” is now a focal point or sacrifice to the community. This is a cautionary tale for those in that community that may want to question their faith. It is also a rallying point for those that seek to control the body. Girard adds to this discourse:

The community affirms its unity in the sacrifice, a unity that emerges from the moment when the division is most intense, when the community enacts its dissolution in the mimetic crisis and its abandonment to the endless cycle of vengeance. But suddenly the opposition of everyone against everyone else is replaced by the opposition of all against one. Where previously there had been a chaotic ensemble of particular conflicts, there is not the simplicity of a single conflict: the entire community on one side, and the other, the victim. (Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* 24)

In much the same way as a cult controls the interactions of an individual with the outside world, Salvatore paints this picture with his depiction of the Drow. They too are severed from ordinary interactions with the outside world. Deep down in the bowels of the earth, they are taught to shun outsiders and live their lives in xenophobia. The less interactions with an outside culture, the easier it is to “other” them and the easier it is for the leaders to control the discourse of the body. While creatures on the surface may be wary of venturing too far into an unknown cave for fear of encountering the evil Drow, the Drow likewise fear encroachment of a different way of life into their dark space. Convincing

the Drow of the evil of the surface is easy because for a creature that lives in darkness, the brightness of the sun is a painful reminder that they do not belong. The first steps into the surface reject them as they struggle with the blinding pain. In order to overcome their fear of the unknown world above, they must endure a physical and metaphorical experience. In this passage from *Homeland*, we can see Drizzt learning about the tenets of the spider queen, Lolth and what it means to be a Drow that worships her:

So, the relationship continued for another five years, with Drizzt learning the basic lessons of life in Drow society while endlessly cleaning the chapel of House Do'Urden. Beyond the supremacy of female Drow (a lesson always accentuated by the wicked snake-headed whip), the most compelling lessons were those concerning the surface elves, the faeries. Evil empires often bound themselves in webs of hate toward fabricated enemies, and none in the history of the world were better at it than the Drow. From the first day they were able to understand the spoken word, Drow children were taught that whatever was wrong in their lives could be blamed on the surface elves. (Salvatore 27-28)

This is one of the ways that the Drow indoctrinate their young to recognize their surface cousins as “other.” A fine example of the Drow teaching othering in *Homeland* occurs when Drizzt is studying at Melee-Magthere, a school for young Drow warriors. The master of lore, Hatch'net perpetuates the cycle of trauma by repeating the myths about the surface world to the young Drow, further radicalizing them. This is an important scene in the understanding of Drow culture:

Hatch'net paced the perimeter of the room, making certain that every eye followed his movements attentively. “You are Drow.” he snapped suddenly. “Do

you understand what that means? Do you know where you come from, and the history of our people? Menzoberranzan was not always our home, nor was any other cavern of the Underdark. Once we walked the surface of the world.” He spun suddenly and came up right in Drizzt’s face. “Do you know of the surface?”

Master Hatch’net snarled. Drizzt recoiled and shook his head. (Salvatore 114-115)

Here, Hatch’net begins his indoctrination of the young Drow into the culture. He is perpetuating the mythology responsible for their hatred of the surface elves. To accentuate his point, he describes what to a Drow would be a dystopian landscape where the sun is a great ball of fire bringing torment to the surface world. For the sensitive eyes of a Drow, who have lived their entire life underground, the light from such a thing would be excruciating. Hatch’net continues:

“An awful place.” Hatch’net continued, turning back to the whole of the group.

“Each day, as the glow begins its rise in Narbondel⁸, a great ball of fire rises into the open sky above, bringing hours of a light greater than the punishing spells of the priestesses of Lolth! (Salvatore 115)

Adding to the horror of a punishing ball of light hanging in the daytime (a word that is unknown to Drow), he tells them that even when the sun relents, stars and moon remain:

Even in the night, when the ball of fire has gone below the far rim of the world,” Hatch’net continued, weaving his words as if he were telling a horror tale, “one cannot escape the uncounted terrors of the surface. Reminders of what the next day will bring, dots of light—and sometimes a lesser ball of silvery fire—mar the sky’s blessed darkness.” (Salvatore 115)

⁸ Narbondel was a huge stalagmite in the city of Menzoberranzan and served as a clock for its inhabitants. See *Drizzt Do’Urden’s Guide to the Underdark* p. 61

Next, Hatch'net schools the young Drow on some of their history. Drow did not always live in darkness. They once danced beneath the stars with their surface cousins which is a shock to the young warriors: "Once our people walked the surface of the world," he repeated his tone now one of lament, "in ages long past, even longer than the lines of the great houses. In that distant age, we walked beside the pale-skinned elves, the faeries!" (Salvatore 115). The teacher's information is met with incredulity as one of the students interjects: "It cannot be true!" and Hatch'net responds: "It is!" (Salvatore 115) This furthers the discourse that those that are outside the faith are the evil other. From here the teacher, Hatch'net continues the lesson with more rhetoric about the evil of the surface elves:

"We thought the faeries, our friends, we called them kin! We could not know, in our innocence, that they were the embodiments of deceit and evil. We could not know that they would turn on us suddenly and drive us from them, slaughtering our children and the eldest of our race! Without mercy the evil faeries pursued us across the surface world. Always we asked for peace, and always we were answered by swords and killing arrows! (Salvatore 115)

This is where the preacher, Hatch'net brings his sermon to its crescendo: "He paused, his face twisting into a widening, malicious smile. 'Then we found the goddess!' (Salvatore 115).

From here he exudes the power of Lolth and enforces the edict that Drow are to slaughter surface elves in service to Lolth and for revenge for what they had done to their Drow ancestors. Drow are to be conquerors and rule over the other humanoid races such as men, goblin kind, and dwarves. Hatch'net concludes, "You are the Drow, never again

to be downtrodden, rulers of all you desire, conquerors of lands you choose to inhabit!”
(Salvatore 116).

In the scene above, Hatch’net could be a fiery end times preacher or a politician trying to incite a crowd. The mob before him could be swept up into a furor over the rhetoric. It is not difficult to see how telling people for generations that their plight is caused by outsiders can perpetuate radicalism and justify genocide. In the case of the Drow, the surface elves are people just like them, but they have different traditions and become the scapegoats in this scenario. In Homeland, the seeds for genocide are planted in the minds of young Drow, and though Drow are imagined creatures of fantasy, they are but a reflection of the darker aspects of real human history. The Drow are monsters to the surface world, but they are merely representatives of a monstrous dark thread of the worst of humanity. In the real world as in this story, religious flavored dogma where doing harm to another group is sanctioned by a deity can lead to generational trauma.

Learned hatred passed down between generations of people and perpetuated by a trusted source of information like clergy can lead to harmful behavior even if the original source of information is not firsthand. Stories of past trauma inflicted by an outside group get passed down over the years and are accepted as fact. This can lead to a tradition of hate that can become a way of life. Amber Shields’s dissertation, *In-Between Worlds: Exploring Trauma Through Fantasy* has more to say on this subject. Speaking about fantasy, she explains how the narrative in storytelling can be used to inform about real world trauma. One way to inform is the use of varying genres. Sharing tales of trauma to each other can help as Shields explains here:

Genre can provoke an insightful and challenging approach to unresolved histories.

It facilitates representation by providing a defined framework. Further, the recognizable conventions and social history of genre can also provide unique contributions to situating and inscribing real life events such as cultural trauma into the societal framework. The fantasy genre, in its many incarnations, offers a rich history of social reflection through recognized narratives that lead to a confrontation, rather than escape, with contested realities. (Shields 49)

While a society may show signs of being affected by large scale violence and profound group changes, for this experience to be viewed as a collective trauma society must go through the “trauma process” in which a new group narrative defining the event as such is created, shared, and becomes a part of a group’s memory (Shields 42).

Here Shields is referring to the trauma process in an individual, but trauma in many cases can be applied to groups of people as well. For instance, in the most horrific and extreme of examples, generational trauma is carried by the heirs of Holocaust survivors. Shield’s work is clearly influenced by Freud. She explains:

Going back to Sigmund Freud and his work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud explored the idea that trauma is not experienced as such at the time of the event but rather becomes trauma in its belated return as a symptom. This is a result of what Freud read as displacement in which the trauma survivor mentally extricates himself from the moment of the traumatic event as a form of protection. This displacement creates a lacuna in the memory of the trauma, which the survivor is not able to fully process and narrate as a past event. As a result, the trauma survivor experiences the repetition compulsion, or the eternal return, of haunting memories. (Shields 26)

Here, Freud speaks of instances when the trauma is permanently with the traumatized person. This is fairly common in fantasy narratives as in real world scenarios. In *The Hobbit* (1937), Smaug in the mountain terrorizing the dwarves of Middle Earth is an example of generational trauma. The people of Midgar in the video game *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) are another example. Suffering under the boot of the Shinra Corporation for generations, the inhabitants of the city endure isolation and totalitarian control. In *Beowulf* (c 1000 CE), the court of King Hrothgar being terrorized by Grendel is yet another. The Danes suffer nightly traumas until the hero, Beowulf comes to rescue them. This kind of trauma is shared by communities, who must bear it until a hero comes. Heroes like Bilbo Baggins, Cloud Strife, Beowulf, and Drizzt Do'Urden show up as a catalyst of change for a community.

Fantasy literature is a great medium for discussing trauma. It is a highly imaginative canvas upon which to tell a story that the reader can immerse themselves in, but conversely, it is also a space that is clearly fictional and removed from the real world experiences. For people that are working through trauma, fantasy can be a safe space where they can learn to deal with said trauma. The heroes of the story give hope and instruction to the traumatized as they too fight on. Shields argues that despite most fantasy worlds being extremely violent, the odds are usually in the hero's favor. She explains it this way:

Examining trauma debates and the growing demand for, though not necessarily recognition of, alternative representations of trauma leads this study to point to the fantasy genre as a representational form that is problematic and yet at the same time has much potential. As a genre that emblemizes and embraces change,

fantasy provides an alternative space to bring together conflicting and unresolved cases of history and confront the many pieces of shattered worlds. This is especially critical in cases such as trauma in which the security of known spaces has been compromised and the spaces that are being created in its stead are still under construction. As a popular, recognized genre, fantasy offers a comforting foundation to this construction process to sort through these transformations in the creation of new understandings and spaces. (Shields 16)

Fantasy as genre of fiction can be a safe space for people who endure real-world traumas. Despite violence and strife, fantastic worlds can be a comforting place because they are not the real world and are far removed.

Fantasy can be used to heal or to cope. Escaping into a safe space where one can experience trauma in a controlled environment is a mechanism for making sense of trauma. Zack Snyder's 2011 film, *Sucker Punch* uses this fantasy world as a device for the main character to relate to the familial trauma in her life that causes her to become institutionalized. Based heavily on Lewis Carroll's, *Through the Looking Glass*, (1871) the protagonist, Babydoll (Emily Browning) uses highly fantasized encounters with the zombie German soldiers, giant demon samurai, and a dragon as proxy for overcoming the real-life monsters in her life. Dealing with physical abuse and the death of a sister and mother, Babydoll retreats into a safe space of fantasy to cope with her situation. In this way, she deals with the trauma of life by playing out the stories in a safe environment. This is a tool that fantasy brings to people. It is a training for dealing with actual trauma and it is a safe place to confront it.

In the second book of *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, *Exile* has Drizzt as a fugitive from

Drow society. For ten years he is lost in the Underdark. Lost in a labyrinth of tunnels and facing the horrors of the deep, he must survive the traumas of living alone in one of most dangerous places in the world and all the while being pursued by a fanatical religious base of Drow that scapegoat him for all their society's problems. The Drow insist this is the case, though the real problem is the adherence to an unpredictable and evil goddess. Lolth takes out her torment on her own worshipers to keep them in a constant state of terror. She is the reason for strife, not Drizzt. His rejection of their culture provides a focus for their suffering under Lolth. Drizzt's escape becomes a convenient reason for their suffering. It is easier to accept this than to fathom another dogma in which Drow can choose to be free of her influence. The Drow of the Underdark have no other reference for framing this situation.

To reiterate, my argument is that Lolth as a central figure in Drow culture is a driving force in the trauma that the Drow undergo. The religion has shaped the society in such a way that each of the worshippers are put through a macabre gauntlet that radicalizes most of them into creatures that mirror their goddess's chaotic evil nature. For those that do not share the kind of religious fervor of the powerful priestesses of Lolth, there is little else. Those warriors and wizards that exist in the culture accept their roles in society with casual apathy. I asked Salvatore in an interview I did with him through Facebook Messenger, "How do you use religion as a device for your characters?" I wanted to know directly about his views on religion as a kind of trauma and how he views it. His reply was:

I view religion as an institution, often rife with the foibles of man (and in our world, most often thick with sexist patriarchal dominance). The interpretations of

Christ from my Catholic upbringing are in direct conflict with the teaching of Prosperity Gospel that's been floating around for the last couple of decades. In short, I have no love for wealthy pastors. I've also seen religion a community experience of spirituality and organization in a good way...So it's a mixed bag, as with most everything. Some of my characters grow through religion (Cattie-brie⁹, for example). Some are inspired by their religion (Wulfgar, Bruenor), and some are agnostics who turn inwards and listen to the very basic compass of right and wrong (Drizzt). Some do both (Avelyn).¹⁰ It's an individual thing but for the most part, religion never becomes a reason for doing good – that always comes from inside. (Salvatore Interview)

Salvatore uses his personal views on religion as a way to examine both the positive and negative effects of religion on the characters he writes. Selfish motivations of a deity and its followers will have negative influences on the people in the community. Religions have good and bad qualities that depend on the motivations of the actors.

Many fantasy stories contain an allegory of religion as a component to make them relatable and easy to contextualize for the reader. There are elements of this in *Beowulf* according as Professor David Anderson of Oklahoma University. He describes on his podcast, *Professing Literature*. where he sees Christianity in the story: “There is a Christian sensibility that is, imposed on this earlier pagan story. We have repeated mentions of God, of the Almighty and a few other biblical allusions. The most vivid one of course is the one to Cain which I recited to you that Grendel is a child of Cain rather

⁹ Cattie-brie is a one of the Companions of the Hall, the group of adventurers that Drizzt joins in the Icewind Dale trilogy along with her adopted father, the dwarf king, Bruenor and the barbarian, Wulfgar.

¹⁰ Avelyn Desbris is an Abellian monk in the Salvatore's Demon Wars series. His rejection of the ways of the order is an important vehicle to the story

than a child of Seth” (Anderson 22:01). If the stories can be allegorical of religion, then the trauma in the story can be symbolic of real-world issues that are generated by one’s relationship to a particular faith. For Drizzt, his rejection of the way of life that worshipping Lolth would bring to him is laid bare when he is chosen to go on a raiding party to the surface. “Hunt well. The Spider Queen is watching,” a Drow cleric tells his brother (Salvatore 98). Upon entering a grove of dancing surface elves, the truth of his religion is made apparent as the Drow raiding party sets to murdering the surface elves in cold blood. “Vengeance!” one of them shouts as he attacks a lifeless body. Drizzt is soon faced with a horrible decision. He is expected to murder a child. “Yes, my brother!” Drizzt’s brother, Dinin exults. “Today, you know the glory it is to be a Drow! Today we appease the Spider Queen!” (Salvatore 100). This is the moment that Drizzt understands the radicalization of his people. The trauma of this moment becomes the point where he turns from the faith of his people and seeks a new path that will once again lead him to the surface and to a different way of life where his rejection of the worship of Lolth can exist. This is the point in his story where he becomes the scapegoat for the Drow of Menzoberranzan. In subsequent years in *The Dark Elf* series, Drizzt will reflect on this moment many times in subsequent novels. Drizzt will reflect on how this trauma changed him. The demands of Lolth are too much for him to give. He is unlike his people and instead of looking outward for conformation and conformity, he looks inward and sees that the murder of innocents is wrong. This is the one of the most important parts of the novel. It is the subtext that says the most about not only Lolth, but Drizzt. This is a powerful example of psychological realism where many people have found themselves questioning their own belief system. It takes a greater kind of faith to step out of one’s

comfortable place to see one's beliefs in a wider context. A hero can show the reader the way out.

In conclusion, religion and in particular the religion of the Drow of the Underdark can cause trauma on not just the enemies of the worshippers, but the worshippers themselves. Religion used as a weapon of rhetoric and fanaticism can leave whole cultures traumatized by a static oppression, such as the case with Lolth. There is no room for change as the culture is walled off from greater society and perpetuates a xenophobic wall around the faithful, excluding them in a cultlike manner from society at large. Breaking away from this type of faith, one is often ostracized and scapegoated into an example of otherworldly sin and societal decay leaving the person isolated and traumatized.

III. RACE IN THE DARK

Racial trauma is represented in much of gaming fantasy lore and the gaming culture that is so closely linked to it. The issue of racial stereotyping and exclusivity has recently become an issue that had to be addressed in the gaming community. In 2020, Wizards of the Coast, the company that owns the license to all *Dungeons & Dragons* materials, announced that it was releasing a new sourcebook called *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* (2020). The popularity of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game came with a rich history built on many traditional fantasy settings. Unfortunately, along with the proliferation of the game, some of the uncomfortable histories and traditions of racial stereotyping came along with it. The fundamental problem is that representing an entire race as evil based merely on their heritage is inherently racist. The game had developed a huge following over the years and the demographics of people that play have changed. When I lived in Dubai, I was surprised to find that roleplaying games, and *Dungeons & Dragons* in particular, were quite popular. The game was not only for the middle-aged white men from Wisconsin, but for everybody. With the release of *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything*, Wizards of the Coast felt they needed to update the way the game is perceived at the gaming table. They open the sourcebook with an explanation of the reasons they had to make a change:

One of the explicit design goals of 5th edition D&D¹¹ is to depict humanity in all its beautiful diversity by depicting characters who represent an array of ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and beliefs. We want everyone to feel at home around the game table and to see positive reflections of themselves

¹¹ *Dungeons & Dragons* is often abbreviated as D&D.

within our products. “Human” in D&D means *everyone*, not just fantasy versions of northern Europeans, and the D&D community is now more diverse than it’s ever been.

Throughout the 50-year history of D&D, some of the peoples in the game—orcs and Drow being two of the prime examples—have been characterized as monstrous and evil, using descriptions that are painfully reminiscent of how real-world ethnic groups have been and continue to be denigrated. That’s just not right, and it’s not something we believe in. Despite our conscious efforts to the contrary, we have allowed some of those old descriptions to reappear in the game. We recognize that to live our values, we have to do an even better job in handling these issues. If we make mistakes, our priority is to make things right. (Wizards of the Coast 4)

This is a monumental task considering that much of the game is based upon racist tropes and othering in literature and mythology. Many of the monsters in the game that the players must defeat are based on racist tropes. In this chapter, I look briefly at the history of racism in a few works of Western literature and in Salvatore’s *The Dark Elf Trilogy*. I analyze how the trauma of real-life racism finds its way into works of fiction as a reflection of the world we live in. How do we deal with it and what do we learn when writers like Salvatore put characters like Drizzt at center stage as his protagonist?

Drizzt is certainly not the first character to bring race to the forefront in literature, but in modern gaming related fantasy and the *Dungeons & Dragons* books produced from it his presence has been very impactful. The conversation around race in fantasy and in the companion of *Dungeons & Dragons* and its community of gamers has evolved

since the publication of the first novel starring Drizzt. As with the Drow and orc depiction, the *Ravenloft* setting in *Dungeons & Dragons* had to be tweaked as well. In the land of Barovia, under the rule of a vampire lord, Count Strahd Von Zarovich an ethnic group of people called the Vistani are the only ones allowed to move to and from Barovia because they are allied with the evil ‘Devil Strahd.’ Vistani are based on the real-world Romani people. They are portrayed as superstitious and frivolous people. The *Curse of Strahd* campaign source book describes them as cultural outsiders: “The Vistani are wanderers who live outside civilization...Compared to Barovians they are flamboyant. Vistani dress in bright clothes, laugh often, and drink heartily...They also earn money by telling fortunes and selling information. They spend whatever they earn to support a lavish lifestyle” (Perkins 26). The Vistani even can cast an “evil eye” curse of adventurers that get cross ways with them. In this instance, they represent the stereotype of Romani people in a mostly negative light, conspiring against the heroes that come to free Barovia.

In an article published in *Wired* in 2020 by Mathew Gault, the attempts by Wizards of the Coast to correct these racial stereotyping in their game is mentioned. Gault points out the Vistani problem explicitly:

The Vistani are a paper-thin Romani stereotype, and WotC (Wizard of the Coast) promised to update *Curse of Strahd* with the help of a Romani consultant. The original publication included the sentence “Although they can seem lazy and irresponsible to outsiders, the Vistani are serious people, quick to act when their lives or traditions are threatened.” The revised edition removed the lines about

laziness and irresponsibility. The revised edition also removed a single use of the word “vardo” to describe Vistani wagons, a direct reference to Romani.

Further adding to this problematic representation of race in *Dungeons & Dragons* are books like the 1985 sourcebook, *Oriental Adventures*, where the problems of the racial stereotypes begin with the outdated title.

The foundation of English literature is steeped in problematic colonial ideology that informs the fictional worlds such as those in the *Dungeons & Dragons* sphere. Much of modern gaming fantasy is based in a Western European Bronze Age or Medieval setting. Diversity is nonexistent except in the races that populate the fictional worlds. Racism, either overt or covert, is present when the stories represent a white, male protagonist triumphing over a darker hued monster army. Or where an entire ethnic group of people are considered an evil race. An example of the culmination of careless racism leaking into modern fantasy culture is the animated fantasy film *Fire and Ice* (1983). At this time, films like *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Krull* (1983), toy line and cartoon, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1981), and of course, *Dungeons & Dragons* were very popular in the fantasy sphere. *Fire and Ice* was heavily influenced by the artwork of Frank Frazetta (1928-2010) who was famous for painting fantasy art in the 1970s and 80s, often depicting sexist and racist undertones in his work. In *Fire and Ice*, the villain, Nekron sends his “subhumans” to kidnap the princess Teegra. Subhumans are reminiscent of orcs, but more ape-like and primitive. Their name, subhuman, is setting them below the hero characters who are white. These works of fantasy are not gaming fantasy, but it is important to indicate that racial insensitivity is prevalent throughout other kinds of Western fantasy. These works often are inspiration for role-playing games

and other works of literature inspired by them. However, one should also add that works that subvert this trend also existed, although without having much influence over gaming fantasy.

English literature has perpetuated colonial racial stereotypes. Works such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1611), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) have established a foundation of tropes in English literature that continue to be perpetuated by later works. As the fantasy genre coalesced, some of these tropes came along with the development. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings* lore, the Moriquendi are dark elves. These dark elves are considered lesser than the Calaquendi or "light elves." However, societal changes over the years have also made readers more educated and sensitive to issues of race and have not only broadened the study of literature but made newer texts more accessible to a wider and growing audience. In the 70s and 80s gaming fantasy was less inclusive as most of the characters and cover art to the books depicted white heroes. On the other hand, gaming fantasy in recent years, influenced by Salvatore and others has become a very popular genre for its inclusivity. (Use the *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th edition as the earmark for modern gaming fantasy.) The gaming fantasy literature would become an influence to the game. The tropes that defined the barriers in older fantasy have been removed by works of modern authors. This is why the character of Drizzt Do'Urden, a dark-skinned Drow, is important to the genre. In *Dungeons & Dragons*, players can play any race or ethnicity. The old tropes are put aside for their limitations. When authors introduced characters that moved away from the racial restrictions that influenced the gaming fantasy landscape, they exposed the problem that

racial tropes were still present and problematic. Adhering to these tropes out of tradition perpetuates the racial stereotyping. This is one reason why Wizards of the Coast decided to address it in updates to their game modules. When the Drow were introduced, there was no way for a player in a game to play one as a hero. They were considered monsters and they were evil. Now, anyone can play a Drow, as race representing a monolithic culture is no longer appropriate. Drizzt's story as he faces a world of rejection due in great part to his heritage is important. He represents a perspective that moves away from older gaming fantasy tropes and into inclusivity. The rejection Drizzt faces is a great trauma to him as he leaves the Underdark where, Drow see themselves as the superior race, to the surface, where he is judged by his skin and automatically deemed to be evil. This stings Drizzt as he has a difficult time trying to find a place of acceptance in a world that first judges him by his skin color.

One of the most important examples of how racism works in *The Dark Elf Trilogy* is the raiding party that Drizzt is forced to join as a member of the school Melee-Magthere. After the religious indoctrination of his teacher, Hatch'net, the other Drow become bloodthirsty with hatred for their fair-skinned surface cousins. The raiding party finds a community of defenseless elves and slaughter them in a bloodbath. Drizzt's moral code does not let him participate in the ritual. During the ambush, Drizzt saves a young elf girl named Ellifain from the slaughter by hiding her from his kin. This experience shapes the worldview of Drizzt going forward. It is the impetus that forces him to make the decision to leave his home in the Underdark and abandon the ways of his people. The Drow are always at racial war with every other race of beings. Like humans, they enslave and subjugate. The trauma that this causes Drizzt lingers long after the events of *The*

Dark Elf Trilogy.

The generational hatred taught to the young Drow is powerful as this scene points out. Drizzt has traveled to the surface world for the first time with the elite students from his fighter school in what is a sort of racist coming of age ritual. His first time encountering the surface elves is nothing like he had been told:

Transfixed by the sheer joy of the elves play, Drizzt hardly noticed the commands his brother issued then in the silent code. Several children danced among the gathering, marked only by the size of their bodies, and were no freer in spirit than the adults they accompanied. So innocent they all seemed, so full of life and wistfulness, and obviously bonded to each other by friendship more profound than Drizzt had ever known in Menzoberranzan. So unlike the stories Hatch'net had spun of them, tales of vile, hating wretches. (Salvatore 189)

As the other warriors in his party begin to cut down the surface elves, Drizzt watches in horror as one of his companions murders a surface elf:

His face the exultation of ecstasy, the Drow warrior tore his sword free and sliced it across, taking the head from the elven female's shoulders. "Vengeance!" he cried at Drizzt, his face contorted in furious glee, his eyes burning with a light that shone demonic to the stunned Drizzt. The warrior hacked at the lifeless body one more time, then spun away in search of another kill. (Salvatore 190)

The cry of vengeance is ironic in that the surface elves have done nothing to them other than to look different and live in a culture outside that of the Drow.

Next, Drizzt is confronted with killing the child of the slain elf woman. His brother looks on as he raises his scimitar to do the foul deed. Drizzt struggles with his

conscience. He is no murderer, but in this split second, he considers the killing of the child a mercy. He instead pantomimes a killing blow to the child:

Rage, horror, anguish, and a dozen other emotions racked Drizzt at that horrible moment. He wanted to escape his feelings, to lose himself in the blind frenzy of his kin and accept the ugly reality. How easy it would have been to throw away the conscience that pained him so. The elven child rushed up before Drizzt but hardly saw him, her gaze locked upon her dead mother, the back of the child's neck open to a single, clean blow. Drizzt raised his scimitar, unable to distinguish between mercy and murder. (Salvatore 190)

His brother, Dinin Do'Urden, who is one of the leaders of the raiding party cheers his younger brother on:

"Yes, my brother!" Dinin cried out to him, a call that cut through his comrades' screams and whoops and echoed in Drizzt's ears like an accusation. Drizzt looked up to see Dinin, covered from head to foot in blood and standing amid a hacked cluster of dead elves. "Today you know the glory it is to be a drow!" Dinin cried, and he punched a victorious fist into the air. "Today we appease the Spider Queen!" (Salvatore 191)

Thinking that Drizzt has bought in to the racism and murdered a child, he replies, "Finally you have learned what it is to be a Drow warrior!" (Salvatore 192) Ironically, Drizzt has learned what it means, and it traumatizes him in a way that sets him apart from his kin. He will never be the same and the eyes of the elf child, Ellifain, will haunt him going forward.

Later, in the second book of *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, *Exile*, Drizzt has left behind

Menzoberranzan, the city of his birth and the only home he has known to find a new life away from the tenets of his people. For years he roams the vast network of tunnels surviving only by his skill as a warrior and his one friend, the magical panther, Guenhwyvar. After some time in the lonely vastness of the Underdark, he decides to approach a city of gnomes called Blingdenstone. Years before he was part of another scouting party that killed a group of gnomes. One was left alive because of the actions of Drizzt, but Belwar, the gnome, has both of his hands amputated by another Drow. Drizzt understands the racial animosity between the two races, but he goes to the gnomes anyway, expecting to die. Drizzt understood that most of the gnomes, known as the svirfneblin¹² had met their end at the hands of the Drow. While Drizzt is prisoner to the gnomes, Belwar is notified of Drizzt's capture and as he speaks to another gnome, a common racist trope is used when they say that all Drow look alike to them:

“The prisoner claims he met you out in the Underdark,” an ancient svirfneblin said to Belwar. His voice was barely a whisper, and he dropped his gaze to the door as he completed the thought. “On that day of great loss.” Belwar flinched again at the mention of that day. How many times must he relive it? “He may have,” Belwar said with a noncommittal shrug. “Not much can I distinguish between the appearances of Drow elves, and not much do I wish to try!”

“Agreed,” said the other. “They all look alike.” (Salvatore 348)

Salvatore singles out the racist idea regarding the indistinguishability across racial lines that is present in real-world intercultural relations. The isolationism of both cultures makes the occasional interactions between them potentially dangerous.

¹² “Svirfneblin are a race of deep gnomes that live in the Underdark. A race related to gnomes of the bright world. They are generally a goodly people and secretive” (Turnbull 84).

In the third book of *The Dark Elf Trilogy, Sojourn* (1991), Drizzt escapes the Underdark and flees into the wilds of the North. One of the first encounters with surface dwellers is the Thistledown family near the human town of Maldobar. As expected, at the sight of a dark-skinned elf, they grow alarmed and react in a stereotypical way:

“Run, Eleni!” Connor Thistledown cried, waving his sword and bearing down on the Drow. “It is a dark elf! A Drow! Run for your life!” Of all that Connor had cried, Drizzt only understood the word “Drow.” The young man’s attitude and intent could not be mistaken, though, for Connor charged straight between Drizzt and Eleni, his sword tip pointed Drizzt’s way. Eleni managed to get to her feet behind her brother, but she did not see as he had instructed. She, too, had heard of the evil dark elves, and she would not leave Connor to face one alone. (Salvatore 567-568)

As expected, this encounter goes awry and later the family is killed by evil monsters that lay the blame on Drizzt. Looking for justice, the community of Maldobar calls in a famous ranger, Dove Falconhand. Dove and her band come to investigate the murders and arrest the Drow.

The death of the Thistledowns is very traumatic to Drizzt. He feels that his presence had put them in danger. His being a Drow draws them into danger and later to a horrific death: “Looking down at Maldobar, another place that he could never call home, Drizzt wondered if that might be a good thing” (Salvatore 614). Eventually, Dove and her band alongside a bounty hunter names Roddy McGristle catches up to Drizzt. A surface elf named Kellindil is with Dove’s party. This is the first time that Drizzt encounters a surface elf since the ill-fated raiding party when he was a part of Melee-Magthere. He

understands that his skin color marks him as a potential enemy. The encounter is important to Drizzt's story as this is typical for most of his first contact meetings with surface people. Kellindil addresses Drizzt when they meet in the darkness on the edge of Dove's camp:

“At last we have met, my dark cousin,” Kellindil whispered harshly in the Drow tongue, his voice edged in obvious anger and his glowing eyes narrowing dangerously.

Quick as a cat, Kellindil snapped a finely crafted sword, its blade glowing in a fiery red flame, from his (sword) belt. (Salvatore 627)

Drizzt tries to disarm the aggression in this encounter. He tries to get the surface elf, Kellindil, to see him for something more than just a dark elf. But it does not go well when he makes the attempt to communicate. He speaks to Kellindil:

“I am Drizzt Do'Urden,” Drizzt began tentatively.

“I care nothing for what you are called!” Kellindil shot back. “You are Drow. That is all I need to know! Come then, Drow. Come and let us learn who is the stronger!”

Drizzt had not yet drawn his blade and had no intention of doing so. “I have no desire to battle with you ...” Drizzt's voice trailed away, as he realized his words were futile against the intense hatred the surface elf held for him. (Salvatore 628)

Kellindil attacks Drizzt, but Drizzt does not enter battle with him, instead he retreats.

Salvatore gives the reader an insight to what Drizzt feels in this scene: “Drizzt would find no acceptance here, not now and probably not ever. Was he forever to be misjudged? he wondered” (Salvatore 628). Again, the trauma brought on by his race prevents him from

achieving normalcy.

Later the search party closes in on Drizzt again and they exchange words that are charged with racial prejudice. The dwarf, Fret, exasperated at chasing Drizzt through the wilderness, says to the other members of the party, “We shall all fall dead of weariness before we find this infernal Drow!” (Salvatore 629) And Kellindil says as the party decides not to pursue Drizzt after he declines combat with the surface elf, “I fear to let a Drow walk free” (Salvatore 638). His brief and unexpected interaction with Drizzt had him doubting that Drizzt was a murderous dark elf. After all, Drizzt showed no aggression in their encounter.

Scholarship examining characters in literature that are black and initially misunderstood abounds. From the plays of Shakespeare, we have Othello and Caliban. Certainly, these characters experience trauma brought on by their racial features. In *The Tempest* (1610-1611), Prospero and his daughter Miranda are shipwrecked on the island, where they find Caliban, the child of the witch Sycorax. We know that the approximate position of the island is north of the African continent. This sets Caliban’s race non-European since he is the son of the African witch, Sycorax. In *Prospero and Caliban* (1950), Octave Mannoni argues that “The ‘inferior being’ always serves as the scapegoat; our own evil intentions can be projected on to him” (Mannoni 101). Caliban is considered an irredeemable savage for the attempted rape of Miranda, and he is punished by Prospero. He is made to do labors like chop and gather wood. The way Prospero talks to Caliban asserts a slave and master relationship:

Thou most lying slave,

Whom stripes may move, not kindness. I have used thee,

Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee

In mine own cell till though didst seek to violate

The honor of my child. (1.2.344)

Notable, that Prospero does not kill or banish Caliban, but instead assumes that this creature is irredeemable because he does not look like himself or the others that come to the island. Caliban is a lesser thing, a slave incapable of becoming civilized. This is the same for Drizzt. Whenever he encounters a new person, they assume he is evil, and they presume his racial makeup confirms it. He (Drizzt) is evil and therefore inferior. The dogged pursuit by the bounty hunter is not unlike that of a slave catcher. It harkens to the story of the *Underground Railroad* (2016) by Colson Whitehead in which the slave catcher, Ridgeway, continues to hunt the escaped slave, Cora. Roddy is like Ridgeway. Ridgeway believes he is in the right because of his race. Humans in his worldview are morally superior to Drow. It is a representation of a Eurocentric view in literature that Salvatore is pointing to. This Eurocentric view unconsciously creates bias in the reader and rises out of real historical contexts.

Toni Morrison's 1992 essay, "Playing in the Dark" provides a great example of how the history of literature prompted her to write this piece of criticism. She calls it, "Dominant Eurocentric scholarship" (Morrison, "Playing in the Dark" 8). Morrison also brings up how racism can affect those that perpetuate it. Morrison examines her place as a writer when she says, "My work requires to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world" (Morrison, "Playing in the Dark" 4). Her short story, "Recitatif" (1983) is another fine example of how the bias created by racialized language can be traumatizing. It is the

story of two girls who meet in a group home. One is white and one is black, but their races are never identified. It is left up to the reader to assign the race. They meet briefly several times in their adult lives and the trauma from their previous encounters get carried forward. The reader unknowingly assigns a race to the characters of Roberta and Twyla. Assigning race to the characters creates bias. According to Morrison, who says in “Playing in the Dark,” “There is no escape from racially inflected language” (Morrison 13). Morrison exposes the trope of light and dark that would make Roddy McGristle the hero and Drizzt the fugitive villain based on the implied races of the two characters. However, Salvatore reverses this trope. The black fugitive is the hero fleeing the trauma of his homeland and the injustice of the surface world.

Bringing the literature to the twenty-first century, we see how the historical tropes of racial trauma in fantasy still persist today. For example, the Vistani in *Curse of Strahd* are representative of racial stereotypes in the real world. In an interview by W. Kamau Bell on the CNN program, *United Shades of America*, fantasy author, N.K. Jemisin, a three-time winner of the Hugo award and the first black woman to win it, says that when she creates characters: “I’m writing about fantastic worlds, but I’m still writing about people” (Jemisin 30:38). She explains, “To make the worlds more realistic is to explore the way oppression works” (Jemisin 31:17). Writers like Jemisin are and have always been looking around them and writing what they see. Some writers explore real-world trauma and injustices and use allegory and allusion to challenge them. Salvatore did this with Drizzt. Exploring the trauma of being the sole person of color, regarded as a monster by the “goodly” races of the surface, he tries to make sense of the real world through the lens of this dark elf character.

As for black heroes in literature, representation is important. Comics, games, and fantasy provide some interesting perspectives on this topic. While Drizzt is not an American or for that matter, representative of a real ethnic group, his experiences mirror many of the same kind of real-world prejudices that a person of color face. In the microcosm of *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, one can try to contextualize the kind of trauma that a person of color would experience in a landscape where they are outnumbered and othered. This is important because readers may live in communities where there is little to no diversity. Reading the story of a lone dark elf, striving to overcome racial trauma will be remembered. Empathizing with a fictional character can be an experience of personal growth.

Adilifu Nama's book, *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Superheroes* (2016) delves into this study of black superheroes: "I know that the imaginative realms and representational schemes that black superheroes occupy in comics, cartoons, television, and film express powerful visuals, compelling narratives, and multiple meanings around a wide range of racial ideas and beliefs in American culture" (Nama 2). The representation is important and acknowledging the historical racialization in literature is as well. Nama continues,

Black superheroes are not merely figures that defeat costumed supervillains: they symbolize American racial morality and ethics. They overly represent or implicitly signify social discourse and accepted wisdom concerning notions of racial reciprocity, racial equality, racial forgiveness, and, ultimately, racial justice. But black superheroes are not only representative of what is racially right. They are also ripe metaphors for race relations in America, and often reflective of

escalating and declining unrest. In this sense, black superheroes in American comic books and, to a lesser extent in Hollywood films and television are cultural ciphers for accepted wisdom regarding racial justice and the shifting politics of black racial formation in America. (Nama 11)

There is a sociological significance to seeing an underrepresented character as a hero. Identifying with a character for the way they look is part of it but identifying with the heart of the character is more important. This gives the story more accessibility and can reach a broader audience. Heroes are not defined by what they look like, but the actions they choose to undertake. Rarely is a hero victorious because of superior strength in arms, but because of strength in character. This is the foundation of what Salvatore does with Drizzt. His moral framework has made him an outsider to his own people. His outer appearance has made him an outsider to the surface world. Yet, the world is not colorless. People need to be seen and heroes need to look like the people that are reading their stories. Here is a description of Drizzt's appearance as described in *A Reader's Guide to R.A. Salvatore's The Legend of Drizzt* (2008): "Like all dark elves, Drizzt has black skin and white hair, but his lavender eyes—which gleam with feral light before he wades into battle—set him apart from most Drow, whose eyes are typically red" (Athans 38).

Salvatore has a penchant for writing characters that go against the grain. From his Corona series where often the most righteous of a religious order called the Abellican Order are ones that question everything to his take on the Drow and Drizzt Do'Urden, he has always written characters that have a certain nuance to them. The character of Drizzt is a dark elf. His story is full of racial trauma. This sets him apart from most other characters in the texts. Salvatore has also written stories about monks that question their

faith in religion and even a character that overcomes cerebral palsy to become a Robin Hood figure in his *Corona* novels. In my interview with Salvatore, I asked him about this and a short story he wrote, “Dark Mirror” in an anthology called, *Realms of Valor* (1993). In this story, Drizzt encounters a goblin slave named Nojheim. Goblins are almost a stock character for evil monster in fantasy books and gaming, but what was different about Nojheim is that he is much like Drizzt in that his intelligence and moral character set him apart. As Drizzt encounters this most peculiar goblin he comes to struggle with his own prejudice. His quest to get the goodly races of the surface to accept him based on his inner qualities and not the racism they fomented based on his skin is reflected back to him in this story as he found that he had done the same to Nojheim. I posed a question to Salvatore about his characters and his take on race. I asked him about why he writes nuanced characters like Drizzt. How important is race to the character of Drizzt? He said, “The same as the importance of race in the world in which we live, which remains, to me, the singularly most stupid and destructive tribal leftover” (Salvatore Interview).

In his introduction to “Dark Mirror” in the *Legend of Drizzt Anthology* (2011), Salvatore explains his methods as a writer and why he gravitates to nuanced characters such as Drizzt:

I consider “Dark Mirror” to be one of the most important pieces of writing I’ve done in my career, from a personal development perspective...I decided to participate in this anthology for reasons of personal exploration above all else and I wrote this story to examine a curious paradox that had developed in the *Legend of Drizzt*. So many readers were mailing me to comment of the examination of racism in the *Dark Elf* books—and indeed, through Drizzt’s trials and tribulations,

I was able to explore and lay bare quite a few racist tropes; the analogies to our world were unavoidable, and I didn't want to sidestep them anyway. (Salvatore, *Legend of Drizzt Anthology* 19)

Salvatore continues, addressing the fantasy elephant in the room:

But there was one problem: isn't traditional "Tolkienesque" fantasy all about racism? Elves are different from dwarves are different from halflings are different from humans are different from orcs and goblins. (sic) Yes, orcs and goblins, there's the rub. (sic) Isn't the notion of a race representing the embodiment of evil a classic definition of racism? Of course it is! So what if I punched Drizzt, so often the victim of racism, right in the face with his own prejudices? What if I shook up the comfort zone of fantasy's broad strokes even more than I had (inadvertently) with my Drow hero? (Salvatore 20)

This is a hard subject to tackle where he had built up a heroic character that is so often the victim of racism and then to turn it on its head by having Drizzt examine why he should be exempt from racism, but a goblin would not be. He had thought himself above such crude tribalism, but here Drizzt is faced with the reality that even he is capable of racial profiling. Salvatore continues to elaborate on the nuance:

Simply put, I don't know the answers to the racial paradox "Dark Mirror" lays bare. I could give you a satisfactory explanation if pressed, I'm sure, and even include some quotes from Joseph Campbell or some other writing "god" to back up my "truths." It would probably sound quite impressive. But even though I'm a fiction writer by trade, I try not to lie. (Salvatore 20)

In my interview with Salvatore, I reminded him of this essay and showed it to him. I

asked him if he would change anything in it if he wrote it today. He replied, “When I go back and read that, and consider *when* I wrote it...makes me content that I was always trying to do good” (Salvatore). The scapegoating and othering of people has been an effective tool for persuasion throughout history. Historical scapegoating is represented in our literature and that literature reflects the views of the times in which it is written. Unfortunately, xenophobia has always resonated with the people that seek to control others by fear of a minority population and thus trauma is perpetuated.

Looking back at what Salvatore has to say about Tolkienesque fantasy and racial stereotypes representative of evil in the world, it is a short bridge to relate to real world trauma in the form of racial discrimination. Some writers are changing the way race is represented in fantasy and gaming fantasy as Salvatore does with his Drizzt books. In his dissertation, *Otherworldly Others: Racial Representation in Fantasy Literature* (2017), John Henry Rumsby connects the problem fantasy literature has had with its connection tropes: “Despite nigh-limitless potential for worldbuilding and social representation, Fantasy literature has often been rightfully accused of being plagiaristic, unambitious, filled with racist narratives and theme” (Rumsby 1). He continues, “However, I would instead argue that the genre’s most defining generic characteristics and its history of pastiche are the best tools at Fantasy’s disposal to address concepts such as race or racism in a dignified way, or even with the intent of promoting social justice” (Rumsby 1). Confronting racial trauma through fantasy is something that writer Djèli Clark explains. In an article on the website *Disgruntledharadim.com*, Clark says: “Speculative fiction has also been a refuge for black writers seeking to deal with incidents of racial terror in their midst – a means to confront the traumatic by interpreting it through the fantastic.”

Rumsby also explains that the movement to address racial tropes in fantasy became more common in the second half of the twentieth century. He specifically mentions Salvatore here:

Salvatore's *The Dark Elf Trilogy* (1990-1991) was a critical study of race discrimination and race identities in Fantasy. By using D&D lore against itself, the author demonstrating how familiar or overused tropes in Fantasy could communicate racism if handled poorly, all while addressing the racism inherent to D&D's foundational universe. The trilogy also served as a prequel to the author's earlier *Forgotten Realms* novels, adding an extra layer of depth to prior stories featuring the dark elf, Drizzt. (Rumsby 56)

Consider what was happening in the real world at the time that *The Dark Elf Trilogy* was published. The United States was dealing with heated race relations. Los Angeles police were filmed beating a black man named Rodney King. The release of *Do the Right Thing* (1989) a couple of years earlier highlighted race relations in the country at the time. And the subsequent acquittal of the officers involved in the beatings set off huge riots across Los Angeles that lasted for two days.

The popularity of the fantasy genre in recent years has made it a medium that has attracted a more diverse audience and group of writers. This popularity, along with the popularity of the companion to the genre, role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, have started to change the way stories are written. A more diverse fanbase and content creators continue to challenge the tropes of race in fantasy the way Salvatore did in *The Dark Elf Trilogy*. As I mentioned earlier, the game of *Dungeons & Dragons* has moved to be more inclusive, and it is now common to see the historically "evil" races

living in the villages and cities of the role-playing game as more player characters decide to roleplay orcs, goblins, and Drow. After Tolkienesque fantasy established a baseline for sword and sorcery fantasy, authors like Samuel Delaney and Octavia Butler challenged the tropes of the genre. Today, writers such as N.K. Jemisin, Tomi Adeyemi, and Nnedi Okorafor are adding their voices to the science fiction/fantasy genre more generally.

What was once considered to be low brow literature is having a renaissance as popularity of fantasy is drawing more cultures and writers to it. This common interest allows for storytellers to relate common human struggles to new audiences. The struggle of racial trauma for instance is not only confined to the United States and African Americans. Racial trauma in the form of a refugee for example can be shared to a global audience as writers relate personal experiences to readers.

The story of a lone Drow elf fleeing the dystopian underworld of Menzoberranzan to seek a better and more just life on the surface all the while battling against racial discrimination could easily be metaphor for any number of tragedies of race and immigration. Drizzt's story of finding a community and a surrogate family after years of religious and racial strife is an important one. From his self-exile out of the Underdark, where he was a religious scapegoat, to the surface, where he is an evil outsider or "black demon" (Salvatore 789), Drizzt is an outcast. Race is a social construct. Being a Drow of the Underdark means more than merely being a dark-skinned elf. It also means embracing a system that Drizzt could never accept, that the Drow were racially superior to the surface elves and other creatures such as humans. These tales involving different races are problematic because they use whole races to reflect a singular aspect of a race of humans. In the epilogue to *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, Drizzt reflects on this peculiar part of

human behavior: “Gods, rather than being outside entities, are personifications of what lies in our hearts. If this is true, then the many, varied gods of the human sects—deities of vastly different demeanors—reveal much about the race” (Salvatore 803). In Salvatore’s indictment of human racism and the needless trauma inflicted on people for the construct of race, he continues, “Humans encompass the spectrum of character more fully than any other being; they are the only ‘goodly’ race that wages war upon itself—with alarming frequency” (Salvatore 803).

The Dark Elf Trilogy is important to not just fantasy, but modern literature in general. Salvatore uses Drizzt to look at real-world issues such as race through this lens while entertaining the reader. Drizzt endures trauma by being strong, but also being vulnerable and even though he is a dark elf from Menzoberranzan, he is human as he represents the best in people. Perhaps this is the reason the character has achieved such popularity. Trauma is a human condition. Human beings all suffer. Racism is an unfortunate part of the human experience. The story of Drizzt will hopefully create empathy in some and recognition in others.

IV. WORDS AS SWORDS: TRAUMA IN THE UNDERDARK

One of the most pervasive forms of trauma comes in the form of language. Along with physical trauma, emotional, and psychic trauma are often inflicted by words in the form of mental abuse. As language is a tool to communicate, it can also be weaponized. Language is also the primary way in which people communicate with each other and how we relate pain and experiences to one another in either the spoken or written word. Analysis of language allows us to study the effects of language on a culture and an individual. Michelle Balaev writes in the journal *Mosaic* about how trauma theory is applied to language:

A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma. However, a discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma produces a homogenous interpretation of the diverse representations in the trauma novel and the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place. (Balaev 149)

In this example, Balaev is arguing that while experienced trauma is a building block to personal identity, there is not a uniform way to discuss every kind of trauma. The theory is not one overarching umbrella which applies to every person. People have different reactions to trauma and while some may experience a speechless fright, it is not a universal experience. Here, I will look at how the language of literature informs the trauma that takes place in the Drow language and look at the history of language and how it has come to inflict trauma on generations that follow.

The old adage *Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me* or some variation of this theme has been repeated for almost two hundred years, but though it is a useful mantra for dealing with verbal abuse, it is in fact a false assertion. Words can and do hurt. Psychological abuse in the form of racial or ethnic slurs can hurt. If a person is ostracized or othered by a community, the language used does indeed mean something. But before any language can be an instrument of trauma there has to be an agreement between two parties on what the words mean. Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure puts forth the idea that: “The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is also a body of necessary conventions adopted by society to enable members of society to use their language faculty” (26). The idea is that a sound made by the tongue and the vocal cords has to be mutually understood by all parties to have the same meaning. Both parties speaking must agree that the sound of the word “dog” means a quadrupedal canine for instance. And while the sounds are arbitrary Saussure elaborates about the meaning being arbitrary: “The link between signal and signification is arbitrary. Since we are treating a sign as the combination in which a signal is associated with a signification, we can express this more simply as: the linguistic sign is arbitrary” (100). We rely on the conventions of the signal to inform the meaning. As Saussure elaborates, “A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” (98). A signification is ultimately something that is acquired by the individual from the outside world.

As chaotic as the Underdark may seem, there are some forms of structure. Language exists between different creatures that inhabit this realm. As unique as its linguistic structures are to the Underdark, to understand how the language of the Drow

informs a study of the trauma in the language, I want to look at a description of the world in which most of *The Dark Elf Trilogy* takes place. The setting and the xenophobic nature of the Drow as they regard other races in the fantasy setting open up more of the meaning behind the language, which is racist and often hurtful to Drizzt. The Drow reside in the Underdark and the physical barriers that cut the Drow off from the surface gives their language a certain inflection amongst the Drow when they are conversing with each other or another denizen of the Underdark. The first words describing a bit of their culture was given by Gygax in a brief description of the elves in the 1978 game module, *Descent into the Depths of the Earth*:

The Drow are (chaotic) evil elves, driven from the upper world by the good elves. They bear undying enmity for all surface dwellers in general and elvenkind in particular. They are a handsome race, but most depraved. The females are better looking and generally more powerful than males. (Gygax 9)

As previously mentioned, the priestesses employ wicked snake-headed whips called “scourges” to inflict torture on the males of their house to keep them compliant. The word “scourge” is an Anglo-Saxon word that literally means *to torture*. As a noun, it can be a whip, a lash, a flail, or some kind of instrument of torture. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its first use was in 1225 by St. Katherine (OED). The Middle English word she uses is “schuorge” as in “beaten hire bare flesch & hire freoliche bodi mit cnottede schurgen.” It loosely translates to modern English as “Beaten her bare flesh & her rebellious body with a knotted scourge.” As a verb, it is to severely whip or flog (OED). As an instrument of trauma and paired with the religious context of the implementation by a member of the clergy in Drow society, it is especially traumatic. The

whips usually have multiple heads with magically enchanted vipers that will bite and poison the victim. The more powerful the priestess, the more heads her whip likely has. They rarely use the whips on other females, but they keep the weaker males in line by beating them sometimes to death. The Drow call this *jivvin quui'elghim*, which translates to “torture to death” (Athans 164). The Drow word for whipping or lashing is “*Neirtarr*.” The act of speaking it can be triggering to the victim. Merely hearing a word can recall a trauma as explained by Busch and McNamara in their article in *Applied Linguistics*: “A particular accent or intonation, the pitch of a voice, or the sound of a language can trigger intrusions and flashbacks by which the traumatic event is relived” (327). The example they use is a French writer that fled the Holocaust as a child:

For example, the French writer Arthur Goldschmidt, who as a child was forced to leave Nazi Germany, describes German as a language that in his linguistic memory is indelibly marked by feelings of extreme distress and adds that even its vocal pitch is likely to evoke the life-threatening fear he had experienced.

In *Homeland*, Salvatore depicts a world of darkness through pointed language that evokes the many traumatic aspects of the story’s universe. The setting of the story is the Underdark. The name is a portmanteau of “under” or a state of lowness or inferiority (OED), and “dark,” a Middle English word meaning absence of light (OED).

Understanding that this story takes place miles beneath the surface, far away from the sun, takes the reader to a place of primal panic, almost like drowning. In the same way that imagery in stories like *The Matrix* (1999) or *Blade Runner* (1982) show a world devoid of the light of the sun, so does the world of the Underdark. This dystopian, hopeless place is filled with evil creatures and dangers lurking in every shadow, from

tentacled panthers called Displacer Beasts that can project illusions of themselves in order to fool prey into making a wrong step to umberhulks, a huge four eyed monstrosity with beetle-like mandibles. “Umber” is an anglicized French word for “umbre” which means “shadow” (OED) And “hulk” which can mean a bulky or big thing (OED). Thus, the name implies a huge thing of shadow lurking in the caverns and a human evolutionary fear of the dark comes to life on the page. Worse still are creatures of cunning and evil that serve a goddess of spiders. Thus, the descriptive terminologies in the world of *The Dark Elf Trilogy* evoke dangers and resultant traumas experienced by both the inhabitants of that world and the readers that are immersed into it.

Language can be a tool for control. Drizzt grows up in House Do’Urden as “secondboy,” signifying his house ranking. After the death of his older brother, he is the second son of Malice Do’Urden, the ruler of the ninth house of Menzoberranzan. Any other male child born to the matron mother of a Drow noble house is expendable. To be male is to be a second-class citizen and to be the lower ranked son is even worse. Perhaps the designation of “secondboy” is even lower than a mere soldier as in many cases the lowest male noble is subject to all kinds of duties that incur a scourge from an older sister priestess. For example, Drizzt’s sister, Briza, uses the language of control through past inflicted trauma: “The secondboy disobeyed the matron mother” and, “The secondboy must be punished” (Salvatore 253).

The Drow language could also be a source of trauma to Drizzt. Many of the abuses he endured as a young person were attached to this language. Once Drizzt leaves the Underdark and is taught the common tongue of the surface world by the ranger, Montolio, he rarely has occasion to use his native tongue. Certain kinds of trauma

memory can be accessed through a dialect. Jennifer Schwanberg explains in the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*:

Research in bilingual autobiographical memory supports the notion that a greater number of memories, and earlier memories, are recalled when cued in the first language” (Otoya, 1987). The present study combined bilingual memory and traumatic memory research to explore how traumatic memories may be reported differently in the first language than in a second language. (Schwanberg 46)

Therefore, to hear the word “Streea” (Athans 165), which translates to mean “to die in the service of Lolth,” even out of context could trigger a traumatic childhood memory in Drizzt, especially as his father and only friend was sacrificed to the spider goddess. This experience would be especially traumatic. When Drizzt flees into the Underdark and is pursued by his brother Dinin and his sister Briza, he hears them in the tunnels and it triggers memories and traumas:

A thousand memories flooded through Drizzt at that moment, but all of them, good and bad, led him inescapably to one possibility: Matron Malice had neither forgiven nor forgotten his actions on that fated day. Drizzt had abandoned her and the ways of the Spider Queen, and he knew well enough the ways of Lolth to realize that his actions had not left his mother in good standing. (Salvatore 310)

Upon Drizzt confronting his family, his sister’s words have a heavy impact on him since he had been alone with his traumas for so long: “‘Brother Drizzt,’ Briza said loudly, hoping the patrol would hear her and understand the call back to her side. ‘Lower your weapons. It does not have to be like this’” (312). Salvatore describes this interaction with one of Drizzt’s former tormentors as overwhelming: “The sound of familiar words, of

Drow words, overwhelmed Drizzt. “How good it was to hear them again, to remember that he was more than a single-minded hunter, that his life was more than mere survival” (312). This scene has even more importance of evoked trauma as Briza tries to soothe Drizzt using a spell and get him to surrender by promising his place among the other Drow. “‘Come home, dear Drizzt,’ she purred, her words holding the bindings of a minor magical spell. ‘You are needed. You are the weapon master of House Do’Urden now’” (312). This has the opposite effect on Drizzt as he is triggered by the memory of his slain father, Zaknafein. Drizzt’s father had been the previous weapon master of House Do’Urden and Drizzt’s only friend in Menzoberranzan. His ritual sacrifice to Lolth is a great source of trauma to Drizzt. This scene explains how the words trigger traumatic memories: “Indeed, Drizzt remembered much more than the comforts of home at that moment. He remembered even more clearly the wrongs of his past life, the wickedness that his principles simply could not tolerate” (313). The following scene is a battle between Briza and Drizzt. She calls out, “Damn you, Drizzt the rogue” (313). Once again, she is traumatizing Drizzt as an outcast and outsider.

Language that identifies one as an outsider to the culture has significant meaning in relation to trauma. Not belonging to a social group especially when there is no other alternative can be very damaging. In real-world applications, almost all cultures have words that are ethnically charged to mean that someone is an outsider. In Spanish, the word “gringo” (OED) is meant to convey a contemptuous depiction of an Englishman or Anglo-American. The word “gaijin” translates to “alien” or “outsider” in Japanese (OED). Obviously, there is a European colonial context that gives meaning to these words. There are Drow words that carry similar connotations. Some examples of the kind

of word used in High Drow are “Iblith,” which translates to offal or excrement and is often used when referring to humans as well as other non-Drow races. It is often used as an insult (Greenwood 99). This racist language is descriptive of the culture. As stated in an earlier chapter, but with context here as well, Morrison points out it in *Playing in the Dark*, “There is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of the language is complicated, interesting, and definitive” (Morrison 12-13). Just as real-world racism is used in order to hurt or demean a marginalized group, so too is the language of the Drow reflective of this racialized component. As a culture that sees itself as the apex of the races, their language can reflect this sort of perspective as well.

Looking at racially charged words in the Drow language that reflect their worldview we can find words such as “colnbluth” which simply means “non-Drow” (Athans 164) but also the word “darthir,” which refers specifically to surface elves and translates to “traitors” (Athans 165). In *Homeland*, Drizzt and his brother Dinin are discussing their surface elf cousins. The language in this scene is used specifically for the purpose of indicating how radicalized Drow society is to the “darthir.” ““You know of our enemies’ Dinin prompted” (Salvatore 180). Drizzt believes he is speaking of the multitudes of monsters that roam the Underdark. ““Countless enemies,’ replied Drizzt with a heavy sigh. ‘They fill the holes of the Underdark, always waiting for us to let down our guard. We will not, and our enemies will fall to our power’” (180). Dinin says, ““Ah, but our true enemies do not reside in the lightless caverns of our world.’ said Dinin with a sly smile. ‘Theirs is a world strange and evil’” (180). And here is where the scapegoating occurs in the conversation:

“The faeries,” Drizzt whispered, and the word prompted a jumble of emotions within him. All of his life, he had been told of his evil cousins, of how they had forced the Drow into the bowels of the world. Busily engaged in the duties of his everyday life, Drizzt did not think of them often, but whenever they came to mind, he used their name as a litany against everything he hated in his life. If Drizzt could somehow blame the surface elves—as every other Drow seemed to blame them—for the injustices of Drow society, he could find hope for the future of his people. Rationally, Drizzt had to dismiss the stirring legends of the elven war as another of the endless stream of lies, but in his heart and hopes, Drizzt clung desperately to those words. (180)

The radicalizing from Dinin continues, “‘They are as you have learned’ he assured Drizzt. ‘Without worth and vile beyond your imagination, the tormentors of our people, who banished us in eons past who forced’”(181). The language here is indicative of the racialized ideology that fuels the othering of the surface elves in Drow society.

When Drizzt finally leaves his home of Menzoberranzan, he along with his magical panther Guenhwyvar¹³ is alone to deal with his trauma and enters a dangerous time in his life wandering the vastness of the Underdark. The time directly after Drizzt flees from the dark elves, he experiences a form of detachment he calls “the hunter” and when he is the hunter, he loses his voice as he assumes this primal warrior persona. It is a defense mechanism to protect himself, but it is interesting that he loses his voice when he is inhabiting his alter ego. When Drizzt finds a friend in Belwar Dissengulp, the deep

¹³ Guenhwyvar is the elven word for “shadow.” As revealed in the short story, Guenhwyvar in the *Legend of Drizzt Collected Stories*. Salvatore reveals that the word is actually a Gaelic variation of the name, Gweniver.

gnome, Belwar says to him, “Many years you have lived out in the Underdark. Surviving where others could not” (361). Drizzt’s reply is simply, “but have I survived?” (361). Drizzt’s loss of language is also a loss of identity. Drizzt had become what the Drow call “dobluth,” an outsider (Athans 164) and “pera’dene,” a scapegoat (165). Back in Menzoberranzan, his mother, Matron Malice, has enacted a ritual to send the animated corpse of his father, Zaknafein, to hunt him down. She does this thing to atone to Lolth for Drizzt’s rejection of Drow culture.

In addition to the core Drow language, there is language separate from Drow, specific to the inhabitants of the Underdark. Some of the intelligent species that live beneath the surface share a type of language called Deep Speech in addition to their own. Deep Speech is the language of what is known in *Dungeons & Dragons* as aberrations. These creatures are evolutionarily adapted to living in the dark and have a detached mindset, seeing themselves as separate from the goings on in the world. Many more strange creatures share the Underdark with the Drow. Many of them are fantastical creatures such as the sometimes allies of the Drow, a type of aberration called the illithid. The illithid are squid-faced bipeds that use psionic powers to ravage the brains of their victims. Another name for the illithid is mind-flayers for obvious reasons. They prey upon other intelligent creatures and as their tentacles find purchase, they ravage the brains of their victims, thus stealing their voice and language. They appear to be based on Lovecraftian Cthulhu lore in appearance. Illithid appear as robed, bipedal creatures, with a squid-like head and large eyes. They communicate telepathically and exist in a hive mind. They are perhaps the most fearsome thing one can find in the Underdark: even more so than Drow. They also deploy mind control powers where they can possess the

persona of a victim. When Drizzt and Belwar are captured by the mind flayers, they are made to enter into combat as entertainment for the creatures. The scene below describes Drizzt's first encounters with an illithid: "Drizzt had never actually viewed such a creature before, but he knew what it was: an illithid, a mind flayer, the most evil and most feared monster in all the Underdark" (Salvatore 438). This fearsome encounter does not go well for Drizzt:

The mind flayer struck first, long before Drizzt had closed within his scimitar's limited range. The monster's tentacles wiggled and waved, and—*fwoop!*—a cone of mental energy rolled over Drizzt. The Drow fought back against the impending blackness with all of his willpower. He tried to concentrate on his target, tried to focus his anger, but the illithid blasted again. Another mind flayer appeared and fired its stunning force at Drizzt from the side. (439)

Drizzt loses this battle. In this arena his skill with a blade is of no use. He loses more than the fight, he loses his self, his voice is no longer his own. His language is now the Deep Speech of his mind flayer captor. He will be overwhelmed and forced to entertain the mind-flayers. Dr. Frank Ochberg, in his article in the *Los Angeles Times* "The Ties That Bind Captive to Captor-Stockholm Syndrome," describes the kind of attack a mind flayer's mental assault would resemble: "In Stockholm syndrome, there is a sudden, terrifying capture. The hostage is stunned, shocked and often certain that he or she will die. The hostage then becomes like an infant. He or she can't talk, eat, move or use a toilet without permission." According to this definition by Ochberg, the implications are that Drizzt has had his psyche stolen, a violation of the highest order.

Dragons and demons are usually fluent in Deep Speech as they use it to

communicate with the dark denizens that live in the Underdark like the Drow. As for the Drow, they have different forms of language. There is Deep Drow, which is the common form of communication. Greenwood describes the Drow language: “Deep Drow, also known as ‘Low Drow’ or ‘Drowi’ is the everyday tongue of the Drow, corrupted by passing fashions, trade-tongue jargon, and even words from other languages notably orcish, dwarven, surface elven and human wizardly terms” (Greenwood 95). According to Greenwood, “Deep Drow is a living, changing tongue, and varies from place to place in the Underdark, as well over time (although Drow speech, due to isolation and technology slowed by tradition and a rigid class-based society, does not change with the rapidity of surface languages)” (95). This isolation from the surface world and its language and lack of dialog with an outside influence lends itself to cult-like tendencies where cutting oneself off from greater society can lead to religious and ethnic discrimination. Language can be a shared experience and one can also retain their cultural language without sacrificing ethnic and sociological importance to one’s identity. In *Dungeons & Dragons*, there are several languages like High Elf or Deep Speech, but there is always a common language that is shared by the surface peoples. The Drow in *The Dark Elf Trilogy* do not participate in the surface world except for the occasional raid. Thus, they consider themselves to be outcasts, the trauma of their origin story like the one that Dinin and Hatch’net believe is a part of their culture to the point that they do not speak common. There is almost no reason a Drow would learn the common tongue of the surface being that they are isolationists. Drizzt will have to learn the common tongue in order to thrive on the surface, breaking the tradition of xenophobia that is so pervasive in his culture.

Looking at some language specific to the Drow, a common curse in drowic is “Ssussun pholor dos!” or “Light upon you!” (Greenwood 95). This inversion of what is normally understood by humans to be a positive thing in light turned into an insult is an interesting feature of Drow language. In Drow culture, the light is a painful thing, and a punishment as bright light stings the sensitive eyes of these creatures that live in darkness. This is another example of how Saussure describes the shared values of language. The light being upon you would almost certainly be a compliment to a human. Inversely, light is harmful and would be an insult to a Drow. Conversely, the phrase “Oloth plynn dos!” would be used specifically against a non-Drow. It means “darkness take you!” (Greenwood 95). Shared values are critical to comprehension of a word or phrase. For example, calling someone wise as an owl in Western European culture is considered a high compliment but being called an owl is an insult to someone from India. Or simple gestures that are meant to convey a message like the “okay” hand gesture is interpreted to be vulgar in Brazilian culture, but in North America it is considered a sign of affirmation of a positive. Two entities must agree on what the meaning of the communication is supposed to imply. It is dependent on the relationship between the speaker and the receiver. These examples of Drow language could be represented as ethnic slurs which if understood by both parties is a source of trauma.

One theory about Drow language is that it would be akin to Australian or American English as the original speakers were separated from the main group. The Drow would have spoken a shared ancient version of elvish and when they were exiled to the Underdark would have developed an accent that was unique to their group. Contact with “aboriginal” creature like the Svirfneblin may have resulted in words being

incorporated into the lexicon (Baugh and Cable 216). Yet, because the time of the fall of Lolth and the Drow being driven below the surface, I would argue that their language may seem more like Old English in relation to Modern English. Most of gaming fantasy take place in a setting inspired by Medieval interpretations of Western Europe. In terms of technology, this is before a printing press and therefore the language should be reflective of this time in the history of English. The Drow and their isolation from other cultures and language would have had less development. Fewer new words would find their way into the Drow lexicon. Mostly, what would have occurred would have been internal developments of the language where expansion of the language would have been a result of sporadic contact with other peoples, “as the history of conquests, revolutions, religious movements, and artistic achievements unfolds” (Baugh and Cable 8). However, the strict adherence to the worship of Lolth would have limited the religious aspect. Losing the favor of the Spider Queen could result in a Drow being changed into a wretched drider, a horrible monstrosity where an elf loses his lower body to that of a spider and is forced to live in exile from the rest of the Drow. All Drow live under the threat of this kind of trauma. The language can lead to a worldview as it does with the Drow that hate outsiders. Brigitta Busch and Tim McNamara bring it together this way in their article “Language and Trauma: An Introduction,” in the journal *Applied Linguistics* (2020):

Language can also per se become a weapon that may be injurious. Exposure to hate speech, linguistic ostracism, or brutal silencing, whose goal is denying one’s acknowledgement as a subject qualified to interact, can—especially when frequently reiterated—have a traumatizing effect and obviously, verbal violence is

often paired with physical violence. (Busch and McNamara 328)

The tendrils of hate speech and racial slurs can become worse than verbal trauma in this scenario where violent speech metastasizes into physical violence.

There is a recognition of racial codes in language. In the text, racial language is normalized among the characters to show how the words can inflict trauma. I feel it is important to highlight the connotation of how the language is connected to Drizzt's race and how Busch and McNamara say words are a weapon for trauma. This is especially relevant when Drizzt leaves the Underdark for the surface world. Creatures that are black in American and European literature tend to be associated with evil. Just as the Drow are known as the evil branch of the elven line, the "Duergar" are an evil equivalent line of deep dwarves. Their name is of Icelandic origin and literally means "dwarf" (OED). Duergar are wicked creatures that attack surface dwarves when they mine too deep and wreak havoc on them. As is the case with the Drow, they too are darker skinned than their goodly surface cousins. This is problematic of much of classic fantasy and literature in general. White is good. Black is bad. In Joyce A. Joyce's essay in *The Journal of Black Studies* on the study of the word "black," we glean even more connotations to the use of the word in Medieval stories that would inspire modern fantasy literature:

Not only did the Medieval Age instigate a semantic emphasis from light to dark, it also added a figurative dimension to the word blak: hence blak and blakness become associated for the first time with terror and fierceness, as well as with foulness and wickedness. Enriching this new dimension, the Middle Age associates the color black with sin, sorrow, and the devil. (Joyce 309)

Drow are black as depicted in their descriptions in the various books and modules they

were introduced in the game of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Black can mean many things in English as we have seen from Joyce. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines black as a word of Germanic origin, meaning “Of the darkest colour possible, that of soot, coal, the sky on a moonless night in open country, or a small hole in a hollow object; designating this colour; (also) so near this as to have no recognizable colour, very dark” (OED).

Black can also mean evil or can symbolize something is bleak or the opposite of happy. See songs such as Amy Winehouse’s, *Back to Black* (Winehouse 1:16) or Soundgarden’s *Fell on Black Days* (Cornell 1:11) for context. Drizzt will eventually decide that he is not like his kin and leave the Underdark. The color of his skin will become the source of a new kind of trauma as everyone he encounters under the sun believes him to be evil simply because he is black. Turnbull describes the Drow this way: “Drow are black-skinned and pale-haired. They are slight of build and have long, delicate fingers and toes” (Turnbull 34). This is how they are described for the first time in the game supplement by TSR games in 1980 inside the *Fiend Folio*. This is why the connections that Salvatore makes regarding the physical appearance of the Drow are important and the language that other characters encountering them use in the text can be racially charged. This use of charged language is on purpose. When Roddy McGristle refers to Drizzt as a “Black-skinned devil” (Salvatore 797), it is to hurt him with the reminder that he is still othered no matter where in the world he is. The words are meant to inflict harm. Also in *Sojourn*, Drizzt has come to Icewind Dale and is seeking permission to live among the people in this community. He is met with constant racism and resistance at every turn. When Drizzt finally reaches the farthest known settlement, a place known for outsiders and rogues, Ten Towns- specifically one of the ten, the town of Bryn Shander- he is greeted with

suspicion: “The guards hardly knew how to react. Neither of them had ever seen a dark elf—though they knew beyond doubt that Drizzt was one—or knew more about the race than fireside tales of the ancient war that had split the elven peoples apart” (770). All of these conversations indicate racial prejudices.

The leader of Ten Towns, Cassius is summoned to the gates of the town to talk to Drizzt. The dark elf introduces himself, “‘I am Drizzt Do’Urden,’ he said, ‘of Mirabar and points beyond, now come to Ten-Towns’ (Salvatore 771). Cassius simply asks him why he has come to their settlement. “Drizzt shrugged. ‘Is a reason required?’” (771). Cassius’s answer is rife with racial bias. “For a dark elf, perhaps” (771). After some more conversation Cassius tells Drizzt, “I’ll not let a wandering Drow into Bryn Shander” (771). Drizzt replies, “Would a man have to prove himself worthy?” (771). The reply is steeped in cultural racism. “A man does not carry so grim a reputation” (772). Now imagine this conversation in modern vernacular using racially charged language: “I’ll not let a black person in... Would a white man have to prove himself worthy?” At this point in the story, Drizzt has spent seven years looking for a place to belong. Past experiences have taught him that his appearance will be associated with uncontrollable evil. He is a Drow; therefore, he is evil in their worldview. Even in the last stop in the known world, a place of rogues, his skin is a barrier to acceptance. Cassius’s argument is that a human would not carry so grim a reputation. But in his speech to Drizzt, he is racializing all Drow into one singular trait that is representative of an entire people. Even after Drizzt leaves the Underdark, he is followed by the trauma of what it means to be Drow.

Despite the tribulations that Drizzt undergoes in his journey to find acceptance on the surface, he is not immune to using racialized language and even has a moment when

he uses the language of the stone giants in a sort of racist way. Drizzt and his mentor, Montolio, are fending off a giant attack and Montolio teaches Drizzt a bit of racial slander meant to incite immediate danger from the giants: “Mangura bok woklok!” (712). They yell at the giants: “‘Mangura bok woklok,’ Montolio declared again. ‘Stupid blockhead: translated word by word. Stone giants hate that phrase—brings them charging in every time’” (712). A “blockhead” would be a racist insult to a stone giant. In the lore of *Dungeons & Dragons*, stone giants are far more intelligent than some of their giant cousins like hill giants. Calling them blockhead implies that they are stupid like a hill giant. In this example, Drizzt employs racist language similar to the kind he has been subjected to on other occasions. Drizzt using this language indicates that he is still struggling with the societal racism that he learned as a part of Drow culture. In later books in the series, Drizzt will reflect on these early years and his development. He will become more introspective and sensitive to his actions and the motivations behind them.

In my research examining how racialized language inflicts trauma on an individual, I found an interview on the *Dick Cavett Show* where the writer James Baldwin discussed how words that are racially charged can be traumatic. He said, “The word ‘negro’ is really designed to disguise the fact that you are talking about another man” (Baldwin 2:37). By using this word as a placeholder for an entire group of people, it others them, thus making systematic trauma a repeating thing that happens over and over. In the *Forgotten Realms* books, rarely is a Drow elf referred to as simply “elf” like a human would be called a human, but they are always heralded by the name Drow to separate them. For example, “Drow” elf or “dark elf.” There are many different lineages of elf in the *Forgotten Realms*. There are high elves, wood elves, moon elves, and so on

and so on. But like real people, they have a dark-skinned cousin that represents all that is evil in their kind. And they are called Drow more often than elf to “other” and scapegoat them. I mention this in my chapter on race, but here I wanted to look at it from a new angle. The language can be weaponized to form a racial divide. That is the source of the trauma in this instance for Drizzt. Drow call themselves “Drow.” The name has been weaponized by the surface dwellers to mean a pejorative when directed at a Drow.

Shields writes about how collective memory in a culture can be tied to language and the language can perpetuate the trauma. Collective memory and generational trauma are connected. The derogatory language used to identify a minority group is part of that collective memory. Baldwin illustrates this with the word “negro.” When it is used to emphasize the othering of a group of people it is contained in the collective memory of both the perpetrator and the recipient of the trauma. Racial epithets change over generations, but most slurs stay alive in the collective memory. Shields more elaborately describes the collective memory effect here she says:

The emphasis on society’s performances and its material culture production of memory can be seen in the replacement of the term “collective memory” with more societal oriented terms such as “cultural memory,” “national memory,” and “historical memory” that highlight the cultural influences and identity politics involved in shaping these memories. The discourses on cultural memory provide diverse points of exploration, namely how memory shapes cultural identity and the societal implications this carries. (Shields 41)

Drizzt’s race is a long-lived one. Individuals can live for hundreds of years. Cultural memory of a people with such longevity would make a collective memory vast. From the

moment that Drizzt steps foot into the light of the surface world, he will be subjected to language that will retraumatize him and remind him of his place as an outsider. Surface people use language that is meant to demean and ostracize him. For hundreds of years, he will have to replay this scenario as he encounters new people with no personal knowledge of his good deeds.

Finally, I want to look at the word “Drow.” “Drow” means: “a fit of illness; a fainting fit; a qualm” according to the Dictionary of the Scots Language. Being a Drow of the Underdark is to experience trauma on an unbelievable scale. Consider that the lifespan of a Drow elf in the *Forgotten Realms* setting can be up to twelve-hundred years. As mentioned in *Dragon Magazine*, in the article “Flesh for Lolth: The Secret Life of Dark Elves”: “They start training as warriors as early as eight and would become mature adults at the age of eighty” (Laws 24). Service to Lolth requires that the Drow begin to pass on the ideas that marginalize other races and creatures that share their world as an early part of their education. For Drizzt, this is exacerbated by being born a lowly male in a matriarchal society. To survive to adulthood, one would most likely have to have learned to kill and become quite efficient at it. Empathy is scourged out of a victim at the end of a snake-headed whip. The more powerful the priestess, the more heads the whip will have. Angering a matron-mother can be fatal as the venom of the magical snake bites fill their victim with agony. Now imagine having the conviction and courage to reject this world and make the sixty-mile journey through twists and turns, dodging and fighting your way out of a starless night only to reach a surface world where you are rejected solely on the color of your skin. The first words Drizzt hears would be the name for his race, “Drow.” It is used in a way to indicate hatred and fear, othering him and keeping

him as an outcast to the surface world he so longs to find community in. It would seem as if there was no place to call home. Then there are the new words he learns in the common tongue to describe the hate and the fear humans and surface elves have when they see a Drow. Traumatized every time he meets someone new, the language is piercing and follows him everywhere he goes in the world with the face of a Drow. This is what it means for Drizzt to have the fortitude to keep his blades put away and try to show the goodness in his heart. In *Sojourn* Drizzt recounts these experiences: “The receptions were always the same: shock and fear that quickly turned to anger. The more generous of those I encountered told me to simply go away; others chased me with weapons bared” (Salvatore 737). To the traumatized, weapons can be words.

Language is a main point for trauma. As Drizzt makes his way through *The Dark Elf Trilogy* as a refugee of the Underdark, the language used in the text supports the religious and racial kinds of trauma to connect it back to those earlier chapters in this thesis. The common thread is that trauma persists in the text and how it relates to real-world trauma. The language used by the characters is indicative of the trauma being experienced by Drizzt. Whether it be the demeaning nature of condescension by the female members of his family or the religious radicalization and then ostracization of the leaders in Drow society, this has a traumatic effect on Drizzt in his years of early development. When he finally flees the dangers of the Underdark, he faces racial discrimination often in the form of language. The name for his people is spoken with racial bias. When he hears the word “Drow,” it takes on a new meaning to him that separates him from others. What is remarkable about the character is that he still has hope that things will change for him even as he is rejected as he goes from town to town. He

constantly seeks to grow as a person, adding the trauma of his experiences from his life and trying to be a better person in spite of the constant rejection he faces in life.

V. CONCLUSION

Trauma is a universal experience that all people can understand. As long as there is empathy, then one person's or protagonist's story can reach people. Fortunately, humans are storytellers and as we try to understand the world and each through stories, we can find common ground through experiences and empathy. This story about an elf named Drizzt became important to me as I struggled to relate my trauma to the world. I did not have the tools to express myself adequately and so the adventures of this hero allowed me to work through certain traumatic incidents in my life. This is why I think Salvatore's *Legend of Drizzt* series is important. Not just because it is entertaining, but it allows the reader to empathize and experience trauma in a safe space and overcome it, teaching the reader that there is light on the other side of darkness. For Drizzt, the light and dark is both proverbial and literal as he leaves his original home behind to ascend from the depths of the world to the surface. It is both metaphor and pedagogy.

Religion can be a unifying, cultural, and uplifting experience. Organized religion can bring together communities or give solidarity to individuals looking for a sense of belonging or advice on how to conduct themselves in the framework of a society. Every religion has positive aspects. However, religion can be used as a weapon instead of a tool where it can cause great harm and trauma. Some religious and ethnic groups have suffered great generational trauma as a result of belonging to a religion. Others have been ostracized for not following an interpretation of a religion. A disagreement over a minor point has caused schisms in religions that went on to become genocides, thus perpetuating trauma for generations to come. There are many people alive today that have ancestors that were murdered because of their religious beliefs. And then there are more

localized examples of trauma where a religious community scapegoats a group of people to explain all the woes that they face. The Salem witch trials are a good example of this kind of community hysteria that can become a mob. This community hysteria is represented in fantasy literature as well. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), Mordor follows Sauron as both a religious leader and a dictator. The dark side of the Force in *Star Wars* (1977) requires adherence to a Sith lord as a religious leader. The source of power for a Sith is fear and aggression, thus perpetuating trauma on the galaxy. Much the same, Lolth exudes her chaos and evil onto her own worshippers, continuing the generational trauma that feeds in on itself, a never-ending cycle of abuse that is hard for the people involved to escape.

Tribalism and fear that are often linked to religion cause trauma in a direct way. An individual can choose not to follow a religion, but they cannot choose to be another ethnicity. As Drizzt exhibits throughout the tale, he can run from the city of his birth and get as far away from the religion of Lolth, the spider queen, but he cannot outrun his skin. He is marked different by his eye color when he is among the Drow. He is othered when he does not accept Lolthian tenets and propaganda, thus rejecting the culture it would have been easier to accept. When he leaves the Underdark, he is constantly confronted with what it means to be Drow. He isn't trying to overcome being a dark-skinned elf, he is trying to simply be himself and show the ignorant surface world that the culture and ethnicity shouldn't be all that defines someone.

Considering when Salvatore wrote the first Drizzt story, it is remarkable that the character was accepted so quickly. It wasn't overt, but the popularity of Drizzt in the gaming fantasy genre planted a seed in the culture that germinated into several changes to

the way we digest fantasy now. Everyone wants to play Drizzt in *Dungeons & Dragons*. He is the epitome of a hero. He is valiant. He is selfless. He can slay the dragons and slay the misconceptions all the while being vulnerable and yes, human. What makes him great isn't that he is the most amazing swordsman in the world, but his capacity to learn from his traumas and to forgive. That is what the hero is all about. It takes a certain kind of bravery to face down a literal demon from the pits of hell, but it takes real courage to face one's inner demons and use them to grow and change into a better version of oneself. As a player will level up his character in a game of *D&D*, so does a person that is about to harness the pain of trauma and use it as fuel to be a better person.

And finally, the words we use matter. The lexicon of trauma language is extensive. Words that would have little meaning outside of the context of trauma can become scarring to an individual. Languages contain words that are meant to inflict pain on people. Schoolyard teasing of the poor about things like worn, handed down clothes can become a trauma that echoes with a person for the rest of their life. Being berated for an accent can traumatize a person into being afraid to speak up. Being called "dirty," "poor," or "stupid" can traumatize someone into identifying as these things, hampering social development. We all have our trigger points when it comes to language. Racial slurs are the worst kind of trauma language. Here, I have tried to explain that the English language has a prejudice against the word, "black." Anything black carries a negative connotation. Drizzt's skin being black is important to telling his story, though it is a fantasy world, and he could really be any color and the vernacular of racism would still be intact. There would be a dialect of racist terminology if he were in fact, blue.¹⁴

¹⁴ Many of the modern depictions of Drow are a dark blue as Wizards of the Coast have tried to move the tension away from the Drow representing black people.

Though, in my opinion, Drow should be black because the story is relevant in a real way. Though it is make-believe, it is reflective of real-world issues. This is why I believe much of Salvatore's work is important. It deals with real issues that are relatable using the vehicle of fantasy literature. Relatable like real-world social issues of trauma like naming and violent language towards a marginalized group make it important. Words can and do hurt the psyche if not the physical body. *The Legend of Drizzt* books delve into issues of trauma on several levels, but they also speak to friendship and personal exploration. With each new book, Drizzt comes to know the world around him better for the experiences he has and yes, the traumas that come with them, but he also gets to know the world and his place in it.

Trauma theory is still a new literary method in relation to some of the others that have been used in scholarly work for decades. It is still evolving as does our understanding of how trauma affects the person. Each person is different and so trauma is received differently across the board. The world of gaming fantasy literature is often brutal and violent. The villains represent the worst in humanity, for humans are the real monsters. Heroes have represented the aspirations of various cultures across space and time. A hero is much the same to cultures in any era. Usually, a culture's heroes will look like them, but not always. Sometimes they need to be different to illustrate a point. When we sit around a fire and telling tales about heroes or when we sit in therapy across from a therapist, we all use the same way of communicating what is important to us. We tell stories. That is what makes us human.

WORKS CITED

- Alber, Jan. "Impossible Storyworlds—and What to Do with Them." *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 1, 1 2009, 79–96.
- Anderson, David, and Eric Williams. "Professing Literature: EP07 - *The Archer With the Bow: Beowulf* on Apple Podcasts." *Apple Podcasts*, 15 Nov. 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/professing-literature/id1565266817?i=1000541989584>.
- Athans, Philip. *A Reader's Guide to R.A. Salvatore's the Legend of Drizzt*. Edited by Susan J. Morris, Wizards of the Coast, 2008.
- Balaev, Michelle. "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 149–66.
- Barker, Pat. *Regeneration*. Penguin, 1991.
- Bashaw, Jennifer Garcia. "Jesus, Girard, and Dystopian Literature." *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spr 2016, pp. 73–86.
- Baldwin, James. "James Baldwin Discusses Racism: The Dick Cavett Show." *The Dick Cavett Show*, YouTube, 24 June 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWwOi17WHpE&t=160s&ab_channel=TheDickCavettShow.
- Baugh, Albert Croll, and Thomas Cable. *A History of the English Language*. 6th ed., Routledge, 2013.

Boyd, Eric L. *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark*. Edited by Quick Jeff, TSR Inc., 1999.

Busch, Brigitta, and Tim McNamara. "Language and Trauma: An Introduction." *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 41, no. 3, June 2020, pp. 323–33.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth: with Bill Moyers*. Doubleday, 1988.

Clark, Djèli. "Early Black Writers, Speculative Fiction and Confronting Racial Terror." *Disgruntledharadim.com*, 20 Oct. 2017, <https://disgruntledharadrim.com/2015/06/23/early-black-writers-speculative-fiction-and-confronting-racial-terror>.

Cornell, Chris. "Fell on Black Days." *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySzrJ4GRF7s&ab_channel=SoundgardenVEVO

Cowan, Douglas E. *Magic, Monsters, and Make-Believe Heroes: How Myth and Religion Shape Fantasy Culture*. U of California P, 2019.

Cunningham, Elaine. *Evermeet: Island of Elves*. Wizards of the Coast, 2000.

Dews, Peter. *The Idea of Evil*. Blackwell, 2007.

Dictionary of the Scots Language. 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. Accessed 1 Jul 2021 www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/drow_n1_v

“Drow.” *Dungeons & Dragons Lore Wiki*,

<https://www.dungeonsdragons.fandom.com/wiki/Drow>.

Dungeoncast, The. *The Interview With R. A. Salvatore: D&D Icons - The Dungeoncast*

Ep. 146, YouTube, 18 Aug. 2019,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmFNzmdXAkA&ab_channel=TheDungeonca](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmFNzmdXAkA&ab_channel=TheDungeoncast)

[st](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmFNzmdXAkA&ab_channel=TheDungeoncast). Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Eagleton, Terry. *On Evil*. Yale UP, 2011.

Fawaz, Ramzi. “Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes/Do the Gods

Wear Capes? Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes/Race in American Science

Fiction.” *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and*

Bibliography, vol. 85, no. 1, Mar. 2013, pp. 199–202.

Fire and Ice. Directed by Ralph Bakshi, Performances by Gerry Conway and Thomas

Roy. 20th Century Fox, 1983.

Frankel, Jay B. “Ferenczi’s Trauma Theory”. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*,

vol. 58, no. 1, 1998, pp. 41–61. *Springer Link.com*,

<https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022522031707>.

Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Group Psychology*

and Other Works; (1920-1922). Vintage, 2001.

Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. HarperCollins, 2002.

Gault, Matthew. "Dungeons & Dragons' Racial Reckoning Is Long Overdue." *Wired*, Conde Nast, 31 Dec. 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/dungeons-dragons-diversity/>.

Girard, René, and Andrew J. McKenna. *Violence, the Sacred, and Things Hidden: Discussion with René Girard at Esprit (1973)*. Michigan UP, 2021.

Girard, René, et al. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford UP, 1987.

---. *Violence and the Sacred*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1977.

Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Houghton Mifflin, 2012.

Greenwood, Ed. Foreword. *Forgotten Realms: The Dark Elf Trilogy*, by Salvatore, TSR Inc., 1998, np.

---. *Forgotten Realms: The Drow of the Underdark*. TSR Inc. 1991.

Gygax, Gary. *Descent into the Depths of the Earth: An Adventure for Character Levels 9-14*. TSR Games, 1978.

Hammond, Wayne G., and Christina Scull. *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*. Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Hopkinson, Nalo. "Maybe They're Phasing Us In: Re-Mapping Fantasy Tropes in the Face of Gender, Race, and Sexuality." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1 (69), Jan. 2007, pp. 99–107.

- Ivanova, Evgenia “Religions in Fictional Worlds: Infernal Religious Mythology in Fantasy Series.” *Convention 2017: Modernization and Multiple Modernities*, 2018, pp 357–364. DOI 10.18502/kss.v3i7.2487
- Jemison, N.K.. Interview. *United Shades of America*. Hosted by W. Kamua Bell *Sweet Home (Mobile) Alabama*. Season 3 Ep. 3. 11 Mar.2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpqLpYemJK4&ab_channel=UnitedShadesofAmerica
- Joyce, Joyce A. “Semantic Development of the Word Black: A History from Indo-European to the Present.” *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1981, pp. 307–312. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2784182. Accessed 11 Apr. 2021.
- King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Scribner, 2000.
- Laws, Robin D. “Flesh for Lolth: The Secret Life of Dark Elves.” *Dragon Magazine*, Aug. 2000, p. 24.
- Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy*. U of Chicago P, 2000.
- Livingston, Michael. “The Shell-Shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien’s Trauma of the Ring.” *Mythlore*, vol. 25, no. 1–2, Sept. pp. 77-92.
- “Lolth.” *Forgotten Realms Wiki*, <https://forgottenrealms.fandom.com/wiki/Lolth>. Accessed 1 July 2021.
- Mannoni, Octave. *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. *Psychologie De La Colonisation*, Translated by Pamela Powesland, U of Michigan P. pp. 97-102, 105-09, 1990.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan UP, 2013.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage Books, 2019.

---. *Recitatif: A Story*. Knopf Canada, 2022.

Nama, Adilifu. *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes*. U of Texas P, 2016.

Ochberg, Frank. "The Ties That Bind Captive to Captor." *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 8 Apr. 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-apr-08-oe-ochberg8-story.html>.

Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/208777. Accessed 28 March 2022.

Perkins, Christopher. *Dungeons & Dragons: Curse of Strahd*. Edited by Jeremy Crawford, Wizards of the Coast, 2016.

Perkins, Christopher, et al. *Dungeons & Dragons. Out of the Abyss*. Wizards of the Coast, 2015

Powell, Alisha. "Religious Trauma Syndrome: Examples, Symptoms, & 7 Ways to Cope." *Choosing Therapy*, <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/religious-trauma-syndrome/>.

Rumsby, John Henry. *Otherworldly Others: Racial Representation in Fantasy Literature*.
2017. University of Montreal. PhD dissertation.

<https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/handle/1866/>.

Salvatore, R.A. Personal Interview. 30 December 2021

Salvatore, R. A. *Forgotten Realms: The Dark Elf Trilogy. Collector's Edition*. TSR Inc.,
1998.

--- *The Collected Stories of R.A. Salvatore: The Legend of Drizzt Anthology*. Edited by
Philip Athans, Wizards of the Coast, 2011.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Roy Harris,
Bloomsbury, 2016.

“Science of the Scary With Neil Degrasse Tyson, Mathias Clasen, and Heather Berlin,”
Startalk Radio hosted by Neil Degrasse Tyson *YouTube*, YouTube, 21 Oct. 2021,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_wv4CZ_kzE&ab_channel=StarTalk.
Accessed 17 Jan. 2022.

Schiffman, Richard. “*When Religion Leads to Trauma*.” *The New York Times*, The New
York Times, 5 Feb. 2019,
[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/well/mind/religion-trauma-lgbt-gay-
depression-anxiety.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/well/mind/religion-trauma-lgbt-gay-depression-anxiety.html).

Schwanberg, Suzanne Jennifer. “Does Language of Retrieval Affect the Remembering of
Trauma?” *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 44–56.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2017.

Shields, Amber. *In-between Worlds: Exploring Trauma through Fantasy*. 2018.

University of St. Andrews, PhD dissertation <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/16004>

Snorri, Sturluson. *Prose Edda*. Am.-Scandinavian foundation, 1916.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to the Literary Genre*.

Translated from the French by Richard Howard. P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings*. Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

Tomin, Brittany. "The Order and the Other: Young Adult Dystopian Literature and Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 47, Nov. 2020, pp. 474–478.

Turnbull, Don. editor, *Fiend Folio*. TSR Games, 1980.

Winehouse, Amy. "Back to Black". YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJAfLE39ZZ8&ab_channel=AmyWinehouse
VEVO

Winell, M. "Religious Trauma Syndrome" (Series of 3 articles), *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Today*, Vol. 39, Issue 2, May 2011, Vol. 39, Issue 3, September 2011, Vol. 39, Issue 4, November 2011.

Wizards of the Coast. "Diversity and Dungeons & Dragons." *Diversity and Dungeons & Dragons / Dungeons & Dragons*, Wizards of the Coast, 17 June 2020,

<https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/diversity-and-dnd>.

Wyatt, James. *The Art of Magic: The Gathering: Innistrad*. Wizards of the Coast, 2016.