

## Depressed Immortals: Immortality and Ecocriticism in Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris*

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*Brandon Sanderson's Elantris (2005) exemplifies how fantasy fiction may reflect on the contemporary way of life, as the immortal protagonists' situation in the novel comments on the present depression epidemic and its relation to the entanglement of the urban and nature. Further, the notion of nature and human being opposites is negated, and their oneness foregrounded instead. Based on the idea of a coexistence in symbiosis, the importance of humanity's connectedness to nature and the urban environment is highlighted. By drawing upon the notion of an extended self, Sanderson presents his readers with a work that is in line with deep ecology.*

*Brandon Sandersons Elantris (2005) verdeutlicht, inwiefern sich Fantasy auf heutige Lebensweisen beziehen und diese reflektieren kann. Die Situation der Unsterblichen kommentiert dabei die gegenwärtige Depressionsepidemie im Zusammenhang mit der Verflechtung von Mensch, Stadt und Natur. Hier wird die Vorstellung, dass Natur und Mensch Gegensätze sind, negiert und stattdessen ihre Einheit in den Vordergrund gestellt. Auf Grundlage der Idee von Koexistenz in Symbiose wird die Bedeutung der Verbundenheit des Menschen sowohl mit der Natur als auch mit der städtischen Umwelt hervorgehoben. Der Idee des erweiterten Selbst folgend, spiegeln sich in Elantris Ansätze der deep ecology.*

### **Introducing a Re-imagined Urban Ecology**

In times of anthropogenic climate change, the binarism of Nature as space versus civilisation as the place where humans exert control (over nature) negates human dominance in favour of a re-mystification of Nature that foregrounds human inferiority in the face of climate catastrophes (Parker); however, approaching Nature as the dark sublime may also lead to the reduction of Nature to

being seen as just a threat to human survival.<sup>1</sup> While there are fantasy narratives that primarily evoke eco-anxieties through the negative sublime of life-threatening Nature (Walder), in this article, I propose that nature nevertheless can and should be an acknowledged part of the concrete jungles of the contemporary city, as the natural world affects humans and their urban living spaces alike. Instead of approaching N/nature as separate from the urban, I demonstrate how humans remain dependent on a life in unison with both nonhuman Nature and cultivated nature. Hereby, my examination of Brandon Sanderson's fantasy novel *Elantris* follows the attempts of social ecocriticism and urban ecology in bringing the notions of nature and urban together. Pertaining to psychological research on the positive influence of the entanglement of nature in the urban on mental health, I will then reflect on the importance of nature-connectedness in relation to place-connectedness and outline how medical and psychological research findings have found a foothold in genre fiction.

Without any inherently nature-oriented emphasis, Sanderson's *Elantris* could be easily dismissed by ecocriticism as being too concerned with the subjective and social. Following Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace's example in *Beyond Nature Writing*, however, Greg Garrard advocates for a more prominent inclusion of genre fiction in the field of ecocriticism; that is, he deems the ecocritical value of texts without an "obvious environmental dimension" ("Introduction" 18) as equal to those texts with which ecocriticism has been primarily concerned from the outset – as claims have been made for nonfiction and poetry (*Ecocriticism*). Nevertheless, most contemporary works are still excluded from ecocritical studies, as ecocritics "expect of writers that they inscribe ecological viewpoints in their work" (Oppermann, "Ecocentric" 230), and thus the main focus remains on direct descriptions and presentations instead of asking how ecocriticism can enter various texts. When focusing on the way the environment and nature enter a text – thereby defining ecocriticism in inclusive terms and following Serpil Oppermann's

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1 Parker capitalises Nature in order to acknowledge the difference between Nature as space, a world of the nonhuman defying human control, as opposed to nature as a place that has been cultivated by humans (7–8).

argument for an enlightening and postmodern study of genre fiction (“Theorizing”) – Sanderson’s story can indeed be approached from an ecological perspective that provides insight into the contemporary relation between the human, the urban, and nature. Here, the notion of deep ecology as an “environmental philosophy” that understands the human “as centrally embedded in, rather than apart from, the natural world” (Snyder 8) underlies the representation of the human (dis)connection to nature in the novel. This enables an ecocritical approach insofar as Sanderson points his readers to the importance of being sensitive to one’s union with nature.

Whereas postcolonial readings and the construction of alterity are arguably more obvious approaches to Sanderson’s work, the fantasy world of *Elantris* also lends itself to a particular ecocritical reading concerning the question of how the global health issue of the depression epidemic, as Jonathan Rottenburg calls it, is connected to humanity’s maladaptation to its environment, that is the present imbalance between urbanisation and the natural world. Instead of arguing for a *return* to nature, the plot then highlights how nature sensitivity can lead to improved life in urban spaces while further pointing to the necessity to revalue the triangular relation between people, cities and nature in order for depression rates to decline (Bratman et al.). Considering how ecocriticism is embedded in the text as a whole instead of seeking direct descriptions of the same, a focus on nature-connectedness is supported by the main setting of the novel, namely the urban space of Elantris. A reading of the novel that is informed by the coexistence of the urban and nature can then address how the entanglement of nature in the urban may result in improved mental health – and thus avoiding the anti-ecological reasoning of “going back to nature” that reduces nature to a simplistic comparison with human civilisation (Garrard, “Introduction” 6).

In order to argue that the novel reflects on the relation between depression and environment, I will first demonstrate the likeness between the Elantrians and people suffering from hope-

lessness depression.<sup>2</sup> Then, introducing the concept of place- and nature-connectedness, the connection between mental health and the entanglement of the urban and nature is illustrated. Based on urban ecology, the importance of nature-sensitivity is highlighted, emphasising the link between humans and their urban living space. Rather than advocating for a life *in* nature, the novel reflects on how one can live in an urban space while still mentally benefiting from nature-connectedness, for which the idea of self-realisation as the recognition of “one’s personhood as tied to the cosmos” (Naess qtd. in Snyder 9) is fundamental.

### **The Mentally Ill Elantrians and Their Social Exclusion**

While the issue of mental health enters the text through the immortal Elantrians, their state of immortality leading to hopelessness depression is due to a previous shift in their transformation, which is presented right at the start of the novel as follows:

Elantris was beautiful, once. It was called the city of the gods: a place of power, radiance, and magic. [...] Yet, as magnificent as Elantris was, its inhabitants were more so. [...] Legends claim that they were immortal, or at least nearly so. [...] They were divinities. And anyone could become one. The Shaod, it was called. The Transformation. It struck randomly [...] [and] the fortunate person’s life ended and began anew; he would [...] move to Elantris [...] and be worshipped for eternity. Eternity ended ten years ago. (*Elantris*)<sup>3</sup>

Set in Arelon, a feudalistic country with corrupt leadership, the plot of *Elantris* unfolds ten years after an event called the Reod, after which the divine eternity described in the Prologue comes to an end as the Shaod now turns humans into living corpses instead of divine immortals. Following the Reod, those unfortunate to be

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2 Even though the Elantrians are immortal, they are referred to as human instead of nonhuman in this article. Being representative for contemporary humanity, these human-like immortals are then shown to be entangled with the urban and nature (nonhuman matter/materiality).

3 In Brandon Sanderson’s *Elantris*, the pagination is inconsistent. The quote is from the Prologue, for which no page numbers are displayed.

affected by the transformation are then cursed with endless pain as their bodies are unable to function normally. Although the humans attribute the incomplete transformation to the Reod, they are uncertain of its true nature. It is only towards the end of the novel that they discover that the Reod is actually an earthquake that altered the landscape.<sup>4</sup>

While the Elantrians have been worshipped before, they become outcasts confined to the city of Elantris as they “lost their right to be men [and] are animals” (Sanderson 102), according to the religious group serving Jaddeth. First, this statement establishes a hierarchy in the novel that favours humans over animals, contradicting the idea of the human being “with and of the Earth” which recognises that “the biotic and abiotic powers of this Earth are the main story” (Haraway). Second, the comment demonstrates that humanity’s disconnection from nature is evident not only in the overall plot, as outlined below, but also in the descriptions of the Elantrians that certain members of Arelish society use to devalue them as they disturb their civilised society. As the urban environment is a human-controlled place, unpredictability – that which the human cannot control, civilise, or order – is undesired and must be excluded. The Reod is uncontrollable and lacks any discernible system, leading to unpredictability in the civilisation of Arelon. Due to its negative effects on humans, a significant portion of the fictional society feels the need to mark those affected as inferior (similar to how they view animals) in order to justify the Elantrians’ exclusion from society. In Elantris, the enclosed city of these dehumanised exiles, the immortals then enter a depressive state of mind whereby their transition from mortality to immortality echoes the juxtaposition of “the vulnerable natural world of the organic and the changing with that of the hard, precious world of fixity and permanence” (Klotz 30). Here, the desire for permanence and fixity – both associated with immortality (Klotz) – is mocked insofar as the immortal’s fixed state does provide neither security nor comfort, instead leading to an assumed endless suffering. This

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4 Regarding this newly gained nature-sensitivity, see the section “Place-Connectedness and the Entanglement of the Human and the Urban with Nature” below.

then comments on the vulnerability of the human and the futility of desiring control and permanence.

The term *depression* entails a multitude of meanings for different research fields, which points to the difficulty of defining the illness in clear-cut terms as it often remains invisible. For this article, the notion of depression as being in a particular state of mood is applied. This can cover “the most catastrophic of states . . . [of being] unable to get out of bed, unable to work, unable to self-care, and even consumed by thoughts of death” (Rottenburg 12). In contrast to mental illness as “the occurrence of disorder of cognition, affect, and behavior”, the World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which [an] individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community” (Bratman et al. 2). The idea that the Elantrians may suffer from mental illness then becomes evident when other characters describe those who underwent the disfiguring transformation some time ago. Their inability to function in a normative, productive or fruitful way is well reflected when Galladon – a rather ‘new’ and yet undepressed Elantrian – explains to another protagonist called Raoden that the Hoed are

those Elantrians who had succumbed to the pain. Their minds lost, their lives were filled with continual, unrelenting torture. They rarely moved, though some had enough feral instinct to remain crouched in the shadows. Most of them were quiet but few were completely silent. As he passed, Raoden could hear their mumbles, sobs, and whines. Most seemed to be repeating words and phrases to themselves, a mantra to accompany their suffering. (Sanderson 44)

The reader is here confronted with a population marked by a numbness that lets them only occasionally “bob toward the surface of what [they] had once called consciousness” (579). Besides exhibiting the typical invisible symptoms of depression, the mental illness is further reflected in the changes in appearances of the Elantrians as their hair turns “limp gray” and their skin becomes “covered with sickly black patches, like dark bruises” (4); both apparent changes mark them as inherently Other. Here, it is of particular interest that

even though depression is an illness that has no bodily markers and remains “invisible and incalculable” (Rottenburg 2), the text makes it visible. In Sanderson's world, it is not only the mind that suffers but the body as well. Further, the distressed body is closely entwined with the affliction of the mind: “every cut, every nick, every bruise, and every ache – they will stay with you until you go mad from the suffering” (Sanderson 10).

Referring back to my introduction and the remark that *Elantris* offers a multitude of readings, this new way of representing a mental illness highlights the aptitude of this particular work, and popular fiction in general, for addressing social questions in a unique way; here, the problem of depression being invisible and the dismissal of those suffering from it is commented on. The bodily markers mentioned above clearly identify those suffering from depression, which makes it rather difficult for the fictional society to look the other way, that is to ignore that something went wrong. Rather than questioning the cause of the ‘depression’ and the changes that have occurred, the ‘healthy’ society chooses to exile the Elantrians, similar to how mentally ill individuals are institutionalised in the real world. Here, I do not intend to criticise institutionalisation per se as there are cases in which individuals may profit from such intense care. However, the ‘out of sight, out of mind’ attitude without caring to look deeper into the reasons of, for instance, the depression epidemic remains problematic. Hence, the persecution and mistreatment of the disfigured Elantrians can be seen as a comment on the social exclusion of mentally ill individuals that disregards the larger causes for mental illnesses.

### **Hopelessness Depression and Personal Condemnation**

Beyond the visible depiction of depression as an illness, the Elantrians display a particular kind of depression that is linked to their fate of being exiles forced to live apart from their families in the enclosed ghetto of Elantris. After years in isolation without any hope of finding a possible cure for their pain – most do not even have the capacity to think properly anymore, let alone to search for a cure –

the Elantrians lose hope for a better life. Throughout the text, this loss of hope is prominently pointed to, so that the notion of *hopelessness depression*, a subtype of depression, can be further considered when examining the state of the Elantrians. In the field of clinical psychology, depression is regarded as a response of the human mood system to the environment. Here, the idea of hopelessness depression follows the basic assumption that the way an individual responds to negative life events is related to the likelihood of that same individual developing depression. In their study, Liu et al. propose that there are three “inferential tendencies in response to a negative event”, whereby each individual infers either “stable and global causes”, “negative consequences” or “negative self-characteristics” (347) from a negative event; only when the event relates to the particular inferential style of an individual, hopelessness depression is engendered.

Since most Elantrians “thought that they were damned, and assumed that nothing could save their souls from rotting away like Elantris itself” (Sanderson 165), the negative cognitive style of the Elantrians is foregrounded. Instead of hoping or working for a better life, most Elantrians regard themselves as damned upon entering the city. Their hopelessness thus stems from their negative cognitive style, which seeks to explain the negative life event of the Shaod in terms of their personal condemnation. Replacing this negative self-assessment with a more positive inferential style – for example inferring the Reod to unstable natural causes unrelated to oneself – may indeed “produce an ameliorative effect on the individual’s sense of hope and mood” (Liu et al. 349). While one could argue that the loss of hope among the Elantrians is understandable regarding their endless suffering, the text also points out that

The city needs a sense of purpose. [...] Everyone’s convinced that their lives are over just because their hearts stopped beating. [...] We need to convince ourselves we can go on. The Shaod isn’t causing all the pain here – [...] people on the outside lose hope too, and their souls end up just as emaciated as those poor wretches in the square. If we can restore even a tiny bit of hope to these people, then their lives will improve drastically. (Sanderson 123–24)



Thus, the text directly points to the Elantrians' pain being also caused by a loss of hope, as the quote above highlights that it is not only the failed transformation due to the altered Shaod and the resulting fixed form of the Elantrians but especially their hopelessness that causes them pain. After having established the assumption that the Elantrians suffer from hopelessness depression made visible, in the following, I relate their depressive state of mind and body to place- as well as nature-connectedness, which in turn leads to a reading of the novel that follows the strand of social ecocriticism as well as urban ecology (Bracke).

### **Place-Connectedness and the Entanglement of the Human and the Urban with Nature**

For the purpose of this article, the notion of place is considered an environmental as well as an identity-shaping category, following Buell's conception of places having various dimensions. Here, it is imperative to distinguish between urban places, nature as green or blue places that the human assumes to be in control of, and Nature as a survival-threatening space that remains free from human control (Parker); below, I use *place* to particularly refer to the concrete jungle of the urban, while I apply *nature* to the collective of the external physical world that stands in close relation to the urban; that is *Nature* as negative sublime is backgrounded in favour of *nature* in the urban. Although nature-connectedness and place-connectedness refer to two different kinds of environment, both are entangled and equally related to mental health. Similar to nature-connectedness, place-connectedness is defined as an inherent connection to "what we feel *with* and *around*, *under* and *above*, *before* and *behind*" (Buell 61; original emphasis). The lack of place-connectedness is then assumed to have what Buell describes as "a pathological effect" (75), which produces an environmental notion of place that affects the well-being of a given population.

That populations are closely tied to their urban environment is highlighted in the novel when Raoden looks upon Elantris and notices that "[i]t seemed unnatural to look at Elantris from the out-

side. Raoden belonged in the city. It was as if he stood outside of his own body. [...] He should no more be separated from Elantris than his spirit should be separated from his body” (Sanderson 487). Here, it is first and foremost place-connectedness and not the connection to nature that is underlined. Instead of being emotionally attached to the surrounding nature, it is the urban environment that claims the protagonist’s feeling of belonging and connection whereby he for now displays a strong relation to the urban. Referring to Buell’s conception of place, the characters in the novel represent the idea that the urban environment is not humanity’s Other but rather “part of our being” (55). This notion reflects Bennett’s emphasis on vibrant materiality, which assumes an inherent interconnectedness between all matter, and enables a relation of the urban ecology as presented in *Elantris* to nature-connectedness and the concept of deep ecology. Introducing Haraway’s Chthulucene and Alaimo’s “thinking across bodies” (4), focusing on human matter, Buell’s idea of the entanglement of the human and the urban re-centres the intrinsic link between all “biotic and abiotic powers” (Alaimo 4) on the urban.

For an understanding of the triangle relation between the human, the urban, and nature in Sanderson’s fictional world, the concept of *Dor* as a natural energy is introduced, which entangles both urban place and the human – represented here by the immortals – with nature:

Dor is the unseen power – it is in everything, but cannot be touched. It affects nothing, yet it controls everything. . . . There must be some link between Elantrians and the Dor – it feeds our bodies, providing the energy we need to survive. . . . Not only that – but there must be some sort of link between this land and the Dor. (Sanderson 276–77)

Thus, the all-encompassing Dor relates to the idea that one cannot come into being without being in tune with nature. This is demonstrated by the natural energy of Dor feeding the human mind and body, indicating that nature underlies all aspects of existence. Hence, the concept of nature-connectedness enters the text insofar as not only the Elantrians but also their urban place itself is linked to nature through the notion of Dor as a life-giving energy,

which in turn means that Dor interrelates the Elantrians with the land, that is nature, as well. By becoming sensitive to the energy provided by nature, the Elantrians thus practice nature-connect-edness. In the following section, I will examine how Sanderson's novel discusses the malpractice of nature-connectedness as well as the healing properties of regained nature-sensitivity, based on the entanglement of the human (Elantrians), the urban (Elantris), and nature as energy (Dor).

### **AonDor and Healing from Hopelessness Depression through Regained Nature-Sensitivity**

In addition to the Dor-energy, the concept of AonDor is introduced: AonDor is an alphabet of signs that are drawn in the air to release the Dor so that one can, for example, produce light or heal injuries with the help of natural energy. Here, the selves of the Elantrians are shown to be interdependent with nature and its energy. This aligns with deep ecology's understanding of the notion of self as including "other organisms, and all that supports them, as part of one's own identity" (Clark 39; cf. Bennett and Haraway). The ability to use the Dor by drawing Aons was, however, reserved for the Elantrians from the past who were mentally and physically healthy, that is sensitive to nature. Since the Elantrians show visible signs of an illness, they are unable to connect to nature's energy, hinting at a general disconnect from their natural environment. While the Elantrians have exercised control over nature in the past by utilising the Dor, their current inability to access the Dor indicates that their control has always been limited and dependent on their nature-sensitivity. Similarly, in contemporary society, we may attempt to cultivate nature to exert some level of control over it, but natural catastrophes such as earthquakes demonstrate that complete control remains an illusion. The growing awareness of our limited control over nature and the inherent link between nature and health, especially the importance of human interaction

with nature (Bressane et al. 1), is hence reflected in Sanderson's fantasy through AonDor.<sup>5</sup>

The entanglement of the urban and nature then becomes particularly foregrounded when the main characters notice that there is one Aon underlying all Aons, which is essentially a map of the land: "Each one [of the Aons] had the three basic lines – the coast line, the mountain line, and the dot for Lake Alonoe" (Sanderson 504). This is then followed by the protagonists' assessment that something may be wrong with the land. Raoden realises that "[*n*]hen the Reod occurred, the land cracked. [...] It caused the crack to the south, and suddenly all of the Aons were invalid – they all needed an extra line to function. All of AonDor, and therefore Elantris, would have fallen immediately" (507; original emphasis).

Hence, when the natural environment changed but the humans failed to adapt the Aons so that all still mirror the land, their ability to use nature's energy subsided. After becoming finally sensitive to their environment, the protagonists not only notice that the AonDor mirrors the land, but they also become sensitive to the urban landscape of Elantris, realising that the city was built to represent the Aon that translates as 'Spirit' or 'Soul': "Elantris. Four walls forming a square. The four outer cities surrounding it, their border circles. A straight road leading from each city to Elantris" (583). Since the earthquake changed the landscape, Elantris is not an image of the environment any longer, just as the Aons were no longer a mirror of the land, and therefore the city lost its spirit; only after Raoden "finished his line in the dirt [...] Light exploded from the ground. And [...] the pain went away. The city complex was an enormous Aon – a focus for Elantrian power. All it had needed was the Chasm line to make it begin working again" (592).

The fact that the environment around Elantris changed relates this place to Buell's conception of place, which embraces these entities as "not stable, free-standing [...] but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside" (67) as represented in the novel by the Elantrians themselves and the earthquake.

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5 The Mental Health Foundation has themed the *Mental Health Awareness Week 2021* as "Nature: How connecting with nature benefits our mental health", exemplifying the increasing awareness of nature's positive impacts.

When the Elantrians adapt their urban living space as well as their usage of nature's energy by adding another line to the structure of the city as well as to the main Aon of AonDor – the new line representing the chasm that occurred after the earthquake – they heal from their pain and recover from being mentally and physically ill. This reflects the research that shows that a population “can develop a new relationship with the natural world by noticing nature, and that doing so has been found to bring improvements in mental health” (Mental Health Foundation 41). Hence, when the characters notice the change of the landscape as well as the connection between their urban living space and nature as such, they initiate a new relationship with their surroundings that is marked by nature-connectedness and leads to a healing of both mental and physical wounds. The statement by the Mental Health Foundation that “nature connectedness is also associated with lower levels of poor mental health; in particular lower depression and anxiety levels” (5) is thus represented in both the healing of the Elantrians' depressive mood and their physical appearance. Besides, the Elantrians' recovery also reflects the overall benefit of nature-contact as highlighted in a study by Klein et al.: While researching the association between green space and mental health, “the authors found that contact with nature in everyday life significantly associated with decreased levels” (qtd. in Bressane et al. 5) of mental illness. As indicated in section 3, the change in the Elantrians' connection to nature and regained knowledge of the earthquake leads to the adoption of a new inferential style. Instead of inferring their personal condemnation from the Reod, the Elantrians replace their negative self-characterisation with an explanation that is not related to them as beings, which invokes “an ameliorative effect” (Liu et al. 349) that enables the Elantrians to heal from their hopelessness depression.

## Resuming the Synthesis of (Urban) Ecology and Fantasy

Conclusively, opposing the approach of nature as something inherently different from the urban, *Elantris* highlights how nature affects humans and their urban environment alike (Bracke). Here, the entanglement of nature with the urban is foregrounded; and instead of representing the contemporary urban way of life negatively, the novel becomes an argument for an urban lifestyle in unison with nature. Additionally, the novel's ending presents the Elantrians, the urban city Elantris and nature not as opposites but parts of the same, which follows Buell's "understanding of the oneness of human and nonhuman" (59). In doing so, the focus remains on a coexistence in symbiosis and a "being [as] being-with" (Morton 302) that relates to the idea of "the close interconnected reality of humans to the cosmos" (Snyder 10). Thereby, the plot follows the ideas of "the extended self" (11) and self-realisation as the recognition of "one's personhood as tied to the cosmos" (Naess qtd. in Snyder 9) as argued for by scholars of deep ecology. Hence, Brandon Sanderson's text somewhat deviates here from the Western understanding of nature and its relation to humans. In Confucianism, for instance, the "inseparability of humans from nature" as well as "the universe [being] a dynamic, ongoing, recess of continual transformation" (Snyder 5) are basic assumptions that clash with the Western thinking in terms of a "spirit/matter or human/nature" (11) split – a split that the plot of *Elantris* also negates. Here, it is imperative to point to the World Health Organisation's presumption that approximately 20% of the Western population in industrialised countries suffer from depression, which makes the issue of mental health a particular problem for urban spaces of the West (Rottenburg).

As the fantastic text tells the story of a change in nature affecting the ability of the immortals to function properly, it further reflects the common agreement across the sciences that the experience of nature as well as one's communion with it has great impact on "cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and other dimensions of mental health" (Bratman et al. 1). By linking the urban living space of Elantris with nature's empowering energy that is in turn uti-

lised by the Elantrians themselves, a circle of influence between the human, the urban, and nature is created. Just as the Elantrians heal when *Elantris* is rebound to the environment and the natural energy of Dor, the reduction of mental illness in contemporary urban societies can be effected by a newfound sensitivity for nature. Besides considering the potential impact that changes in nature – as represented in *Elantris* by the earthquake and the Chasm – may have for us, the novel raises questions about the global population's mental health that suffers as nature-connectedness decreases. Studies based on theories such as the Attention Restoration Theory highlight how “nature acts on the improvement of mental fatigue and, in this way, contributes to the recovery of associated mental health problems” (Bressane et al. 2) or that “reduced regular contact with outdoor nature and increased time spent indoors, on screens and performing sedentary activities” (Bratman et al. 3) is linked to mental illness; all of which can be regarded as reflecting on the importance of nature-connectedness for mental health.

Due to its unique approach to the entanglement of the human, the urban and nature, Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris* is a prime example for the possibility of reflecting on the contemporary through the ecocritical reading of genre literature. Following the attempts by social ecocriticism and urban ecology to bring the spheres of nature and the urban together – entangling both notions even though both, at first, seem to be inherently different – the novel displays the property of a cautionary tale for our own relation and connectedness to nature.

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