



THE CENTRE OF NEGATIVE LIBERTY: DECONSTRUCTING  
COMMODIFICATION OF PERSONHOOD IN LEIGH BARDUGO’S SIX OF  
CROWS DUOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper explores the deconstruction of the body and the rationalization of commodification through a post-Marxist framework in Leigh Bardugo’s Six of Crows duology, contending that the commodification process cultivates alienation and perpetuates social inequality. Drawing on Christopher Hermann’s theory of commodification and Margaret Jane Radin’s critique of the sale of human attributes—an act that erodes individual personhood—this paper scrutinizes the exploitation of marginalized characters, particularly Inej and the Grisha soldiers, to underscore the pervasive societal issues of oppression and dehumanization. Hermann’s assertion that commodification prioritizes exchange value over use value, reducing individuals to mere instruments for profit, serves as the foundation for understanding the novel’s depiction of enslavement and the reduction of marginalized bodies to economic tools. Through its vivid portrayal of these dynamics, Bardugo’s work serves as a trenchant critique of the commodification of personal identity and agency, exposing the corrosive consequences of profit-driven ideologies on both social equality and individual dignity.

**Key Words:** Commodification, Marxism, Incomplete Commodification, Rationalization, Social Inequality

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## INTRODUCTION

### RATIONALIZATION OF COMMODIFICATION AND THE REALM OF INCOMPLETE COMMODIFICATION

The progression of commodification within society inherently leads to alienation, a concept Karl Marx identified as deeply interconnected with the alienability of the market. While liberal property rights champion the freedom of alienation, Marx understood that the commodification process estranges the laborer from their labor, transforming the product into capital and severing the intrinsic connection between the worker and the work. Marx's concept of alienation, further developed by Emil Oversveen in *Capitalism and Alienation: Towards a Marxist Theory of Alienation for the 21st Century*, expands on the social fragmentation and disintegration that arise from such estrangement. For Oversveen, alienation describes the detachment of individuals from their capacity for personal development and meaningful engagement with the products of their labor, leading to a sense of disconnection and dehumanization. Marx contends that this estrangement reduces the worker to a mere commodity, rendering human existence substandard by the over-rationalization of the commodification process, which undermines the individual's autonomy and purpose.

Margret Jane Radin posits that universal commodification represents a fictional model of complete commodification, as opposed to the indeterminate and adaptable condition of incomplete commodification. Incomplete commodification is a result of contested things, such as human organs, sex, or housing, allowed to be bought and sold notwithstanding the regulated circumstances that are required to manage the transaction prudently. Thus, commodification becomes a matter of degree, incomplete, and regulation signifying a failure on the part of the market. When the commodity is contested the "Regulated markets represent incomplete commodification in a stronger sense in situations where they reflect internally plural meaning, that is, where regulation expresses and fosters an important nonmarket aspect of the interactions between persons who buy and sell things" (Radin 116). The interactions can be basic decent standards of shelter, safety, and dignity measures in the respect owed to the worker. The absence of a literal market for law, morality, politics, and characters of social life suggests that the commodification is incomplete, thus metaphorical markets entertain these contested sites of commodification. The discourse of ordinary language identifies them as a measure for understanding the discourse of commodification in a society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### TRAUMA AND THE EMOTIONAL INCARCERATION: INEJ'S PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTLE IN *SIX OF CROWS*

Margrét Júlía Björnsdóttir's scholarly examination, "The Monster and The Wraith: The Effects of Trauma and Disability in Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows*", provides an insightful analysis of the psychological impact of trauma and disability on the characters Kaz Brekker and Inej Ghafa. The paper traces the physical and psychological transformations of both characters, illustrating the impact of their trauma on their identities and interactions within the narrative. As Björnsdóttir observes, Kaz and Inej share similar symptoms of C-PTSD, including avoidance behavior, difficulty with intimacy, and a process of redefining themselves; however, their coping mechanisms differ significantly. Kaz seeks vengeance as a means of reclaiming power, while Inej pursues a more constructive approach, focusing on rescuing others from similar exploitation. Drawing on Glaser's work on childhood trauma and Balaev's contributions to literary trauma theory, Björnsdóttir contends that both

characters' traumatic pasts profoundly influence their mental health. Their adoption of new identities can be understood as a protective strategy against vulnerability, with Kaz's disability, rather than being magically cured, being represented as a source of strength. Through these characters, Bardugo underscores the complex interplay between trauma, disability, and survival.

In "She Wished Someone Would Help Them: PTSD and Empathy in the Six of Crows Duology" (2021), Keus and Harde apply the Theory of Mind (ToM) framework to further explore the portrayal of PTSD in Bardugo's duology, emphasizing the role of empathy in understanding characters' psychological struggles. The article discusses the characters' coping mechanisms, interpreting their actions as reflective of deeper emotional and psychological complexities. Keus and Harde assert that Bardugo's vivid depiction of PTSD through well-rounded characters and engaging plotlines enhances the potential for ToM. As they note, "Accurate portrayals of PTSD may increase ToM; multiple focalizations, vivid imagery, well-constructed stories, and an underdog status can increase transportation, while a fantasy landscape with sufficient context may reduce imaginative resistance" (Keus and Harde). The article highlights the potential of fiction to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness by fostering empathy and promoting prosocial behavior, thus offering a path to overcoming the societal barriers that hinder the treatment of mental health conditions. By immersing readers in the emotional experiences of characters like Kaz and Inej, Bardugo's narrative encourages a deeper understanding of trauma and its effects, challenging readers to engage with the complexities of mental health beyond mere abstraction.

## **PROCESS OF COMMODIFICATION: DECONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY AND THE RISE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

Marek Ziółkowski in his 2004 article "Commodification of Social Life," analyses the most common characteristic of post-communist transformation and modernization in Poland, exploring the various occurrences of commodification and their impression on social disparities by deliberating the extension of goods and services becoming commodities and being retailed on the market. A commodity for Ziółkowski is "a product or a service or, even more broadly, any social relation – which has exchange value and can be bought or sold on the market" (Ziółkowski 387). The author also refers to the extensive rise in social inequality as a process ensuing commodification, alongside the market economy creating economic inequalities often surpassing the ones produced by privileges of the former nomenklatura. The author also highlights the additional benefits that specific groups or individuals garner from the sales of commodities, providing services, or decisions made steering to further social inequalities. The disintegration of society's normative and cognitive system is an indication of the effect that the occurrences of commodification have on social inequalities, as a result, weakening the social legitimization of the new order. Moreover, the author positions that the ambiguity in the ethics and rules that underlie the procedure of commodification culminates in the blurring of boundaries in eclectic subsystems, which heralds the prevention of detrimental low-key equilibrium between the distorted market, ineffective democracy, patronage, and familial networks.

"On the Commodification of the Black Female Body: The Critical Implications of the Alienability of Fetal Tissue" is a 2002 critical study by Khiara M. Bridges, highlighting the intersectionality in the market that exploits the bodily rights of black females engendering a market that alienates and discriminates against the individuals on the outskirts of society. Bridges also delves into the arguments for and against the inalienability

of the contested commodity, especially fetal tissue. She reasons: “When faced with the possibility that the commodification of a potential good may have negative effects on society, the first response of courts and legislatures has been to make inalienable that potential good” (Bridges 127). This response to the question of the body’s commodification reflects the potential dangers of conceptualizing the body as a commodity and the potential negative effects of the commodification of certain goods. The author discusses the process of commodification in terms of turning something into a commodity that is legally allowed to be bought and sold on the market. The article avers that body parts are a contested commodity in the market, not only by virtue of vague laws surrounding it but also in light of the persistent racism and prejudice in society regarding certain groups and individuals that corroborates the exploitation and alienation of these groups.

Lesley A. Sharp in her 2000 review, “The Commodification of the Body and its Parts” affirms the interdisciplinary nature of the premise of body commodification that necessitates a multidisciplinary approach expressing beyond anthropology and into the dominions of history, philosophy, bioethics technology, and cultural studies. The author deconstructs the body presents a definition of the body part and espouses “A focus on embodiment thus ultimately foregrounds the dualistic separation of body and self. This dualism, so rampant in medical practice, facilitates the depersonalization and, thus, dehumanization of persons-as-bodies, a process that ultimately allows for the commodification of the body and its parts” (Sharp 290). Highlighting the historical factual accuracy of the commodification of the body in the form of slavery, female reproduction, and the domains of sorcery and endocannibalism, this article discusses the body and its parts in multifarious cultural contexts. Commodification has been an early fate of the human body throughout history and concerns and anxieties have been rising regarding its access, scarcity, and ownership. This article presents an image of the fragmented commodified body and nature that has been objectified and put on the market throughout history, either through medical practice or science, focusing on the transformative processes understood in clinical constructions. This knowledge translates to the fantastical universe of Grisha that experiments on Grisha soldiers with a power-enhancing drug called judra parem.

## DISCUSSION

### THE COMMODIFICATION OF GRISHA AND THEIR WRONGFUL SUBJUGATION

Free trade in Kerch has resolved personal worth and attributes into exchange value, causing the exploitation of the marginalized minorities namely Grihsa. Grisha services are valuable for the merchants to exude wealth and privilege in society and get a use-value out of Grisha indentures. The commodification of Grisha into Kherguud soldiers is solely to earn profit at the cost of Grisha’s life and health. Most nations are involved in the dealing and mystery of Jurda Parem to earn profit and revolutionize the role of Grisha as an instrument of production. Grisha services are perceived differently in different societies influenced by the culture and context of the people. Zemeni farmers see Grisha as blessed human beings, while Kerch merchants use them as real commodities traded for exchange value and employed for their use value. Following Radin’s argument, the Grisha is a contested commodity through the presence of their personhood that is exploited due to the rules of the free trade market allowing the buying and selling of human beings with their will. The slave traders exploit this law of the free market by forcefully making the marginalized and weaker communities sign their indentures. The treatment of Bo Yul Bayur in the novel is a powerful symbol of the place of grisha on a global scale, being held captive, saved to be



sold, and finally auctioned at the court for the best price. The inhuman traits that belong to grisha alienate them from the rest of the characters and put them in a different division of society which subjects them to objectification and wrongful treatment.

Commodification is a widely used expression typically defining the process that facilitates the exchange of a product of labor or service on a market for a competitive price. Christopher Hermann views commodity as “a process in which market value comes to dominate use value” (Hermann 20). The Grisha in the duology is commodified by the rich, capturing and controlling their labor with illegal indentures and the slave trade. Retvenko, a Grisha soldier of the second army in Ravka, hides his identity as Grisha because he is afraid of being captured and sold into slavery. “There had been more rumors of disappearances in Ketterdam recently —Grisha vanishing from the streets or their homes, probably snapped up by slavers and sold to the highest bidder” (Bardugo, Crooked 12). This quote exposes the market rhetoric surrounding Grisha. They are a commodity that can be captured to be sold at the market. The slavers do not have a use value for the Grisha thus they let the market decide their value based on their skills and the condition of each Grisha. For the slavers, Grisha is a means to make good money in the market because of their high demand and use value for the merchants.

The superhuman species known as grisha endowed with the capacity to manipulate elements, are treated as commodities with a market value that dominates their use value as they are collected and employed primarily for profit making. In the chapter ‘The Theory of Commodification,’ Christopher Hermann declares that “Commodification, in this view, entails the production/ provision of good/service for sale and a profit” (Hermann 23). The said two qualities are evident from the beginning of the novel, as we witness that Councilman Hoede possesses three Grisha and the narrator Joost claims, “The Grisha weren’t just servants, they were Hoede’s treasured possessions” (Bardugo, Six 8). These treasured possessions fulfilled various supernatural jobs allowing Councilman Hoede to present an upright position in society. Joost claims that Hoede sent him to get a bruise healed by Anya because “Hoede...didn’t like his guards looking like thugs” (Bardugo, Six 9). This Grisha is indentured in the councilman’s house and is “a testimony to Hoede’s wealth” (Bardugo, Six 6). The councilman buys Grisha indentures on account of their unique gifts to satisfy his desire to possess power and maintain a privileged face in society. The return on Hoede’s investment in the Grisha is in the form of social status and privileged position. He utilizes Grisha’s powers to maintain the upright image of his guards and heal their wounds quickly.

The marketplace is a competitive domain that entails adaptation and revolutionizing the products or services to maximize profits. Karl Marx affirms, “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them, the whole relations of society” (Moore et al. 15). Hermann also admits that “formal and real commodification are associated with the exchange on markets for money with competing providers and the intent to make a profit” (Hermann 32). Therefore, the producer or the seller of the commodities is avidly looking for adaptations and innovations to compete in the market. In the novels, the heist that the six crows are sent to accomplish is to save or capture Bo Yul Bayur, a scientist responsible for the creation of jurda parem, a drug used to exponentially enhance Grisha’s power. By the end of the first novel, Brum explains to Nina: “We’ve combined the jurda parem with a sedative that makes them more biddable. We’re still working out the correct ratios, but we’ll get there” (Bardugo, Six 338). This new invention

has dire effects on the market and changes the meaning of possessing Grisha soldiers. Kuwei enlightens Nina about the Shu's plan for jurda parem, "They plan to make a new kind of soldier, the Kherguud. I don't know if they succeeded" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 140). The plan of the Shu to create a new kind of soldier compels the Fjerdans to kidnap the scientist and perform experiments of their own. This competition in the market gives rise to harmful innovations at the expense of Grisha's life. In an ever-changing market, all service providers must innovate to exist. Thus, Nina also ends up taking Jurda Parem to complete the mission.

A competitive market that promotes innovation does not necessarily result in the quality of material output. Christopher Hermann explains "While there are some possibilities for increasing productivity through rationalization or organizational innovation, generally this means that the quality of the services cannot be improved without increasing costs" (Hermann 35). This cost of production can be monetary and in terms of the holistic services of the product. The Grisha subjected to jurda parem can advance their abilities in the small sciences at the cost of shortening their life span. The cost of their advanced services is visible on their body. Even though practicing the small science positively affected Grisha, Nina notes that the performance-enhancement drug had weakened Nestor. "But the body had limits. It was as if the drug had caused Nestor's power to outpace his body. It had simply used him up" (Bardugo, *Six* 222). Nina also goes through a similar ordeal when she takes the parem to save her team and succeed in the mission. Addicted to parem Nina loses her powers. "The heart of power that had been her constant companion since she was a child, had simply ceased to beat" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 88). The increasing cost for innovation is not merely in the consumption of time and energy of the Grisha but also their value. The Shu scientist's son was responsible for the invention of the jurda parem is expected by the crows to earn them "sixty-five million Kruger" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 308). The laws of commodification at work demonstrate that the increase in productivity of the Grisha services costs the market an increase in bidding reward and the shortening of their life span.

After conceptualizing personal attributes as possessions, akin to objects, the journey towards their conception of Grisha as separate from persons through alienation is noticeable. Radin rejects the idea that the presence of a person's will makes something a property because it only applies to external properties and excludes internal attributes. She presents: "Substantive personality characteristics are not things external by nature and are hence inalienable" (Radin 35). This inalienability of personal attributes hinders them from achieving freedom and proper self-development of the sellers. Grisha indentures in Ketterdam exist with conditions on the existence of their beings. Any small mistake could cost them money, increasing the indenture debt, resulting in a sum of indenture almost impossible for the Grisha to pay off. A small crack in a glass panel after Ratvenko shuts the door with his power is claimed by Joost on Councilman Hoede's behalf. "That's counting against your indenture" (Bardugo, *Six* 7). The freedom of choosing a partner or marrying someone is also taken away from Anya for being indentured to Councilman Hoede. Joost falls for Anya but he knows "he could never afford to buy her indenture from Hoede, and she would never marry unless Hoede decreed it" (Bardugo, *Six* 9). The indentures are understood to be slave contracts that were almost impossible to pay off by virtue of the corruption and unfair terms of the contract restricting the freedom and character development of the Grisha.

Ketterdam is presented as a center of negative liberty propagating a free market without any restrictions on trade, thus the merchants or businessmen can acquire Grisha without any coercion, restriction, or interference from the law. Political liberty is compromised in Ketterdam for the sake of freedom of trade. Explaining Mill's argument against the freedom to sell oneself into slavery Radin claims "People must be free in order for a free political order to exist; they cannot be free without such a political order; hence, in the nonmarket realm they cannot, without contradiction, be free not to be free" (Radin 45). However, in Kerch the law allows people to sell their indenture. Kuwei Yul Bayur takes advantage of this law to scam the Merchant Council. Kaz explains "Any Kerch citizen and any free citizen who travels to Kerch has the right to sell his own indenture" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 304). It is the sacred duty of the people of Kerch to allow this trade for it is sanctioned by "Ghezen, god of industry and commerce" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 304). Therefore, the law of Kerch compromises the freedom of the political order in the nonmarket realm allowing negative liberty which monetizes the freedom of a person by legalizing voluntary enslavement. In a society that supports a laissez-faire market, the freedom of the marginalized groups that lack influence and means is compromised.

Fungible and personal property is not a rigid binary dichotomy for Margret Jane Radin, both terms mark the endpoints of a continuum. Personal property has a non-monetizable value and is bound up to a person. However, fungible property is completely interchangeable with others without losing any value to a person. Radin further proclaims that "certain categories of property can bridge the gap or blur the boundary between the self and the world, between what is inside and what is outside, between subject and what is object" (Radin 57). She asserts that the conception of a commodity as property depends on the culture of ownership and exchange in the social construction of the society. Grisha's powers are used as objects when hired or contracted by a master. Nevertheless, a Grisha free of all debt or masters, perceives their power as personal property, something that does not have any equivalent monetary exchange. Kaz remembers the situation in the Ravkan civil war that forced the Grisha to pay the price of their freedom through indentures "without realizing that they'd essentially sold themselves into slavery" (Bardugo, *Six* 51). These indentured Grisha cannot use their powers in public but are free to use them for the benefit of their masters. This makes Grisha's services a fungible property that they can sell in times of disparity to save lives in Kerch.

The culture and social structures of the society can influence the perception of properties and their categorization as personal or fungible property. Radin stipulates "The fungible items are socially constructed as commodities" (Radin 59). Despite the non-alienable features of Grisha's power and services, their profitability is purely cultural. The fungibility of the Grisha services does not translate into the Zemni culture. Jesper's mother Aditi Hilli does not sell her services to earn profit. She uses it for welfare and personal use. Despite the fear of slavers Aditi kept playing the role of a healer for friends and family. She asserts "If my gifts can help people then it's my duty to use them" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 228). The Zemeni people refer to Grisha as "Zowa" meaning "Blessed" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 229). The name refers to the miraculous and saint-like characteristics of the Grisha making it a property unique to the Grisha. However, in Kerch, Grisha's treatment is wholly the opposite of Zemeni's. Wealthy merchants and capitalists own Grisha; their individuation is restricted to the extent of restricted mobilization and control over their life decisions. Rutger instructs Joost about talking to Grisha: "You don't ask. You tell. They're servants. Not honored guests" (Bardugo, *Six* 8). The market of Kerch allows Grisha indentures as

servants making them a commodity that lacks freedom of persons. The socially mediated judicial relationships exist in a social structure that allows the exploitation of one party at the cost of the freedom of another.

## **THE COMMODIFICATION OF INEJ'S PERSONHOOD AND HER UNJUST SUBJECTION IN THE BARREL**

The individuality of the character of Inej Gafa is challenged throughout the fictional narrative. Her character arch initiates from being a prostitute in Tante Heleen's menagerie, getting indentured to Per Haskell and working under Kaz, and ultimately procuring enough monetary prospects to leave the employment of Per Haskell to embark on a life-changing journey aiming to bring social justice. The attack on her personhood is evident from the commodification of her body by Tante Heleen's establishment. However, Inej's commodification in the Dregs remains incomplete as she can roam freely and serve in the Barrel lord with her consent. Kaz may not provide her the luxury of refusing a job in all instances, but when the job has very low odds, he gives her the agency to reject the offer. The contract with Per Haskell allows Inej to earn for herself and pay off her debt gradually in contrast to Tante Heleen, with whom she was trapped into an indenture contract impossible to pay. Inej's exposure to the agency enables her to dream of acquiring a ship and working for a cause. Inej's status changes from a laborer to a worker and ultimately to an individual with complete autonomy securing her personhood from unjust subjection. This section of the thesis expounds on the plights of the laborers, forced to sell themselves piecemeal to survive thus becoming a commodity, available for exploitation. The outcome of Inej's subjection to commodification traumatized her for life and left her at the mercy of the circumstances.

The conceptual structures of freedom and unfreedom, disempowerment, and commodification are linked through the market rhetoric that problematizes some commodities including slaves. The process of commodification that heralds concern regarding personhood amounts to social oppression which converts into wrongful subordination. The character Inej Ghafa is enslaved into prostitution at the Menagerie by Helen Van Hudon, blameworthy for selling her indenture to Per Haskell, a barrel boss. Radin explains: "When a group of persons is wrongfully subordinated it lacks social recognition of the rights and other indicia of respect otherwise conceived of as universally acceptable to persons" (Radin 158). Inej confesses to Nina "There is no freedom in the Barrel, only good terms. Tante Heleen's girls never earn out of their contracts" (Bardugo, Six 80). Inej understands her position in the Barrel which lacks freedom. Freedom may be considered a universal human right but is understood to be inaccessible to a girl with no influence in the Barrel. Inej's expression which confirms that there is no example of a girl who earned out of the indenture reflects her belief that slavery is the default status for her.

The commodification of personal attributes such as sexual or reproductive services of a human being is a contested case of commodification. Legalizing such a form of exchange is an attack on the personhood of the possessor of the commodity while denying the right to sell a personal attribute hinders free choice threatening liberation from Radin's perspective. In Inej's unique case, we witness the commodification of her body which traumatizes her to the extent that she is unable to look at the Menagerie without mentally suffering. However, the commodification of her skills as an acrobat and assassin seems to liberate her. Radin argues: "The threat to personhood from commodification arises because essential attributes are treated as severable fungible objects, and such treatment denies the integrity and uniqueness of the self" (Radin 127). Inej is stripped of her uniqueness and



integrity by Tante Heleen, the owner of the Menagerie, as she reduces Inej to her Suli appearance and animal representation of the lynx. Heleen encounters Inej after selling her indenture to Per Haskell and reminds her that “Lynx is your only name” (Bardugo, Six 124). In contrast, when Kaz hires Inej on behalf of Per Haskell he calls her dangerous due to her skills. She admires the adjective “Dangerous. She wanted to clutch the word to her” (Bardugo, Six 275). It is merely because of the idea that she is unique and a person to be feared, reaffirming her personhood.

The commodification of the body or personal aspects has a contradictory market and nonmarket understanding. Neither the market nor the nonmarket can be described by commodification or non-commodification, engendering one person to interact in a different and conflicting manner thus assembling it as a contested commodity. Inej’s agreement to the heist in the ice court invokes two very different types of feelings in her. On the one hand, Inej thinks of giving up her skills and personal aspects in the heist as Kaz’s fault and a violation of her morals: “Kaz bought us here...Kaz and his greed. She didn’t feel guilty. She wasn’t sorry. She was just mad” (Bardugo, Six 271). On the other hand, she feels that this heist will give her a chance to earn freedom. “She wanted this – the money, the dream it would help her to secure” (Bardugo, Six 296). “It becomes important to recognize both our social division over commodification and the non-market aspect of many transactions that can be conceived of in market terms” (Radin 103). However, Inej thinks that Kaz is wrong for agreeing to do a job that may end in her death, she does feel grateful for the opportunity of earning money through the commodification of her aspects because it promises her freedom. Inej’s desire to maintain a religious and moral figure throughout the novel is surpassed by her need to achieve freedom from the Dregs.

Objectification puts pressure on our conception of personhood requiring the treatment of a person as an object depriving them of the status of a self-governing moral agent. The process of commodification is one means of objectification of the person. Inej is treated as an object in the menagerie by Tante Heleen as she lacks any agency as a moral or self-governing agent. When Inej tried to run away Heleen beat her badly and “kept her in golden chains” (Bardugo, Six 271). This domination of Heleen over Inej causes her to experience humiliation, pain, and degradation. The golden chains symbolize the slave status of Inej turning her into an object that should be guarded. “Problematized conception of the person is associated with alienation, pain, degradation, and dissonance” (Radin 156). Inej may try to make decisions for herself in the menagerie but fails to accomplish agency to act for her good as a result, she gets reduced to a commodity that may be used to make a profit. Akin to Heleen, Kaz also buys Inej’s indenture to utilize her as a spy to gather information and threatens her that if she tries to skip the contract “Haskell will send people after you, people who make Tante Heleen look like a doting grandmother” (Bardugo, Six 275). Inej’s position in the dregs is secured purely because she is a good commodity, producing profit and Kaz’s threat serves as a means of reminding Inej that she is not free, thus, alienating her from the rest of the crew which lacks a formal contract.

Radin differentiates between laborers and workers, clarifying that workers may have some non-commodified human element but the laborers are fully commodified. Inej is a menagerie laborer because of her lack of agency, and every aspect of her existence is commodified. Her status as a laborer remains unchanged after joining the Dregs because she cannot make any personal decision until she is indebted to Per Haskell. She understands that she is a commodity and if she loses the personal attributes that determine her exchangeable value in the market or the Dregs, she will be worthless. In the

event of her kidnap after Van Eck orders her to break Inej's legs she pleads: "He'll never trade if you break me" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 62). "Labourers are sellers; fully motivated by money, exhausting the value of their activity in the measure of its exchange value" (Radin 105). The value of a member in the Dregs will be determined by the amount of profit they can earn for the team. Each member is an investment that must be protected to avoid loss. Kaz orders to put a net under Inej's walk from one silo to the next to protect her from falling. When she inquires about the reason behind the precaution she explains: "You protect your investments" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 156). He replies "That's right" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 156). This interaction clears the status of Inej as a commodity that must provide more profit than is invested in her which would be impossible to make if she dies.

Radin adheres to relativism repudiating the universal imposition of reductionist and commensurability value assertions on commodification. She posits that the radical untranslatability inherent among diverse cultural groups or historical periods necessitates this approach. However, she does not reject the commodification of personhood and personal attributes only that the exchange may not be in terms of money or a common commensurable unit. "Market and non-market conceptualizations of various interactions seem often to coexist as opposing rhetorical crosscurrents" (Radin 14). The coexistence of opposing crosscurrents disqualifies the commodification of personhood from complete commodification and qualifies it as an incomplete commodity. Inej understands the contradictory laws of Kerch, she knows that even though legally slavery is illegal, many trades were of human beings. "Kerch had been built on trade, but how much of that trade had been humankind? A minister of Ghezen might stand at that altar and rail against slavery, but how much of this city had been built on taxes from the pleasure houses?" (Bardugo, *Crooked* 376) The dichotomy that exists in the market rhetoric of Kerch may not promote slavery in its legal system or religious altars. Still, a considerable part of Kerch's economy is standing on the shoulders of indentures and pleasure houses.

Christopher Hermann criticizes commodification through the nature of markets that produce extremely harmful outcomes for some individuals or the entire society. Hermann argues that one party or individual involved in the exchange is vulnerable or lacks agency, either by exclusion in negotiation or through incomplete information. Inej signs her indenture at a very young age and does not speak the language used in the document, which makes her oblivious to the terms and conditions of her contract putting her in a vulnerable position in the exchange. In her first verbal exchange with Kaz, she learns that Tante Heleen has been charging her for room, board, and grooming even though she treats Inej like property. "She bought me, ... I couldn't even read what I was signing" (Bardugo, *Six* 275). Kaz however does not hide any information from Inej when he pays her Indenture on behalf of Per Haskell. However, Inej's vulnerable situation plays a role in accepting the conditions because it appears to be in a better position with added agency. Hermann states "Vulnerability is mostly the result of lack of resources, especially compared to the other party involved in the exchange. Vulnerable individuals often have no choice but to accept whatever terms are offered on the market" (Hermann 7). Since, Inej is sold into a menagerie and has been used as an object, being able to move to Ketterdam as a spy with a contract that is not a sham is almost freedom to her.

Explicating the plight of the laborer, Radin extends the commodification of the product to the labor as they exhaust the value of their activity in the hunt for its exchange value. Marks presents the same idea: "These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all

the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market” (Moore et al. 20). Indentures of the Grisha do not qualify them as slaves in Ketterdam, but rather as workers in debt. Nina wonders why she had never carried a gun before she lost her powers and concludes “Because I was the weapon” (Bardugo, *Crooked* 87). Nina’s powers that she used to earn money in the Slat are a commodity that earns her money, and due to an inseparable link with such a commodity, Nina became a commodity herself. Only when she loses her powers does she understand the strong connection between her survival in the market and her powers. She understands that her position in the group is valid only if she can provide something of value. “They needed her to be a Corporalnik, not an addict with the shakes who wore herself out with the barest of tailoring” (Bardugo, *Crooked* 81). Nina feels valueless to the group considering that she has lost her Grisha power, while Jurda Parem has enhanced the capabilities of another Grisha.

## CONCLUSION

In *Six of Crows*, the narrative intricately exposes the multifaceted commodification of Inej Ghafa and the Grisha, revealing the exploitation inherent in capitalist structures that reduce individuals to mere objects. Inej’s personhood is commodified both as a prostitute and a spy, her autonomy stripped by figures like Tante Heleen, who dehumanizes her, and by institutions such as the menagerie, which treats her as property valued solely for her capacity to generate profit. Characters like Jesper, Kuwei Yul Bayur, and Nina Zenik, alongside the bio-experiment of Kherguud, highlight the systematic exploitation of the Grisha, embodying the same ruthless commodification. Inej’s lack of agency in negotiating her own worth reflects the broader societal treatment of vulnerable individuals, whose identities and survival are dictated by their utility to the market. Though Kaz recognizes Inej’s lethal skills, affirming her worth beyond commodification, the novel underscores the alienation, degradation, and pain caused by a society that measures human value through profit, illustrating the deep social inequalities perpetuated by these systems. Even amidst such commodification, the nuanced, non-market elements of relationships offer a contested space, complicating the otherwise stark dynamics of power and exploitation.

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