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**Evolution of Epic Fantasy Worldbuilding: Contrastive Analysis of
Middle-Earth and Roshar**

Bachelor's Thesis

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I hereby declare that the thesis “Evolution of Epic Fantasy Worldbuilding: Contrastive Analysis of Middle-earth and Roshar” was developed independently and that all primary and secondary sources used are listed.

In Olomouc

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Introduction

Currently, fantasy belongs amongst the most widely read genres, and after years of neglect during its earlier days, this worldwide phenomenon of literature has been recognised by literary scholars who no longer see it as an artistically inferior short-lived trend but as a serious source of multiple objects of study. One of which is the theory used in this thesis, the worldbuilding theory, interested in the creation of fictional worlds. Important scholarly essays, studies, and books regarding this field were written by Mark J. P. Wolf whose contribution will serve as a theoretical background for this thesis research.

The main aim of the thesis is to put into juxtaposition the worldbuilding strategies of two significant fictional worlds in the epic fantasy subgenre from two opposite sides of its history in order to compare them and, based on the findings, describe the evolutionary steps taken in the worldbuilding over the course of several decades and propose the future of it. The findings of epic fantasy evolution will also answer the research question of how the contemporary series fits into it. Is the modern work a natural progression, revisionism, or a complete antithesis of the epic fantasy?

The first world to be compared is Middle-Earth from J. R. R. Tolkien's legendarium, mainly known from *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), a classic trilogy that symbolises the beginnings of epic fantasy (even though it is not the first fantasy) when it had an immense impact and influence on the following authors not only in terms of the genre's tropes and themes but also in terms of building imaginary worlds. One of the goals of this thesis is to determine to what extent this influence is visible in the works of contemporary fantasy authors, whether the traditional strategies are still in use in their original form, modified form, or are old-fashioned and, at this point, completely surpassed by current approaches.

The representative of the modern epic fantasy is Brandon Sanderson who is presently writing a fifth instalment of an ambitious series *The Stormlight Archive* (2010–present) which takes place in Roshar, the second subject of the analysis and comparison. The series was not chosen for its qualities but for the vastness and variety of the dynamic world filled with creative ideas and experiments. The influence of *Stormlight* is naturally unknown because of its unfinished state and recency, but the thesis will aspire to pinpoint which of Sanderson's worldbuilding strategies are essential for the genre's future.

The thesis consists of three sections – theory, analysis, and results. The first section will establish the fantasy genre based on Attebery's theory of fantasy and then its topical subgenre,

epic fantasy. Furthermore, the theory will, in more depth, introduce the individual series, its authors, and their importance. Finally, the first section will present the worldbuilding theory by Mark J. P. Wolf and all of its terminology used in the second section. The analytic part will delve into the works' worldbuilding tropes and techniques based on their completeness, consistency, invention, and author's ideologies. The third section will summarise the data, compare them, and answer the research questions of how the worldbuilding techniques have changed over the half of the century in the epic fantasy genre and whether the modern representative is the revisionism of the genre.

1. Fantasy

Defining an abstract concept has been a difficult task since the dawn of critical thinking and has become the subject of philosophy and science. “What is love?”, “What is time?” and “What is life?” are a few of the questions asked by humanity with no clear answer. The purpose of the first subchapter is to define a seemingly easier term than the ones listed above: “What is fantasy?”. After finding an applicable answer, the following subchapter will question the meaning of epic fantasy to narrow down the research focus. Naturally, our interest is in defining the terms through a literary lens; therefore, claiming that “fantasy is the opposite of reality” is not enough. Brian Attebery divides fantasy into genre, mode, and form, but the following paragraphs will show the difficulties linked to all of these. Problems are also caused by other definitions and terms presented that are no longer up-to-date or lead astray. As the most fitting definition of fantasy, I choose Attebery’s fantasy genre and his theory of ‘fuzzy sets’ to justify *The Lord of the Rings* as a fantasy benchmark. Epic fantasy suits the best C. Palmer-Patel’s Heroic Epic definition. This chapter will end with introductions to two major authors of this subgenre, J. R. R. Tolkien and Brandon Sanderson, along with their topical works and explanations of their importance regarding epic fantasy and fantasy as a whole.

1.1 Definition of Fantasy and Related Terminology

One of the most prevalent definitions of fantasy among theorists,¹ especially when it comes to its distinction from science fiction, is that fantasy describes the impossible while sci-fi the possible.² Such a simplistic division may be enough for libraries or publishing houses, but from an academic standpoint, it is unsatisfactory for many reasons. The first one is unsurprisingly the vagueness of ‘impossible’ which may include not only Tolkien’s epic fantasy but also Stephen King’s horror stories or even Charles Brockden Brown’s gothic novels.³ Secondly, the ‘impossible’ is also unsuitable because it implies a lack of logic or rationality and overall no connection to our world⁴ which was disproved as early as by Tolkien⁵ and since then by many

¹ Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), I.

² Orson Scott Card, *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1990), 22.

³ Gary K. Wolfe, “Fantasy,” *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 38.

⁴ C. Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 3.

⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger, and Douglas A. Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 65.

others⁶ who emphasise reason, logic, and mainly the reality basis of fantasy. It even forms an integral part of Attebery's definition of fantasy. More specifically, it is Northrop Fry's literary mode of mimesis that serves to produce the imitation of real experience.⁷ The third and final problem with this definition is its restricted focus on reader-response theory rather than highlighting its themes or structure.⁸

What should not be closely associated with fantasy is the term 'fantastic' which shares the same root as the word but not its derived adjective form, as might be assumed. According to Gary Westfahl, the word served as an umbrella term for fantasy and science fiction during the 1930s and 1940s in America. Later, it encompassed other 'impossible' genres like magical realism⁹ and presumably even horror and gothic novel. A similar term to 'fantastic' is Russian 'fantastika' which was used since 1925 for science fiction¹⁰ and nowadays its meaning has expanded to the related genres of fantasy and horror, at least in the Czech environment.¹¹ Therefore, it can be deduced that it stands as the Eastern European equivalent of the American 'fantastic'.¹²

A completely different conception of the term 'fantastic' comes from Bulgarian philologist Tzvetan Todorov¹³ who defines it as a feeling of hesitation of an ordinary character when it is confronted with supernatural.¹⁴ Todorov, with this definition, follows similar approaches to the term by Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, British author M. R. James and especially French philosophers Louis Vax and Roger Caillois defining 'la littérature fantastique'.¹⁵ However, unlike these authors, Todorov creates a new layer of the term by forming two genres based on the supernatural in fantastic. If the reader at the end of the story assumes that the supernatural is explainable by natural laws and logic, then the genre moves from 'fantastic' to 'uncanny'; if the supernatural cannot be explained then the 'fantastic' becomes the 'marvellous' genre.¹⁶ Following scholars like Attebery found Todorov's terminology misleading and non-

⁶ Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*, 5.

⁷ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3.

⁸ Wolfe, "Fantastika," *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship*, 38.

⁹ Gary Westfahl, "Fantastic," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, (London: Orbit, 1999), 335.

¹⁰ Wolfe, 38.

¹¹ Tereza Dědinová, *Po divné krajině: charakteristika a vnitřní členění fantastické literatury* (Brno: Filozofická fakulta, Masarykova univerzita, 2015), 16.

¹² "Fantastika," SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fantastika>.

¹³ Wolfe, XXI.

¹⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve Unit, 1973), 25.

¹⁵ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 26.

¹⁶ Todorov, 41.

topical. Attebery states that Todorov's 'fantastic' same as his French basis is relevant only to nineteenth-century literature like Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898).¹⁷

Several times mentioned Brian Attebery has truly changed the way literary critics have viewed fantasy through his contribution in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992). Naturally, he gave his own definition of the term, as is expected from a monograph about fantasy, but he did not provide only one but three. Thus, to answer the main question of this subchapter, "What is fantasy?" fantasy is mode, formula, and genre.¹⁸ The subsequent paragraphs will go through this much-needed distinction in the terminology surrounding the term, and they will choose the most relevant for *LotR* and *Stormlight*.

Starting with the mode, which in general, is a way to tell stories.¹⁹ Fantasy as a mode stands in Northrop Frye's terminology at the opposite end of a scale for a mode of mimesis,²⁰ explained above. But they do not act as opposites; rather, they complement each other. Fantasy needs to be grounded in reality, otherwise the story would not be understandable because it would only implement unrecognisable concepts and actions. Mimesis without fantasy would only consist of retellings of ordinary occurrences based solely on one's senses.²¹ The advantage of the fantastic mode, its broadness, is also its biggest problem. On one hand, it is unambiguous in the sense that it corresponds with the casual use of the word 'fantasy', thus it comprises a large number of genres and works throughout literary history, like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595–1596) or Swift's *The Gulliver's Travels* (1726)²² which are not commonly associated with fantasy as we know it, but they undeniably incorporate fantastic elements. On the other hand, its broadness causes that no theory applies to it. Theories can only describe some parts of it, like language, social aspects, or philosophies, but never the whole.²³ The closest already discussed term to the fantasy as a mode is 'fantastic' or Eastern European 'fantastika'.

The broadness of fantasy as a mode had another effect: daunting authors of fantasy who chose, rather than the deep bottomless pit of fantastic, motifs and themes already written, creating fantasy as a formula.²⁴ Formulaic fantasy usually draws from Tolkien or Robert E. Howard,

¹⁷ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 20.

¹⁸ Attebery, 2.

¹⁹ Attebery, 2.

²⁰ Attebery, 3.

²¹ Attebery, 3–4.

²² Attebery, 4.

²³ Attebery, 4–5.

²⁴ Attebery, 9.

following traditional settings, characters, and plots, and it is sometimes called sword-and-sorcery.²⁵ Formula creates predictability, but it is also often a source of entertainment for readers, especially when the author works with the classical themes and can skilfully vary them or even subvert them as Agatha Christie did with detective fiction.²⁶ Other benefits of formula fantasy are that it opens doors to creative fans who can easily create their own stories within role-playing games,²⁷ and it also provides a ‘training ground’ for aspiring authors.²⁸ The issue with the formula is aside from its predictability, the opposite of the fantastic mode’s broadness, too narrow scope.²⁹ Sword-and-sorcery does not encompass every fantasy work nowadays, including *Stormlight*. Not to mention subgenres like urban fantasy or grimdark which are out of the formula’s reach as well. Then, there must be a term somewhere between the fantastic mode and the fantasy formula that suits the thesis’ purposes better. The missing piece is called the fantasy genre.³⁰

The creation of the fantasy genre is fairly clear by now. It is a history of restricting the fantastic mode, but not as much as falling within the narrow dictation of the fantasy formula.³¹ What is not so clear is the fantasy genre’s definition and its boundaries. Genres are generally fluid and can naturally seep into one another. For instance, there is a continual debate among critics whether the George Lucas’ *Star Wars* movie franchise (1977–present) or Frank Herbert’s *Dune Chronicles* (1965–present) should be considered science fiction or fantasy³² because they implement features of both genres. Attebery acknowledges this problem by borrowing the George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s concept of fuzzy sets or categorization based on the prototypical member.³³ Lakoff and Johnson proposed that the individual member of the category does not have to contain the same features as the prototypical member, but there must be some likeness between them.³⁴ Attebery chose *LotR* as the par excellence member of the fantasy genre. Making this choice was admittedly unscientific,³⁵ but even thirty years later, *LotR* seems to reside in collective consciousness as the quintessential fantasy. Based on the

²⁵ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 9

²⁶ Attebery, 9.

²⁷ Attebery, 9–10.

²⁸ Attebery, 11.

²⁹ Attebery, 10.

³⁰ Attebery, 10.

³¹ Attebery, 10–11.

³² Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*, 11.

³³ Attebery, 12.

³⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University Press of Chicago, 1980), 123.

³⁵ Attebery, 12.

closeness to *LotR* in content, structure, and reader response, Attebery characterises members of the fantasy genre and forms its definition.³⁶

The first feature of the fantasy genre derived from *LotR* regarding the content is the ‘impossible’,³⁷ a term commonly linked with the definition of fantasy. Difficulties tied to it are stated above, but its inclusion as one of the features is indisputable. Neither balrogs nor wizards with magical powers can wander on Earth. The second aspect is the genre’s structure which initially poses an issue that is solved at the end.³⁸ Again, seemingly vague but very much applicable aspect. The Ring is destroyed, and Sauron is defeated at the end of the third book.³⁹ It also negates some of the mentioned problems with the ‘impossible’ because horror, which is considered ‘impossible’, does not have to end with a clearly solved mystery. An example can be one of the quintessential horror writers, H. P. Lovecraft whose ‘issues’ in the form of supernatural and cosmic entities are not ‘solved’ or explained within his stories. The last prototypical characteristic of fantasy connected with the reader response is Tolkien’s term eucastrophe⁴⁰ which is an overall positive feeling caused by the “sudden joyous ‘turn’”⁴¹ and by finding the fantastic occurrences truthful.⁴² Attebery finds C. N. Manlove’s ‘wonder’ better fitting⁴³ to the same concept of finding sense in the supernatural.⁴⁴

Based on these aspects of fantasy, fantastic mode, and formula, Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) created one of the most comprehensive definitions of the fantasy genre which derives from *LotR*, the prototypical member of this fuzzy set:

It is a form that makes use of both the fantastic mode, produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar. The conventions of sword-and-sorcery are not part of the definition: the genre can include stories without hobbits or rings of power or evil magicians. Fantasy does impose many restrictions on the powers of the imagination, but in return it

³⁶ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 14.

³⁷ Attebery, 14.

³⁸ Attebery, 15.

³⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 242–243.

⁴⁰ Attebery, 15.

⁴¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger, and Douglas A. Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 75.

⁴² Tolkien, Flieger, Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, 77.

⁴³ Attebery, 15–16.

⁴⁴ C. N. Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 7.

offers the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness. This we call wonder.⁴⁵

This is the definition with which this essay will work because it perfectly applies to a series published almost three decades later. *Stormlight* is set in an impossible world with magic, but the social structure and character actions are mimetic. It also functions without the formulaic features of evil wizards or elves. And lastly, the magic in Roshar has clear rules; therefore, it produces wonder in the reader when he observes the supernatural and understands it, it is true.

Naturally, there are some critics who disagree with not only Attebery's definition of the genre but also with the genre as a concept. One of these voices is Gary K. Wolfe who finds the term useless nowadays, partially because of the already discussed fluidity of genres.⁴⁶ However, Wolfe goes even further than addressing the genre ambiguity of *Star Wars*. He states that fantasy is no longer a fluid but rather a vapour in the air surrounding us everywhere we go. Fantasy is not restricted by literature; it is a part of every other medium, conventions, people's beliefs, and lifestyle.⁴⁷ Although the statement about the omnipotence of fantasy in today's popular culture is accurate, this thesis deals with worldbuilding inside literature, and for its purposes, the term fantasy genre and Attebery's definition are more than sufficient. Besides that, the concept of fuzzy sets validates *LotR* as the ideal contrasting point for modern works of fantasy like *Stormlight*. Still, the fantasy genre is too wide of a term to generalise the evolutionary steps of worldbuilding for it. That is why the next subchapter will briefly introduce the typology of fantasy and mainly focus on the one relevant to both *LotR* and *Stormlight* – epic fantasy.

1.2 Taxonomy of Fantasy and Epic Fantasy

One of the first distinctions of fantasy, which is still in use, is its division between high and low fantasy, promoted by anthology editors Robert H. Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski since the late 1970s.⁴⁸ In a simplified form, high fantasy is set in a secondary world, while low fantasy takes place in the primary world.⁴⁹ Both primary and secondary worlds are terms coined by Tolkien

⁴⁵ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 17.

⁴⁶ Gary K. Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 53.

⁴⁷ Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*, 51.

⁴⁸ Wolfe, "Introduction," *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship*, XXIV.

⁴⁹ Marshall B. Tymn, Kenneth J. Zahorski, Robert H. Boyer, *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide* (New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1979), 5.

in his essay “On Fairy Stories” (1947) which describes how the fantasy author becomes a sub-creator because he is creating a fictional secondary world. Deductively, the primary world is our world, made by the real maker.⁵⁰ In other words, high fantasy takes place in a different but familiar setting to Earth. Boyer and Zahorski also mention other types of high fantasy, like myth fantasy, fairy-tale fantasy, gothic fantasy, science fantasy, and lastly, sword-and-sorcery and heroic fantasy.⁵¹ Most of these are either out of fashion or not in use anymore, except for sword-and-sorcery and heroic fantasy.

Sword-and-sorcery is already in Attebery’s terms described above as formula fantasy. But what is heroic fantasy? The answer is not as simple as it might be presumed because the meaning of heroic fantasy has changed throughout its history, and now it lacks one altogether.⁵² Critics like Boyer and Zahorski, Clute, or Wolfe have come to the consensus that it is partially interchangeable with sword-and-sorcery.^{53,54,55} However, Clute also writes that heroic fantasy is a broader term that encompasses both Robert E. Howard’s *Conan the Barbarian* series (1932–1936), conventionally connected with the sword-and-sorcery subgenre,⁵⁶ and *LotR*,⁵⁷ associated with the epic fantasy.⁵⁸

The epic fantasy is, based on the fantasy types presented, both high fantasy and heroic fantasy. The third term in the sequence could be ‘immersive fantasy’ from Mendlesohn’s taxonomy of fantasy which means that the fantastic is ever-present and not questioned.⁵⁹ For its actual characteristics, I will use C. Palmer-Patel’s definition of the Heroic Epic. She mainly emphasises its scale, plot, and characters. The scale of the epic must be vast, including concrete towns and countries, whole planets, and universes.⁶⁰ The plot of the narrative follows the journey of characters to save the world, changing it forever.⁶¹ The characters are heroes sent on a world-saving mission by a prophecy⁶² or divinities who influence the plot and actions of

⁵⁰ Tymn, Zahorski, Boyer, *Fantasy Literature: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*, 52.

⁵¹ Tymn, Zahorski, Boyer, 12–19.

⁵² Tymn, Zahorski, Boyer, 19.

⁵³ Tymn, Zahorski, Boyer, 19.

⁵⁴ “Heroic Fantasy,” SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, accessed January 29, 2024, https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/heroic_fantasy.

⁵⁵ Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*, 52.

⁵⁶ Wolfe, 128.

⁵⁷ “Heroic Fantasy,” SFE: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction.

⁵⁸ Brian Stableford, “The Introduction,” *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), LXIII.

⁵⁹ Farah Mendlesohn, “Toward Taxonomy of Fantasy,” *Journal of the Fantastic Arts* 13, no. 2 (2002): 175, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308579>.

⁶⁰ Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*, 8.

⁶¹ Palmer-Patel, 6.

⁶² Palmer-Patel, 6.

characters just like in myths.⁶³ Palmer-Patel also mentions the common motif of separation of the main characters⁶⁴ which implies plurality of protagonists.

The thesis could be named differently, and the research question would explore the evolution of worldbuilding within the Heroic Epic rather than epic fantasy, but there are some problematic elements regarding the term. First of all, Palmer-Patel suggests that the mythic aspect of the transcendent beings is only implied in *LotR*⁶⁵ with which I do not particularly agree. I would argue that the divinities do move the plot further by their actions, considering that the Wizards and Sauron are Maiar, Arda's equivalent of angels.⁶⁶ However, admittedly, their celestial identity is only revealed in *The Silmarillion* (1977) and not discussed in the trilogy; therefore, from a purely formalist point of view, the mythic aspect is not included in *LotR*. The second issue is that Heroic Epic is applicable beyond the genre of fantasy in other fantastic genres like science fiction. Palmer-Patel this way solves the everlasting argument about the genre of *Star Wars* or *Dune* belonging to the unifying term,⁶⁷ but by doing that, she also widens the scope, which is undesirable for this thesis. The scope could be reduced by calling it Heroic Epic Fantasy, but due to simplicity and more well-known status, the term epic fantasy will be used instead.

1.3 J. R. R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

After numerous mentions of his name and the terms he coined in this chapter alone, the impact and legacy of J. R. R. Tolkien on fantasy as a whole is undeniable. For these reasons, he earned the nickname 'the father of fantasy' even though he was not the first to write in this genre. Before *LotR* and its prequel *The Hobbit* (1937), the fantasy genre had authors like George MacDonald with his *Phantastes* (1858), Lewis Carroll and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), L. Frank Baum's Oz books (1900–1920), beginning with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and already mentioned Robert E. Howard with the *Conan* series. The firstly named MacDonald was even admitted as an influence by Tolkien.⁶⁸ The list could go on and on, however, the sequence of authors inspired by Tolkien's *LotR* and his world would be endless.

⁶³ Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*, 10.

⁶⁴ Palmer-Patel, 9.

⁶⁵ Palmer-Patel, 7.

⁶⁶ Jared Lobdel, "Angels," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. by Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.

⁶⁷ Palmer-Patel, 11.

⁶⁸ Penelope Davie, "Children's Literature and Tolkien," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 96.

Often cited writers are Stephen R. Donaldson, Terry Brooks, Terry Pratchett, David and Leigh Eddings, Robert Jordan, and Raymond E. Feist.⁶⁹ And that is just the tip of the massive fantasy iceberg which does not include contemporary authors like Brandon Sanderson or other media where this evaporated genre reigns nowadays.

Part of Tolkien's legendary status in the fantasy fandom relates to his approach to worldbuilding. Even though most of its features were not original even then; for instance, deities, constructed languages, or maps were done before by other authors of fiction, but the vast scope and the level of detail put into these features is what makes it special and inspirational.⁷⁰ The thoroughness is mainly visible in the fully functioning languages which initiated Tolkien's sub-creation.⁷¹ Also an integral part of Tolkien's worldbuilding is the extensive history of Arda, mainly described in his posthumous *The Silmarillion*. The whole mythology of the world Tolkien calls his legendarium. All of these worldbuilding techniques, including the ones above, will be discussed more closely in the analytic section.

Until now, the thesis has mentioned several names from *LotR*, presuming knowledge of these because of their familiarity in popular culture, but to put them in context, I will briefly introduce the work. *LotR* is a unified story divided into three books: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), and *The Return of the King* (1955). The trilogy takes place in a fictional land of Middle-earth, a continent of a world called Arda, during a Third Age which is not peaceful anymore because of a dark lord Sauron who is gaining strength and is looking for his source of power, the One Ring. The quest of the heroes, little beings with hairy feet called Hobbits, Frodo, and Sam, is to destroy the Ring in the land of Sauron, Mordor. On their journey, they are accompanied by wise immortal beings called Elves, represented by Legolas, a small, bearded dwarf called Gimli, humans such as Aragorn and Boromir, and a wizard named Gandalf. Through their perspectives, the readers visit, apart from hostile Mordor, the elven sanctuaries Rivendell, and Lothlorien, and the kingdoms of Men, Rohan, and Gondor. The story ends with the eucastrophe of destroying the Ring and after freeing the Shire of the evil wizard Saruman, bringing peace to Middle-earth.⁷²

⁶⁹ Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 133.

⁷⁰ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 131.

⁷¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, "To Charlotte and Dennis Plimmer," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company 2000), 375.

⁷² Amy H. Sturgis, "Lord of the Rings, The," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 386–388.

This abridged plot description ticks off every C. Palmer-Patel's requirement for a Heroic Epic. The vastness is symbolised by areas of various races, like Lothlorien and Gondor. The world-saving mission of freeing Middle-earth from Sauron and the separation of the characters during the course of the novels cause a division of the narrative into two parts – Frodo and Sam's storyline and the storyline of the rest of the fellowship. From a narratological point of view, it is mostly narrated by an omniscient narrator who knows more than each character. This is called 'zero focalisation' in Gérard Genette's terms.⁷³ The omniscience implies a third-person narrator which does not take part in the story. This type of narrator, Genette named heterodiegetic.⁷⁴

Besides laying down foundational tropes of the fantasy genre in a setting (immersive secondary world), characters (races of Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits), and a story (heroic journey), the future of the fantastic mode also resonated with the themes of the legendarium. The author himself considers the main themes of his works "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine".⁷⁵ The 'Fall' symbolises the omnipresent sense of former beauty and grace replaced by the crawling darkness from Mordor.⁷⁶ Similar melancholy for the lost golden times can be seen in the original trilogy of *Star Wars*. 'Mortality' symbolises the inescapable transiency of all things, life and kingdoms included. In *LotR*, it is mainly from the perspective of immortal Elves who have witnessed whole millennia and they sense that their time on Middle-earth is over.⁷⁷ To my knowledge, there is not a fantastic work that would use this theme to such an extent, but the theme of immortality and its drawbacks is explored in many works, like in the film *Highlander* (1986). The longevity of elven lives is a common motif as well, for instance in *The Witcher* series (1986–2013). The anti-industrialist theme of the 'Machine' personified by Saruman and his deforesting actions has developed into the ecological and ecocritical themes prevalent in *Dune* (1965). Interestingly, some of the most frequent Tolkien motifs of trees and music did not have such an important role in the following fantasy books.

At this point, *LotR*'s position in the worldbuilding juxtaposition has been justified by being Attebery's prototypical member of the fantasy fuzzy set and also by the never-ending series of authors influenced by its tropes and themes. The purpose of the next subchapter is to advocate for *Stormlight*'s place next to *LotR*. Naturally, not in terms of influence, for reasons stated in

⁷³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 208.

⁷⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 244–245.

⁷⁵ Tolkien, "To Milton Waldman," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 145.

⁷⁶ Sturgis, "Lord of the Rings, The," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 388.

⁷⁷ Sturgis, 388.

the “Introduction” but in terms of ambition, worldbuilding, and the importance it holds in the contemporary epic fantasy.

1.4 Brandon Sanderson and *The Stormlight Archive*

Brandon Sanderson started his literary career as a writer of fantasy with his debut novel *Elantris* (2005) and proceeded to publish *Mistborn: The Final Empire* (2006), the first book of the first *Mistborn* series (2006–present) which led Sanderson to be chosen for completing Robert Jordan’s epic fantasy *The Wheel of Time* (1990–2013).⁷⁸ This is already a great achievement for a new author, but in 2010, he began his most ambitious project yet, *The Stormlight Archive*.

Sanderson had been planning a ten-book-long epic fantasy for fifteen years, and with *The Way of Kings* (2010), he has begun this journey. The structure of the series and individual novels was prepared as well. The series will eventually have two five-book parts, and each instalment will focus on the history of a different character.⁷⁹ So far, Sanderson has published four books *The Way of Kings*, *The Words of Radiancance* (2014), *Oathbringer* (2017), and *The Rhythm of War* (2020). But this is not where Sanderson’s ambitions end. Most of his novels, including mentioned *Elantris*, the *Mistborn* series, and *The Stormlight Archive*, are part of one universe called Cosmere, consisting of several worlds with different magic systems. The connection between the worlds is embodied by so-called ‘Worldhoppers’ who can appear in more than one world, and other references towards the plots of other books, but Sanderson emphasises that each series can be read on its own without the knowledge of other series.⁸⁰

The story of *Stormlight* takes place in one of the Cosmere worlds called Roshar a few years after the assassination of Gavilar, the king of Alethkar, by the man dressed in white called Szeth-son-son-Valano.⁸¹ This event starts a war between two nations: Parshendi, who ordered the murder, and Alethi.⁸² After this prologue, we follow the main cast of three characters: Kaladin, a former soldier turned slave,⁸³ Shallan, an apprentice scholar with ulterior motives,⁸⁴ and Dalinar Kholin, a brother of Gavilar who aims to redeem his bloody past. And because of

⁷⁸ Brandon Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, (New York: Tor Books, 2017), 1243.

⁷⁹ Brandon Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive: A Pocket Companion to The Way of Kings and Words of Radiancance* (New York: Tor Books, 2016), 6.

⁸⁰ “What is Cosmere?,” Brandon Sanderson, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/what-is-the-cosmere/>.

⁸¹ Brandon Sanderson, *The Way of Kings* (New York: Tor Books, 2010), 9.

⁸² Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive: A Pocket Companion to The Way of Kings and Words of Radiancance*, 7–8.

⁸³ Sanderson, 7.

⁸⁴ Sanderson, 8–9.

his prophetic dreams, he is prompted to unify divided Alethkar and eventually every kingdom of Roshar⁸⁵ against the danger of Voidbringers. In the past, they repeatedly broke out apocalyptic Desolations, but every time they were defeated by the orders of Knights of Radiant, who were endowed with magical abilities called Surges⁸⁶ which are gradually gained by the protagonists throughout the first two novels, forming the roots of the new Knights of Radiant.⁸⁷

Stormlight meets the Heroic Epic definition as well. The epic scale of the setting is gradually revealing itself through ‘Interludes’ which usually follow new characters from different cultures in various places of Roshar other than Alethkar, like Shinovar,⁸⁸ Jah Keved,⁸⁹ Parshendi settlement Narak,⁹⁰ and others. The quest to prevent the next Desolation incited by dreams from divinity is the main driving point of the story. The characters act mainly on their own, solving their problems, but in the grand scheme, they collaborate on their common goal of uniting Roshar against evil. The narration in each chapter solely focuses on one character’s perspective and nobody else’s which is termed ‘internal focalisation’ by Genette⁹¹ who distinguishes three variants of it: fixed, multiple, and variable.⁹² The last one applies to *Stormlight* due to the fact that the focal character changes with each chapter, for example, chapters from part one of book one in *Way* switch the focal characters of Kaladin and Shallan.⁹³ The narrator is not present in the story, therefore it is heterodiegetic.

This brief presentation of Brandon Sanderson and *Stormlight* showed the ambitions and a glimpse of ingenious worldbuilding, but the reason that makes them the perfect candidate for representing the current epic fantasy is simply popularity. Other works of epic fantasy got recognised by the wide public and have become part of popular culture; for example, George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996–present) had an immense fan following in the 2010s, largely due to the acclaimed TV adaptation.⁹⁴ Nowadays, Martin’s fame seems to be fading because of the not-so-well-received ending of the show in 2019⁹⁵ and also because of the almost thirteen-year gap since the last book in the series *A Dance with Dragons* (2011).

⁸⁵ Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive: A Pocket Companion to The Way of Kings and Words of Radiance*, 7–8.

⁸⁶ Sanderson, 29.

⁸⁷ Sanderson, 7–10.

⁸⁸ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 535.

⁸⁹ Sanderson, 889.

⁹⁰ Brandon Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance* (New York: Tor Books, 2014), 162.

⁹¹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 10.

⁹² Genette, 189–190.

⁹³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 29.

⁹⁴ Judith May Fathallah, “‘I AM YOUR KING’: Authority in Game of Thrones,” *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 101.

⁹⁵ “Game of Thrones: Season 8 (2019),” Rotten Tomatoes, accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/game_of_thrones/s08.

Whereas Brandon Sanderson seems to get more popular with each year, the climax of it may be the year 2023 when he raised more than 41 million dollars on Kickstarter⁹⁶ and published five books within one year.⁹⁷ His prolific writing and transparent communication with fans through Reddit and weekly updates on his website may be part of the reason why his name and his most ambitious project, *Stormlight* repeatedly appear in the context of the best fantasy books.⁹⁸

Having concluded the works and authors of the titular worlds, it is time to describe the worldbuilding itself and the method of the worlds' comparison by Mark J. P. Wolf's theory.

⁹⁶ "Surprise! Four Secret Novels by Brandon Sanderson," Kickstarter, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/dragonsteel/surprise-four-secret-novels-by-brandon-sanderson/description>.

⁹⁷ "State of the Sanderson 2023," Brandon Sanderson, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/state-of-the-sanderson-2023/>.

⁹⁸ "Top 100 Fantasy Books," Fantasy Book Review, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.fantasybookreview.co.uk/top-100-fantasy-books/>.

2. Worldbuilding Theory

Worldbuilding, or sub-creation, as the names suggest, is the construction of imaginary or secondary worlds. Even though such activity has a long history, its academic research, like the study of fantasy, has been initiated rather late⁹⁹ due to the following factors. Firstly, scholars did not pay much attention to worldbuilding because of its inherently backgrounded status in contrast to storytelling.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, worldbuilding is transnarrative, transmedial, and transauthorial which makes the research exceedingly difficult due to its daunting size.¹⁰¹ Thirdly, the massiveness also causes it to be studied from the perspective of several studies, so the findings would be only partial. Presently, it is studied by a subfield of Media Studies.¹⁰² The final reason for the lack of academic coverage in earlier centuries is that the surge of secondary worlds did not come until the twentieth century. Michael Saler justifies this surge by arguing that the imaginary worlds at the turn of the century served as the “re-enchanting of an allegedly disenchanted world”¹⁰³ and as the fantastic complement to realist literature.¹⁰⁴ Since then, the tradition has gone on and has become exponentially more widespread.

The pioneers of theorizing about imaginary worlds are unsurprisingly writers of the fantastic, George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, and primarily J. R. R. Tolkien with the already discussed essay “On Fairy Stories”.¹⁰⁵ Since the 1960s, the imaginary worlds have been studied through a philosophical lens, operating with the theory of ‘possible worlds’ and researching their connection with the primary world and how they worked. The findings were then connected with literary theory.¹⁰⁶ Products of this were, for instance, Thomas G. Pavel’s *Fictional Worlds* (1986), Lubomír Doležel’s *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998),¹⁰⁷ and finally, the main source of this thesis, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation* (2012) by Mark J. P. Wolf where he presents methodology for analysing imaginary worlds based on completeness, consistency, and invention.

⁹⁹ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Wolf, 2, 30.

¹⁰¹ Wolf, 2–3.

¹⁰² Wolf, 3.

¹⁰³ Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012), 6.

¹⁰⁴ Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Wolf, 18.

The completeness of the world explores to what extent the functioning of the world is possible based on the information provided by the author.¹⁰⁸ Wolf emphasises that the world must create an impression of existing outside of the narrative. Authors achieve that by giving extra information and hints at possible cultures, societies, infrastructures, ecology, etc.¹⁰⁹ For maximum completeness, authors aim for saturation which is an overflow of details about the secondary world that demands absolute focus and attention towards the text to comprehend all of the world's workings.¹¹⁰ The completeness of the primary world is naturally unattainable for secondary worlds,¹¹¹ but some authors can benefit from this by creating so-called 'deliberate gaps'.¹¹² The author shows or implies a place, character, or piece of history but never fully reveals it which indicates the seeming boundlessness of the world¹¹³ and also forces the reader's imagination to fill in these gaps. The consequence of these two factors is that the world lives longer in the subconscious.¹¹⁴

The second degree of quality, consistency, is self-explanatory. It focuses on how the pieces of information forming the completeness coincide together and whether some do not contradict others.¹¹⁵ The degree of harm to the world's believability depends on where the inconsistency is, whether in the main storyline, secondary storyline, background information, or the world's workings.¹¹⁶ The larger the work, the more probable the inconsistencies¹¹⁷ as in the genre of epic fantasy. To fix them, authors use 'retroactive continuity' or 'retcon', a process of revising previous writings to make them up to date with the newest ones.¹¹⁸

What makes a secondary world secondary is its "degree of detachment" from the primary world,¹¹⁹ achieved by creating completely new places, beings, languages, or even physical laws. All this and more is encapsulated in the last Wolf's term, invention.¹²⁰ From the listing above, it is apparent that this one is more profound than the others which is why Wolf divided it into four realms: nominal, cultural, natural, and ontological.¹²¹ The nominal realm commonly

¹⁰⁸ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Wolf, 42.

¹¹⁰ Wolf, 49.

¹¹¹ Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 169.

¹¹² Wolf, 60.

¹¹³ Wolf, 42.

¹¹⁴ Wolf, 60.

¹¹⁵ Wolf, 43.

¹¹⁶ Wolf, 43.

¹¹⁷ Wolf, 43.

¹¹⁸ Wolf, 46.

¹¹⁹ Wolf, 26.

¹²⁰ Wolf, 34.

¹²¹ Wolf, 35–36.

comprises signs for concepts that already have a commonly used sign in the primary world. Its extreme is an invented language working in practice.¹²² A new language implies a new culture and society which are the subjects of the cultural realm. The terms sound simple, but they constitute every object made by members of a culture, their ideas, customs, and concepts.¹²³ I will include invented races into cultural realm because I find race and culture inseparable and even though Wolf admits races are on the border line, he puts them in the natural realm which explores all that nature can offer in a fictional world, like new fauna, flora, or geography.¹²⁴ Finally, the ontological realm, according to Wolf, analyses changes from the primary world's physical laws.¹²⁵ Wolf does not mention it explicitly, but the existence of magic definitely breaches known physics. And since the following analyses include epic fantasy series where magical objects and gravity defiance play significant roles, the focus of the ontological subchapter will be on magic systems.

The last degree of quality is of my own making, and it is not as universal as Wolf's are. It is an analysis of how authors' ideologies seep into the process of constructing imaginary worlds. This degree has been added specifically to the Tolkien and Sanderson comparison because they are publicly known to be members of two Christian denominations, the Catholic Church¹²⁶ and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹²⁷ The object of the subchapter will be to find out whether the stance towards implementing ideologies in the invented worlds has changed or remains the same after half a century of worldbuilding.

To conclude, the theoretical section has introduced all the essential elements for the following analytic section. The first subchapter defined the term fantasy according to Brian Attebery's theory of fantasy, dividing it into mode, formula, and genre. The latter is the definition suitable for both researched works. The next subchapter used C. Palmer-Patel's definition of Heroic Epic to properly describe the subgenre of the titular worlds, epic fantasy. Lastly, the "Fantasy" chapter provided a rationale for choosing the concrete authors and series. The final chapter of the theoretical section proceeded to explain the thesis' subject matter, 'worldbuilding', and its methodology of analysis by Mark J. P. Wolf which will be employed in the next section. Its goal is to provide enough data to answer the research questions of what the evolutionary steps

¹²² Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 35.

¹²³ Wolf, 35.

¹²⁴ Wolf, 36.

¹²⁵ Wolf, 36.

¹²⁶ Bradley J. Birzer, "Christianity," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 101.

¹²⁷ "About Brandon," Brandon Sanderson, accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/about-brandon/>.

are in epic fantasy worldbuilding and if the modern series is a revisionist work regarding these steps.

3. *The Lord of the Rings*

The analytical part will start with a chapter about the prototypical Tolkien's epic fantasy to establish the methodological benchmark based on which Sanderson's series will be compared. The chapter consists of several subchapters, each examining different parts of Tolkien's worldbuilding through Wolf's terms of completeness, consistency, and invention, split into nominal, cultural, natural, and ontological realms. Lastly, the chapter will explore the influence of Tolkien's Catholic ideology on the creation of *LotR*.

3.1 Completeness

The sub-creation started with Tolkien's love for inventing languages, which by their nature needed cultures that would develop them.¹²⁸ This coincided with his plan to make mythology specifically for England¹²⁹ which, unlike Britain, does not have an epic. Not even the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* can be considered English because it is not set in England.¹³⁰ However, *Beowulf* was an inspiration for Tolkien in many different ways, including worldbuilding. In his essay "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*", he admires the elaborate world which exceeds far beyond the requirements of the plot.¹³¹ This is what Wolf calls saturation which Tolkien strived for in his mythology for England.

Similarly, to creating languages, forming a completely imaginary world with different cultures seems to have been Tolkien's hobby, according to one of his letters.¹³² In the same one, he admits his lack of specialisation in the fields of archaeology, fashion, agricultural tools, architecture, music, pottery, and metalworking.¹³³ Although he did find economics in his secondary world quite feasible, Gondor and Shire are both placed in good fertile environments with access to water which may supply agriculture and, in Gondor's case, industries.¹³⁴ The proof of this is the river Andúin and Pellenor fields surrounding Minas Tirith¹³⁵ which may also disprove Tolkien's lack of confidence in his knowledge of architecture because the uniqueness

¹²⁸ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 130.

¹²⁹ Tolkien, "To Milton Waldman," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 144.

¹³⁰ Carl F. Hostetter and Arden R. Smith, "A Mythology for England," *Mythlore* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 281, <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss2/42/>.

¹³¹ Tolkien, "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*," *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 27.

¹³² Tolkien, "To Naomi Mitchinson," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 196.

¹³³ Tolkien, 196.

¹³⁴ Tolkien, 196.

¹³⁵ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 19–20.

of Tirith's seven circle structure made of white walls each delving more into the hill¹³⁶ is highly admirable. A thought also went to the underground hobbit-holes, consisting of tunnels leading to different rooms, all on one floor.¹³⁷ Another interesting field included in the list of Tolkien's weaknesses is music. It is puzzling, considering that it is the Music of Ainur, the celestial beings which formed a model of the World later created by the God Ilúvatar, according to the mythology in *Silmarillion*.¹³⁸ And even in *LotR*, there are many long songs usually sung by Elves and sometimes their musical powers are hinted, as in the hobbits' encounter with Tom Bombadil who sings to Old Man Willow to release Merry and Pippin.^{139,140}

The blindingly obvious part of Tolkien's completeness in the legendarium is its complexly developed history. It is not surprising because the legendarium was his lifelong work from the 1910s until his death in 1973.¹⁴¹ After his passing, Christopher Tolkien compiled a coherent book of Arda's past, *Silmarillion*, covering its creation, the First Age, the Second Age, and the beginnings of the Third Age during which *Hobbit* and *LotR* take place.¹⁴² All of the contradicting versions of the stories are captured in the twelve-book-long *History of Middle-earth* (1983–1996).¹⁴³ Concise but canonical form, unlike *Silmarillion*, of the history is also included at the end of *Return* in its Appendices, mainly A and B.¹⁴⁴ The reason for this is that the profound history surfaces in the trilogy in the form of characters like Galadriel, items like the One Ring, or parallels between the Aragorn and Arwen relationship and the love of Beren and Lúthien. It also creates one of the themes of the trilogy, the 'Fall'.

The penultimate paragraph of this subchapter deals with Wolf's term 'deliberate gap' in the completeness of an imaginary world. There are more mysteries in the legendarium, mostly due to its unfinished state, but the most known is intentional,¹⁴⁵ the secret origins of the singing Tom Bombadil. Tolkien, in one of his letters to Naomi Mitchinson, clarifies at least his function in the narrative, being the representative of the pacifist, enjoying things as they are and not

¹³⁶ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 21.

¹³⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1991), 3.

¹³⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: Book Club Associates, 1977), 15–20.

¹³⁹ David Gay, "Song Contest," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 621.

¹⁴⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 101.

¹⁴¹ Gergely Nagy, "Silmarillion, The," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 608.

¹⁴² Nagy, 610.

¹⁴³ Nagy, 609.

¹⁴⁴ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 340–422.

¹⁴⁵ Tolkien, "To Naomi Mitchinson," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 174.

caring about power or control.¹⁴⁶ There are other unanswered enigmas in the legendarium, for instance, the destinies of Entwives or Blue Wizards.

Overall, regarding completeness, Tolkien reaches saturation by developing functioning economics, thought-out architecture, frequent music, and mainly detailed history. It is likely that Tolkien established an unseen precedent with the depth of his historical worldbuilding and with the historical parallels in the ‘contemporary’ stories. Despite the level of detail in the mythology of England, Tolkien implemented several deliberate gaps, usually concerning characters, but even some indeliberate gaps, which will be named in the next subchapter.

3.2 Consistency

Wolf notes that consistency is harder to maintain the larger the worlds are,¹⁴⁷ and considering the vastness of legendarium both in time and space then the quest for a complete lack of contradictions was doomed from the start. Tolkien was aware of some of them and those he corrected or retconned. This subchapter will demonstrate the most notable one and then other inconsistencies surrounding *LotR* based on where they occur, whether in the main storyline, the secondary one, or in the background.

Starting with the most cited retroactive continuity in legendarium, done in *The Hobbit*. The reason for its inclusion in the analysis of the trilogy, besides its renowned status, is its connection to *LotR*. The first hobbit adventure was not planned to be part of the legendarium,¹⁴⁸ and it was not planned as a prequel to a more ambitious epic fantasy. Thus, unsurprisingly, the origins and controlling powers of the magical Ring first appearing in the chapter “Riddles in the Dark” had not been invented yet at the point of the first edition. Gollum did not mind giving his ‘precious’ to Bilbo after the game of riddles in 1937. This had been retconned in 1951.¹⁴⁹ Considering that the Ring plays a major role in the main storyline of the sequel, this inconsistency would be very harmful if Tolkien did not retcon it.

The initial unconnectedness of *Hobbit* caused other secondary problems, many of which are linked with the race of Hobbits and how they fit within Arda. Bilbo’s adventure describes some modernities that do not belong to the medieval setting. Tolkien specifically regrets the inclusion

¹⁴⁶ Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchinson,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 179.

¹⁴⁷ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 43.

¹⁴⁸ Tolkien, “To W. H. Auden,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 215.

¹⁴⁹ Catherine Butler, “Tolkien and Worldbuilding,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Peter Hunt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 112.

of an umbrella,¹⁵⁰ but there are other items mentioned that seem out of place, like golf, coffee, or tobacco.¹⁵¹ Only the latter is explained in the “Prologue” of *Fellowship* as pipe-weed.¹⁵² The rest remains an inconsistency that is not detrimental to the *LotR* narrative in any way but breaks the immersion for perceptive readers. A similar case is the lack of recognition of Hobbits by Sauron and other races,¹⁵³ exemplified by the Lothlorien elf Haldir, who did not know about Hobbits living in Middle-earth.¹⁵⁴

Fans of the legendarium found many other supposed plot holes, mostly in the backgrounded information, having almost zero impact on the believability of the world. For instance, contradictory utterances from Elrond and Gandalf about who is the eldest in Middle-earth. Elrond classifies Tom Bombadil as the oldest in the first book, and Gandalf says the same about Treebeard in *Towers*.¹⁵⁵ Another one would be Gimli talking with Éomer about not killing anything in a while despite fighting Orcs not that long ago.¹⁵⁶ But the most notorious one is about eagles not taking the fellowship to Mordor, or at least close to it. Tolkien expressed himself on the topic while commenting on a film script of *LotR* emphasising the stealthiness of the party on foot.¹⁵⁷ The successful destruction of the Ring depended on their secrecy; therefore, flying on huge eagles towards Sauron’s land would not be the most inconspicuous approach, and the company would be presumably attacked by monstrous flying creatures called fell beasts or archers.

To summarise, legendarium consists of many inconsistencies, but almost none can be found in the main storyline of *LotR* due to the retcon in *Hobbit*. More of them occur in the secondary storyline and mainly in the background, but those are not as damaging. Now remains the last and most extensive Wolf’s degree of quality which will cover Middle-earth’s languages, races, animals, trees, maps, and lastly magic.

¹⁵⁰ Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchinson,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 196.

¹⁵¹ Butler, “Tolkien and Worldbuilding,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 115.

¹⁵² Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 22.

¹⁵³ Butler, 115.

¹⁵⁴ Tolkien, 257.

¹⁵⁵ “Possible inconsistencies in legendarium,” Tolkien Gateway, accessed February 24, 2024, https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Possible_inconsistencies_in_the_legendarium#Tales_of_hobbits.

¹⁵⁶ Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2005), 417.

¹⁵⁷ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Forrest J. Ackerman,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 273–274.

3.3 Invention

3.3.1 Nominal Realm

The first realm of Wolf's last analytic method is concerned with new names or signs for already known concepts or for fabricated ones. Names are part of a larger sign system, which is often a language. Tolkien's case in nominal realm worldbuilding is peculiar because of his profession as an English philologist, but mainly because of his lifelong passion for inventing languages. This hobby is thoroughly detailed in his essay "A Secret Vice" where Tolkien describes him taking part in the usage of children's languages such as Animalic, where every word was an animal,¹⁵⁸ or Nevbosh.¹⁵⁹ This all led to his own more complex languages, like Naffarin,¹⁶⁰ or Quenya, and Sindarin, situated in legendarium among others. This subchapter will briefly go through every language appearing in *LotR*, providing only a narrow look into Tolkien's genius regarding this realm.

The most convoluted languages from a linguistic perspective in *LotR* were already mentioned Quenya and Sindarin. They are the most frequent 'foreign' languages used in the books which, unlike the rest of the invented languages, are not restricted to a few names of characters and places but were specifically made to produce full-length sentences and even poems and songs.¹⁶¹ Quenya is an Elvish language serving as a linguistic glimpse into the history of Arda because, in the Third Age, it is considered a dead language similar to our Latin preserved in fixed phrases, songs, and ceremonial speeches.¹⁶² Its origin is revealed through elf Gildor's reaction to Frodo's greeting in Quenya in *Fellowship*: "“*Elen síla lúmenn' omentielvo*,...’... ‘Be careful, friends!’ cried Gildor laughing. ‘...Here is a scholar in the ancient tongue’”¹⁶³ In *LotR*, it also appears during the company's departure from Lothlorien when Galadriel sings them the song "“*Namárië*”" as a farewell¹⁶⁴ and in *Return*, when Aragorn accepts the crown of Gondor.^{165,166} The comparison to Latin is not a coincidence in the case of Quenya because, along with Finnish, it bears a grammatical influence upon its making.¹⁶⁷ Due to this decision,

¹⁵⁸ Tolkien, "A Secret Vice," *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 200.

¹⁵⁹ Tolkien, 202.

¹⁶⁰ Tolkien, 208.

¹⁶¹ Carl F. Hostetter, "Languages Invented by Tolkien," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 340.

¹⁶² Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Return of the King*, 457.

¹⁶³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 72.

¹⁶⁴ Tolkien, 282.

¹⁶⁵ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 267.

¹⁶⁶ Hostetter, 340.

¹⁶⁷ Hostetter, 337.

Quenya evokes in readers the long lost times, supporting the theme of 'Fall'. The second Elvish tongue spoken throughout Frodo's journey is Sindarin, the only one commonly used by Elves at that time.¹⁶⁸ It is visible in the text of *Fellowship* during the hobbits' stay in Rivendell where Frodo hears the song "A *Elbereth Gilthoniel*"¹⁶⁹ or when Gandalf tries to open the doors of Moria with a spell: "*Annon edhelen, edro hi ammen! ...*".^{170,171} The phonological and grammatical roots of Sindarin are in Welsh¹⁷² which may be one of the hints for the intended mythology of England.

The specification of the Third Age is necessary because the Elven languages evolve throughout the history of Arda and do not remain the same. Carl F. Hostetter even states that the languages in each period are linguistically different yet functional on their own.¹⁷³ Another ingenious part of worldbuilding in this realm is that Tolkien devised a protolanguage for Elves, Primitive Quendian from which both Quenya and Sindarin were formed.¹⁷⁴

The believability of the secondary world is enhanced by the idea that everything written in modern English is only a translation of the most widely spread language in the Third Age of Middle-earth, the Common Speech, or Westron.¹⁷⁵ It is spoken commonly by Men and Hobbits, but their dialects differ. Gondor men communicate in a more formal variant than Hobbits who speak rustic.¹⁷⁶ The names of people and places are translated as well, for instance, Rivendell is *Karningul* in Westron.¹⁷⁷ Elves and Dwarves use Common Speech as well, but only when they need to talk with other races.¹⁷⁸ Among themselves, Elves speak Sindarin and Dwarves Khuzdul which they keep a secret from other races.¹⁷⁹ Westron is also used by Ents and Orcs who have their own languages,¹⁸⁰ but neither the Ent tongue nor the Black Speech of Mordor have frequent occurrences in the books.

To conclude, the degree of Tolkien's invention in the nominal realm is similarly to Arda's history simply unparalleled. Quenya and Sindarin are both linguistically feasible languages that

¹⁶⁸ Hostetter, "Languages Invented by Tolkien," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 339.

¹⁶⁹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 183–184.

¹⁷⁰ Tolkien, 232.

¹⁷¹ Hostetter, 340.

¹⁷² Hostetter, 339.

¹⁷³ Hostetter, 334.

¹⁷⁴ Hostetter, 336.

¹⁷⁵ Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Return of the King*, 464.

¹⁷⁶ Tolkien, 464.

¹⁷⁷ Tolkien, 466.

¹⁷⁸ Hostetter, 342.

¹⁷⁹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 232.

¹⁸⁰ Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Return of the King*, 461–462.

have their own history of changes and even a common ancestor. The books also helped to establish the immersive trope of translating Common Speech into a language readers can understand. However, invented languages need to be spoken by some invented cultures which are the subject of the following analytical subchapter of the cultural realm.

3.3.2 Cultural Realm

Culture is formed around one language, but more generally around one ethnicity. *LotR* provides plenty of races, each of which shares some common characteristics but is diversified into many cultures. The aim is to generalise characteristics of all Elves, Men, Dwarves, and Hobbits and explain their further cultural classifications and importance for contemporary fantasy.

Tolkien's Elves were inspired by the tall and noble elves from medieval literature rather than the Victorian depiction of small magical fairy-like beings with pointy ears.¹⁸¹ A similar design to the Victorian one used Tolkien's contemporary author J. M. Barrie in the character of Tinker Bell from the play *Peter Pan* (1904) which Tolkien adored¹⁸² and with which he shares the theme of 'Mortality' or more accurately in this case, immortality. Bradford Lee Eden fittingly describes the first people of Arda as "demigods",¹⁸³ being immortal and exceptionally skilled in craft and art alike. This type of elf has become almost synonymous with fantasy, and it is part of its formula. However, the image of a wise grand elf is taken only from the Third Age of legendarium. Some Noldor Elves from the First Age exemplified by Fëanor¹⁸⁴ were more like Men, curious but also vengeful and arrogant. The theme of the paradoxical behaviour of some characters concerning the characteristics of their race reoccurs among other ethnic groups.¹⁸⁵ The most basic distinction of Elves is between Calaquendi and Moriquendi, based on whether they have or have not seen the light of Valinor, the land of Arda's 'gods' Valar. Calaquendi have seen it, Moriquendi have not. Calaquendi are split further into fair Vanya, sea-oriented Teleri, and inventive Noldor,¹⁸⁶ the latter of which is represented in the Third Age by Galadriel of Lothlorien. They also speak Quenya.¹⁸⁷ Elven kind lying between Calaquendi and

¹⁸¹ Bradford Lee Eden, "Elves," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 150.

¹⁸² David O. Oberhelman, "Barrie, J. M.," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 51–52.

¹⁸³ Eden, 150.

¹⁸⁴ A character of Noldor Elf from *Silmarillion* whose obsession with stolen jewels of his making called Silmarils led to a series of tragedies beginning with the kin-slaying of Teleri Elves at a harbour city called Alqualondë in chapter "Of the Flight of the Noldor".

¹⁸⁵ Christine Chism, "Race and Ethnicity in Tolkien's Works," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 555.

¹⁸⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 59–60.

¹⁸⁷ Mathew Dickerson, "Elves: Kindred and Migrations," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 153–154.

Moriquendi are Sindar, Teleri who have never seen the light.¹⁸⁸ They form the absolute majority of Elves in the Third Age, and they speak Sindarin. Their member is Legolas of Mirkwood.¹⁸⁹

The other race that will be forever linked to the genre are Dwarves. Tolkien's sources of inspiration come from German and Scandinavian folklore where they are depicted as short and living under the earth.¹⁹⁰ In *Return*, Tolkien describes them as good, hardworking, and "lovers of stone, of gems".¹⁹¹ This love may turn to greed which has led to a tragedy in Moria when the dwarves in their search for treasures awoke an ancient monster called balrog.¹⁹² The paradox of this character feature is Gimli who instead of riches wishes for three worthless strands of Galadriel's hair¹⁹³ and also forms a friendship with an elf Legolas throughout the trilogy which is unheard of due to the strife between their races. In a 1955 letter, Tolkien compares Dwarves to Jewish people, both experiencing diaspora yet still keeping their culture like the secret tongue Khuzdul.¹⁹⁴ The language has Semitic words, as he notes in a 1964 BBC interview where he continues the similarities in fighting abilities and fondness for "artifacts".¹⁹⁵ But this does not point to Tolkien's antisemitism. In a 1938 letter to a German publisher, he makes clear that he has nothing but admiration for people of Jewish origin.¹⁹⁶

The last stereotypical race in fantasy is naturally Men, having all the bad and good traits of other races. They can be as corrupt as Orcs but as noble as Elves.¹⁹⁷ The examples of these two extremes within the race are the Wild Men and Númenóreans, ancestors of Aragorn. Most of the tribes of the Wild Men were helping the Enemy alongside Orcs; meanwhile,¹⁹⁸ the brave Men of Númenor gained an island of the same name by fighting against Morgoth in the Second Age. Their descendants rule the advanced kingdom of Gondor¹⁹⁹ which can be compared to the Roman civilisation, occupying the land of Anglo-Saxon England.²⁰⁰ Anglo-Saxon society, on

¹⁸⁸ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 64.

¹⁸⁹ Dickerson, "Elves: Kindred and Migrations," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 153–154.

¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Evans, "Dwarves," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 134.

¹⁹¹ Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Return of the King*, 463.

¹⁹² Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 240.

¹⁹³ Tolkien, 281.

¹⁹⁴ Tolkien, "From a Letter to Naomi Mitchinson," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 229.

¹⁹⁵ Denys Gueroult, "J. R. R. Tolkien," Audio of the Interview, 40 minutes, 1964, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p021jx7j>, 10:35.

¹⁹⁶ Tolkien, "To Rütten and Loenig Verlag," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 229.

¹⁹⁷ Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, "Men, Middle-earth," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 417.

¹⁹⁸ Straubhaar, 416.

¹⁹⁹ Straubhaar, 415.

²⁰⁰ Anna Smol, "History, Anglo-Saxon," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 275.

the other hand, shares features with the barbaric kingdom of Rohan led by talented horse riders Rohirrim, who also fought the evil²⁰¹ and speak Rohirric, which is Old English.²⁰² The race of Men contributes to the theme of ‘Mortality’ because they struggle with the Maker’s gift of death.

Hobbits are, along with the Ents,²⁰³ the only race purely invented by Tolkien.²⁰⁴ Here, the primary world’s model for the overly polite, settled enthusiasts of good food and drink is clearly seen in the English country people.²⁰⁵ This notion has been confirmed by Tolkien,²⁰⁶ and he had continually expressed his love for this comfortable way of life, even calling himself a hobbit.²⁰⁷ But in both *Hobbit* and *LotR*, he emphasises that underneath the fat belly lies great courage waiting to be awakened, especially when their pastoral home, the Shire, and the life linked with it are endangered, as is shown in the penultimate chapter of *Return*, “The Scouring of the Shire”. Tolkien also invented a concept connected with the culture of hobbits which is ‘mathom’, basically a ‘trinket’ usually in the form of an old weapon.²⁰⁸

To sum up the subchapter, Tolkien’s influence is immense in this realm, considering that Elves, Dwarves, Men, and even unmentioned Orcs have appeared in numerous fantasy stories throughout media. However, the formula fantasy usually uses only the general characterization of the races without the exceptions, defying the traditional traits as Tolkien did. The uniqueness of Tolkien’s races also lies in their parallels with the primary world’s races, forming the mythology of England. The rest of Wolf’s original natural realm, namely fauna, flora, and geography will be explored in the next subchapter.

3.3.3 Natural Realm

Nowadays, fantasy worlds must be filled with odd creatures and plants living and growing in different environments to which they had to accommodate or they had created it in the first place. The beginnings of this trend can unsurprisingly be found in legendarium where they play important roles of helpers or villains. Additionally, *LotR* also set standards for maps in fantasy which will be covered in the geographical section.

²⁰¹ Hilary Wynne, “Rohan,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 575.

²⁰² Wynne, 576.

²⁰³ Peter Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 50.

²⁰⁴ Michael N. Stanton, “Hobbits,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 280.

²⁰⁵ Stanton, 282.

²⁰⁶ Gueroult, “J. R. R. Tolkien,” 10:55.

²⁰⁷ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Deborah Webster,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 288.

²⁰⁸ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 20.

Animals in Middle-earth are specific because each appears somewhere on a scale of consciousness and intelligence.²⁰⁹ On one side, there are animals not any different from the primary world, like horses and ponies, or vaguely described presumably thoughtless monsters, like fell beasts. On the other more interesting side of the scale, there are creatures that can talk, think, and reason with people. Sentient animals are present in the literary genre of beast fables, but in this case, the animals are not supposed to be collections of human traits but unique beings with their own psychology.²¹⁰ As is the case with dragons who act as villains in legendarium, but when it comes to Smaug from *Hobbit*, he is not characterised only by the deadly sin of greed. In the chapter “Inside Information”, he also shows his pride, maliciousness, and intelligence. An example from *LotR* is helping eagles who seem to communicate, strategize, and even form a hierarchy, as the title Lord of the Eagles implies, which makes them full-fledged companions and not just means of transport, as many assume. Lara Sookoo also mentions other sentient creatures from *LotR*, like Gandalf’s horse Shadowfax or Shelob who was evidently able to communicate with Gollum, thus being more intelligent than spiders from Mirkwood in *Hobbit*.²¹¹ But her driving motive is still the animalistic instinct of hunger²¹² which puts her somewhere in the middle of the scale. In a similar place belong Shadowfax and other mearas, more intelligent horses able to communicate with the rider.²¹³

Tolkien’s love for flora, specifically trees, is ever-present in his works. He even confirmed his fondness in one of his letters.²¹⁴ In the themes of *LotR*, I have mentioned the motif of trees. So, to extend the argument, trees in legendarium bear a heavy symbolic significance. The first light in Arda was a product of the two trees of Valinor: Laurelin the Golden and Telperion the White²¹⁵ which after the fatal attack of Morgoth, produced the last fruit and flower, making the Sun and Moon.²¹⁶ The Morgoth’s ‘killing’ of the trees is chronologically the first instance of the ecocritical theme of ‘Machine’ in legendarium. The echoes of this event can be found in *LotR* not only in constant repetitions of the colours golden and silver²¹⁷ but also in addressing the Sun and Moon with ‘she’ and ‘he’.²¹⁸ Almost as symbolically valuable as Telperion are his

²⁰⁹ Lara Sookoo, “Animals in Tolkien’s Works,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 19.

²¹⁰ Sookoo, 21.

²¹¹ Sookoo, 20.

²¹² J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (London: The Folio Society, 1977), 351.

²¹³ Tolkien, “Appendix A,” in *The Return of the King*, 383.

²¹⁴ Tolkien, “To the Houghton Mifflin Co.,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 220.

²¹⁵ Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*, 50.

²¹⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 113.

²¹⁷ Curry, 49.

²¹⁸ “Two Trees of Valinor,” The Lord of the Rings Wiki, accessed March 3, 2024, https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Two_Trees_of_Valinor#cite_note-3.

copies, the two White Trees of Númenor and Gondor. The latter appears at the end of the trilogy, in the chapter of *Return*, “The Stewards and the King”, symbolising hope for the future of Gondor under Aragorn’s rule and generally hope for the new age of Men. A reflection of Laurelin’s beauty can be seen in the Third Age on golden-leaved mallorn trees in Lothlorien²¹⁹ which with its trees provides a haven and rest for the company. However, Peter Curry emphasises that the trees do not carry only symbolic value but also the “vulnerability”²²⁰ of normal trees, by which he underlines the already mentioned theme of ‘Machine’. Flowers are also significant in the stories; Tolkien was especially proud of his invention of yellow elanor and white niphredil²²¹ which again resemble the two trees of Valinor. But athelas seems to be the most important one, because due to its healing powers, it was one of the signs of Aragorn’s kingship before his coronation.

The geography of Arda is best shown on the maps that were made for each book. Tolkien in his letters draws great importance to them,²²² and as with everything regarding his legendarium, their production was lengthy, but the result was exceptionally detailed.²²³ The most widely known is the map of Middle-earth from *LotR* which generally shows the north and west. East and South are vague and known primarily as the source of evil²²⁴ because Wild Men and Orcs habit these locations. Arda is also interesting in its geographical changes throughout the Ages, the most notable ones are the sinking of a continent called Beleriand at the end of the First Age²²⁵ and the change from a flat world to a round one at the end of the Second Age, along with the sinking of Númenor.²²⁶

In general, the natural realm in *LotR* includes creatures with different levels of sentience but with characteristics unique to them, unlike the humanlike traits of animals in beast fables. The prevalent motifs in Middle-earth’s nature are colours of gold and silver, and especially trees which form a great part of the “Machine” and ecocritical themes. Regarding geography, Tolkien put much emphasis on maps of the places and continents that radically change throughout the secondary world’s history. The last subdivision of ‘Invention’ is the ontological realm which focuses on the secondary world’s magic system breaking the known physical laws.

²¹⁹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 259.

²²⁰ Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*, 55.

²²¹ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Christopher Tolkien,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 106.

²²² Tolkien, “From a Letter to Allen and Unwin,” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 171.

²²³ Alice Campbell, “Maps,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 407.

²²⁴ John F. G. Magoun, “South, The,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 622.

²²⁵ Tolkien, “Appendix F,” in *The Return of the King*, 458.

²²⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 315.

3.3.4 Ontological Realm

Magic is intrinsically bound to the fantasy genre, creating the necessary ‘impossible’ aspect of the secondary world. But every author approaches this realm differently. Some only use it as a source of ‘wonder’ and use it scarcely as a spice to an already compelling meal. Others create magic with specific rules known to a reader, providing him the joy of understanding the impossible. These two types of magic systems were named by the second author of this thesis’ juxtaposition, Brandon Sanderson who called the former Soft Magic and the latter Hard Magic in Sanderson’s *Laws of Magic*.²²⁷ The next paragraphs will introduce Tolkien’s magic system and assign it to the Sanderson’s types.

Magic in *Hobbit* and *LotR* is seen from the perspective of hobbits, for whom the workings of it are beyond their comprehension; therefore, understandably, there is no explanation for it. For example, when Gandalf uses “A blinding sheet of white flame”²²⁸ to break a bridge in Moria to throw down the balrog in front of him, there is no more information for the unnatural ability than the quote above. The second example is the voice of Saruman in the *Towers*’ chapter of the same name when Saruman uses a magical voice to persuade the king of Rohan to be his ally.²²⁹ Again, the reader only knows the desired effect (shown on the king’s convinced soldiers),²³⁰ but how it is done, what it exactly is, or what are its limitations is never revealed. Magic is also bound to several items throughout the epic, namely the Rings of Power, Palantíri, or the Mirror of Galadriel. Only in these cases, the reader is provided with more information about the magic because the hobbits have used them. The most recognised is the One Ring which can turn the bearer invisible. Carrying it for a longer time may increase the longevity of one’s life, but it also conveys the corruption of its maker, Sauron.²³¹

Tolkien, in an unsent letter from 1954, gives more structure to his magic system when he divides it into two branches: *magia* and *goeteia*.²³² The first creates physical effects,²³³ such as Gandalf’s white light in Moria or the making of magical objects. The effects of the second are not physical²³⁴ as is the case with Saruman’s voice. Tolkien emphasises that both *magia* and

²²⁷ Brandon Sanderson, “Sanderson’s First Law,” Brandon Sanderson, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/>.

²²⁸ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 249.

²²⁹ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 190.

²³⁰ Tolkien, 190.

²³¹ William Senior, “One Ring, The,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 484.

²³² Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchinson (draft),” in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 199.

²³³ Tolkien, 200.

²³⁴ Tolkien, 200.

goeteia can be used for good and evil, depending on the purpose of their usage.²³⁵ But despite the further classification, both magia and goeteia still fall into the definition of Soft Magic. The questions regarding the magic system are left unanswered to produce the sense of wonder and tension of not knowing what may occur.²³⁶ The exception are the magical objects, represented by the One Ring where the readers know its abilities (invisibility) and costs²³⁷ (madness). Thus, the magical items in *LotR* may be classified as Hard Magic, replacing the reader's tension for immersion of being able to solve problems with the characters.²³⁸

Conclusively, the magic system in *LotR* is according to Sanderson's Laws of Magic mostly Soft Magic, used rarely and only to induce the fantasy feeling. Hard Magic with explicit rules is present as well in the magical items of the Ring or Palantíri. The following subchapter will end the first half of the analytic section with my own degree of quality which focuses on the author's ideologies and the conscious or unconscious implementation of them in the works.

3.4 Author's Ideologies

J. R. R. Tolkien was a devout Catholic who was very open about his faith among his family, friends, colleagues, and even students.²³⁹ It can be safely said that Christianity has been a constant element in almost every part of his life. The question of this subchapter is now obvious: "Does Tolkien's faith pervade also in *LotR*?" Based on it, more inquiries suggest themselves, like whether the religious subtext has been a conscious decision or if the conservative nature of the 20th century Catholicism has any impact on the portrayal of women, races, and homosexuality.

To answer the overall question of this subchapter, there is Christian symbolism inside the books, but most of it is not intentional.²⁴⁰ Tolkien on many occasions expressed his disgust towards allegories, even in the foreword to the second edition of *Fellowship*.²⁴¹ Therefore, it can be safely assumed that, unlike C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956),²⁴² *LotR* was not meant to be Christian propaganda in any way. The exception to this 'rule' is Tolkien's

²³⁵ Tolkien, "To Naomi Mitchinson (draft)," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 199.

²³⁶ Sanderson, "Sanderson's First Law," <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/>.

²³⁷ Brandon Sanderson, "Sanderson's Second Law," Brandon Sanderson, accessed March 9, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-second-law/>.

²³⁸ Sanderson, "Sanderson's First Law," <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/>.

²³⁹ Bradley J. Birzer, "Catholicism, Roman," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 86–87.

²⁴⁰ Tolkien, "To Robert Murray, S. J.," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 172.

²⁴¹ Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition," *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 15.

²⁴² Tom Shippey, "Lewis, C. S.," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 359.

conscious implementation of the following dates: 25th December and 25th March which respectively mark fellowship's departure from Rivendell and the destruction of the Ring.²⁴³ Both dates have biblical meaning, the first referencing the birth of Jesus Christ, and the second is the date of the Annunciation, when the birth was announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary.²⁴⁴ However, Christian reading of the trilogy goes beyond these dates with the interpretation, arguing that Galadriel represents the Virgin Mary,²⁴⁵ the elven bread lembas is the eucharist,²⁴⁶ and that each of the characters of Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn symbolise one part of Jesus, the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.²⁴⁷ The Christian symbolism is undoubtedly present but, as has been said, probably not intentionally. This is why many scholars do not think of *LotR* as a Christian novel but rather as a product of Christian imagination which has been raised upon the scripture.²⁴⁸

It has been acknowledged that Tolkien's Christian belief mostly unknowingly seeps into his writing. The next goal of this subchapter is to determine whether *LotR* consists of only biblical references or if it also includes conservative Christian values, specifically towards females, other races, and homosexuality. Starting with the topic of women, it is known that Tolkien held traditional views on the role of women in society. In a 1941 letter to his son Michael, he implies that woman is defined by man²⁴⁹ and that in general, every woman wants to be a mother.²⁵⁰ According to the feminist criticism of *LotR*, precisely these opinions are embodied by the few female characters in the story. The heroic actions of the two most notable women, Arwen and Éowyn, are done because of their love for Aragorn.²⁵¹ The third most notable character is Galadriel who serves as a counterargument because she is as respected as her husband and often acts independently.²⁵² Based on this evidence, it can be said that *LotR* is not a feminist text, and in the treatment of female characters it is old-fashioned, but claims of Tolkien's misogyny²⁵³

²⁴³ J. R. R. Tolkien, "Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*," in *A Tolkien's Compass*, ed. by Jared Lobdell (La Salle, Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1975), 201.

²⁴⁴ Pavel Hošek, *Sloužím Tajnému Ohni: Duchovní zdroje literární tvorby J. R. R. Tolkiena* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2020), 63.

²⁴⁵ Birzer, "Catholicism, Roman," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 88.

²⁴⁶ Birzer, 87.

²⁴⁷ Hošek, *Sloužím Tajnému Ohni: Duchovní zdroje literární tvorby J. R. R. Tolkiena*, 62.

²⁴⁸ Hošek, 76.

²⁴⁹ Tolkien, "From a letter to Michael Tolkien," in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 49.

²⁵⁰ Tolkien, 49–50.

²⁵¹ Aline Ripley, "Feminist Readings of Tolkien," in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 202.

²⁵² Ripley, 202.

²⁵³ Brenda Partridge, "No Sex Please—We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*," in *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. by Robert Giddings (London: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1984), 191.

fall flat, as do charges of racism. It has also been shown in “Cultural Realm” that Tolkien respects Jewish nationality, and by that notion condemns Nazi racism; thus, there is no reason why it should appear in his works. The basic argument of these charges is that all dark-skinned people, the Wild Men, and Orcs, are portrayed as evil and all white people, Men, Elves, and Hobbits, as good²⁵⁴ which is not true, considering the treachery of Saruman the White or Gríma Wormtongue. Besides, Tolkien proves his liberalism in *LotR* by including the interracial friendship between Legolas and Gimli and the marriage between Arwen and Aragorn.²⁵⁵ Lastly, queer theorists interpret Frodo and Sam’s master-servant relationship as too intimate not to be homosexual.²⁵⁶ However, bearing in mind the rest of this subchapter, I believe that the intention was to portray love between men in a solely platonic way.

The author’s ideology is evident in *LotR*, but its existence is a result of Tolkien’s Christian upbringing rather than conscious implementation of the doctrine. Conservative values connected with Catholicism are only hinted at in the female characters, and paradoxically more apparent are liberal views on interracial relationships and, according to queer scholars, even on homosexuality. This conclusion marks the end of the first half of the analytic section which covers the essential parts of the classic fantasy worldbuilding established by Tolkien. The following analysis of *Stormlight* by Sanderson will go through the same degrees of quality.

²⁵⁴ Chism, “Race and Ethnicity in Tolkien’s Works,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 555.

²⁵⁵ Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*, 33.

²⁵⁶ Christopher Vaccaro, “Homosexuality,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, 285–286.

4. *The Stormlight Archive*

The second half of the analytic section focusing on Brandon Sanderson's epic fantasy serves as a case study of contemporary worldbuilding in epic fantasy. It is once again necessary to emphasise the ambitiousness of the series because each book in the series is almost as long or longer than the entirety of *LotR*,²⁵⁷ thus it is beyond the capacity of the thesis to cover every feature of this epic fantasy worldbuilding. This chapter aims to pinpoint only the most essential ones to get a sufficient picture of Sanderson's worldbuilding for the comparison in "Results". Another preliminary to the following subchapters is that the analysis of completeness, consistency, invention, and the author's ideology is strictly reduced to *Stormlight*, and the connections to other Cosmere stories are ignored. A thorough inspection of Cosmere may be the subject of another research.

4.1 Completeness

It is apparent that Sanderson was creating Roshar with the intention of completeness and saturation. At the same time, he was aware that worldbuilding is secondary and did not want to impede the story with an abundance of exposition. To avoid this, he uses 'Interludes', mentioned in the "Brandon Sanderson" chapter, and also various drawings and sketches. 'Interludes' have a form of short stories from numerous perspectives and in different settings than the ones in the main storyline. The purpose is to show the variability of Roshar's places, and cultures and to present current happenings outside of the characters' reach which may have an impact on the main story. The other method of worldbuilding is in the form of sketches by Shallan, one of the protagonists, who is a talented artist and a curious scholar at the same time. She draws not only the encountered events and places,²⁵⁸ as is the case with illustrations in *Hobbit*,²⁵⁹ but also animals,²⁶⁰ flowers,²⁶¹ and buildings,²⁶² all accompanied by extensive notes. Besides these sketches, a plethora of relevant maps are included, but that is discussed in "Natural Realm" below. These approaches to an 'encyclopedic impulse', as Wolf calls a worldbuilding pause from the story,²⁶³ are not original. Ursula K. Le Guin in *Always Coming*

²⁵⁷ According to the website arbookfind.com, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has a total of 455 125 words, while the longest *The Stormlight Archive* book, *Rhythm of War*, has 457 326.

²⁵⁸ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 1093.

²⁵⁹ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 7.

²⁶⁰ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 60.

²⁶¹ Sanderson, 982.

²⁶² Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 91.

²⁶³ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 30.

Home (1985) similarly used different narrators telling their stories which were supported by all kinds of maps, essays, and charts, to properly capture the fictional place.²⁶⁴ But in this case, discovering the world through a multiform kind of ‘encyclopedic impulse’ is in the foreground,²⁶⁵ while *Stormlight* manages to implement it into the story in an unobtrusive way.

This subchapter also deals with how Sanderson covers Tolkien’s fields of specialisation mentioned in *LotR* “Completeness”, which are namely economics, architecture, music, and history. These fields show presumably the best aspect of *Stormlight*’s worldbuilding, the interconnectedness of Wolf’s degrees – each of the invented features affects the rest of the realms. Examples can be economics and architecture; both can be explained by the magic from “Ontology Realm” called Soulcasting which can transform rocks into food²⁶⁶ or air into buildings.²⁶⁷ But the way of making the buildings is subordinate to an invented phenomenon from the “Natural Realm”, highstorms which are hurricanes periodically ravaging the land of Roshar²⁶⁸ from East to West.²⁶⁹ Due to this, the buildings have to be protected from the eastward side by a rock structure, called ‘lait’²⁷⁰ or by wedge-shaped roofs with the front of the house aiming westward.²⁷¹ *Stormlight* does not work with the traditional sense of music as an art form but more as a means of communication called Rhythms, which convey Parshendi’s emotions, for instance, Rhythm of Irritation.²⁷² The direct influence for creating the idea of a nation where each member naturally knows what ambivalent rhythms mean was Carl Jung’s theory of collective unconscious,²⁷³ which argues for the universality of mental concepts.²⁷⁴ Lastly, the gradually revealed history of Roshar is a cycle of Desolations and times of rebuilding, similar to Arda’s constant battle against evil, but it is nowhere near the detail of *Silmarillion*. Another distinction is in the narrative techniques used to reveal the past. In *LotR*, the characters themselves sing, narrate, or briefly allude to the stories of *Silmarillion*, whereas in *Stormlight*, it is through analepses caused by visions or unspoken memories.

²⁶⁴ Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Sub-creation*, 30.

²⁶⁵ John Scalzi, “Introduction: Maps, Facts, Gestalts and Le Guin,” in *Always Coming Home*, written by Ursula K. Le Guin (London: Gollancz, 2016), X.

²⁶⁶ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 100.

²⁶⁷ Sanderson, 101.

²⁶⁸ Sanderson, 83.

²⁶⁹ Sanderson, 231.

²⁷⁰ Sanderson, 70.

²⁷¹ Sanderson, 307.

²⁷² Sanderson, *The Words of Radiane*, 166.

²⁷³ “IAM(still)A novelist named Brandon Sanderson. AMA!,” Reddit, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/1ced7z/comment/c9fosdo/>.

²⁷⁴ C. G. Jung “The Personal and the Collective (or Transpersonal) Unconscious,” In *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 7: Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, ed. by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966), 69.

The technique of deliberate gap in *Stormlight* is premature to analyse because many of the current mysteries may be revealed in the next books. But to mention at least one intentionally enigmatic feature, a character called Wit. Much like Tom Bombadil, he is a helper of unknown origin and motivation, always appearing randomly when the situation is necessary.

In conclusion, Sanderson applies interludes and illustrations to deepen the worldbuilding in a simple and inconspicuous manner. But the reason why *Stormlight* feels complete is the interrelatedness of Wolf's realms, mainly visible in architecture but also in economics or music. Researching intentional omissions in Roshar's worldbuilding is pointless presently because the story is incomplete which also complicates the search for inconsistencies, a problem discussed in the following paragraph.

4.2 Consistency

According to Wolf's methodology, this subchapter would discuss inconsistencies in the main story, secondary plotline, and in the background information. However, so far, there have not been many of them. Those found are mostly timeline issues where the time and distance do not line up, for instance, a civil war leaving an area of a large state kingless and completely devastated took only a month or two.²⁷⁵ This is naturally only a minor detail which suggests a question about why there are no larger plot holes. It may be a result of what I already stated in the "Introduction", the larger editorial teams. One of Sanderson's employees is specifically a continuity editor, Karen Ahlstrom, whose job is to keep track of every piece of information and prevent any possible errors.²⁷⁶ Another reason could be the recency of the series and thus the lack of thorough analyses which would find more serious consistency problems. Admittedly, there are a lot of unanswered questions, but those can hardly be regarded as inconsistencies due to a high likelihood of being resolved within the next six novels. But the content of already published books is enough of a sample to discuss the inventions of *Stormlight*.

²⁷⁵ "Brando Sando has admitted a couple of times now in inconsistencies in the timeline of Stormlight Archive," Reddit, accessed March 19, 2024, https://www.reddit.com/r/Cosmere/comments/vuus0n/brando_sando_has_admitted_a_couple_of_times_now/.

²⁷⁶ "Karen Ahlstrom," Coppermind: The Brandon Sanderson Wiki, accessed March 18, 2024, https://coppermind.net/wiki/Karen_Ahlstrom.

4.3 Invention

4.3.1 Nominal Realm

Stormlight presents at least sixteen languages which belong to five different language families: Dawnate, Vorin, Makabaki, Iri, and Aimian,²⁷⁷ but most of the presented ones consist of a couple of words, and some of them were not even introduced properly. There are two apparent reasons for this. The first one is that to make the secondary world's languages readable, Sanderson, similarly to Tolkien, translates them into the primary world's ones.²⁷⁸ The second is that the four books have not explored the entire continent and rather focused on one part of it, Alethkar, with a racially diverse but rigid set of characters. Thus, this subchapter will only show the languages spoken by these characters, namely Alethi and Thaylen from the Vorin family and then Dawnchant, Parshendi, Unkalaki, and Shin from the Dawnate family.

The Vorin language family encompasses languages from five kingdoms united by the same religion, Vorinism.²⁷⁹ The language explored the most so far is Alethi because it is dominantly spoken by the protagonists. The inspiration for it was mostly Semitic languages, mainly Arabic, Hebrew, a bit of Mediterranean languages,²⁸⁰ and Chinese.²⁸¹ Like Arabic²⁸² Alethi also tends to be a synthetic language, a language forming a word with multiple morphemes.²⁸³ The main indicator of it is the usage of compounds²⁸⁴ during the name-making process. For instance, Adolin can be translated as 'born unto light' because "adoda" means 'light' and "lin" 'born unto'.²⁸⁵ Other known Alethi words are "Mathana"²⁸⁶ and "Mashala"²⁸⁷ conveying the meanings of 'older sister' and 'aunt' respectively. Another Vorin language is Thaylen, but there is little to know about it besides a greeting "Shaylor mkabat nour" – 'the winds have brought

²⁷⁷ "[No Spoilers] Birds of Roshar," Reddit, accessed March 22, 2024,

https://www.reddit.com/r/Stormlight_Archive/comments/5ffl09/no_spoilers_birds_of_roshar/.

²⁷⁸ Brandon Sanderson, "#13 - Brandon Sanderson Live Signing Session," YouTube Video, 2:00:14, July 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_dns53Px0g&ab_channel=BrandonSanderson, 31:40.

²⁷⁹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 159.

²⁸⁰ "The Worldcon Flash AMA – Brandon Sanderson," Reddit, accessed March 23, 2024,

<https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/1lhfl1e/comment/cbzatlc/>.

²⁸¹ "Emerald City Comic Con 2018," Arcanum: The Brandon Sanderson Archive, accessed March 23, 2024, <https://wob.coppermind.net/events/324-emerald-city-comic-con-2018/#e9301>.

²⁸² Badri Abdulhakim D. M. Mudsh, "A comparative study of tense and aspect categories in Arabic and English," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8, no. 1 (March, 2021): 2, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311983.2021.1899568>.

²⁸³ Ludmila Veselovská, *Form and Functions in English Grammar* (Olomouc, Palacký University, 2019), 65.

²⁸⁴ Shmili Lang, "The Languages of Roshar - Linguistics of the Cosmere: Part 1 (Brandon Sanderson, Stormlight Archive)," YouTube Video, 12:59, August 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg2NuZTkp_k&ab_channel=ShmiliLangs, 8:45.

²⁸⁵ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 493.

²⁸⁶ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 406.

²⁸⁷ Sanderson, 1057.

us safely'.²⁸⁸ The other tongues from the family are Veden, Herdazian, Nathan, and Karbranthian which have close to zero representation in the series so far.

The second chosen family, Dawnant, is backgrounded because only a few of the main cast of characters speak its languages, but that does not diminish its worldbuilding importance because the protolanguage is Dawnchant, a dead language of the native Rosharan people²⁸⁹ which had an immense influence upon the development of all of the presented languages even outside of the Dawnant family.²⁹⁰ The only restored sentence is “Anak malah kaf, del makian habin yah,” meaning “to be human is to want that which we cannot have”.²⁹¹ One of the Dawnchant’s direct descendants is Parshendi which is also not rich in vocabulary currently. The word “essai”, ‘a human lover’,²⁹² may lead to the assumption that it is a fusional language,²⁹³ a synthetic language where one morpheme consists of several grammatical features,²⁹⁴ but there is little evidence for this conclusion. More definite is the belief that Unkalaki is a polysynthetic language,²⁹⁵ one word conveys a whole sentence.²⁹⁶ The hint of it is the name of one Unkalaki character, Numuhukumakuaki'aialunamor, which supposedly comprises a whole poem about a rock.²⁹⁷ The last language is Shin which is, apart from the presumed greeting “tan balo ken tala”²⁹⁸ and the patronymic/matronymic system of naming children²⁹⁹ like Szeth-son-son-Valano, a mystery.

This subchapter has shown that the languages of *Stormlight* are various and unique, each being a different type based on morphology. Alethi is presumably synthetic, Parshendi is fusional, and Unkalaki is polysynthetic. However, the examples are too scarce to claim that they are grammatically complex. Despite that fact, immersion is still induced by the translation of Common Speech, mostly Alethi, into English and also by the inclusion of a protolanguage,

²⁸⁸ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 66.

²⁸⁹ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 1043.

²⁹⁰ “IAM(still)A novelist named Brandon Sanderson. AMA!,” Reddit, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/5t9nyy/comment/deomk8h/>.

²⁹¹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 1065.

²⁹² Brandon Sanderson, *Rhythm of War* (New York: Tor Books, 2020), 825.

²⁹³ Shmili Lang, “The Languages of Roshar - Linguistics of the Cosmere: Part 1 (Brandon Sanderson, Stormlight Archive),” 4:19.

²⁹⁴ Veselovská, *Form and Functions in English Grammar*, 67.

²⁹⁵ Shmili Lang, 4:28.

²⁹⁶ Veselovská, 65.

²⁹⁷ “Barnes & Noble B-Fest 2016,” Arcanum: The Brandon Sanderson Archive, accessed March 23, 2024, <https://wob.coppermind.net/events/90-barnes-noble-b-fest-2016/#e4584>.

²⁹⁸ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 537.

²⁹⁹ Shmili Lang, 6:24.

Dawnchant. The next subchapter will discuss whether the culture of races using the languages is more elaborate.

4.3.2 Cultural Realm

Similarly to the previous realm, there are too many races, thirteen, and even more cultures linked with them to cover. Thus, the aim is to describe the most developed ones so far which are primarily the speakers of the languages discussed above: Alethi, Thaylen, Parshendi, Unkalaki, and Shin. The paragraphs summarise their recognisable features of appearance, residence, political systems and specific cultural elements.

Starting with the warlike inhabitants of Alethkar, the Alethi are characteristically tanned skin,³⁰⁰ tall, and have dark hair.³⁰¹ The primary world equivalent would be a combination of an Asian and a Middle Eastern person. The choice of making the majority of the main cast darker was an intentional one, as it defies the fantasy cliché of white heroes and coloured enemies.³⁰² However, racism inside Roshar is not based on the colour of skin but on the colour of eyes. The society is structured into two groups: the lighteyes, the aristocracy, and the darkeyes, the working class.³⁰³ Each has its caste system; the status of darkeyes depends on the number of their nahn, where the first nahn is the highest.³⁰⁴ Lighteyes have the same system, but call the levels dahn.³⁰⁵ Intermixing between the lighteyes and darkeyes is possible, but the product of it is, in most cases, a heterochromatic child treated as the primary world's illegitimate offspring of a nobleman.³⁰⁶ This stratification is dictated by the Vorin religion³⁰⁷ which creates other culturally significant features of Vorin kingdoms, like rigid gender roles. A woman is permitted to learn to read, write, and study science and art,³⁰⁸ while a man is supposed to become a warrior. Male literacy is frowned upon.³⁰⁹ Also, a woman is expected to conceal her left hand.³¹⁰ This has been inspired by the Korean etiquette of not showing the sole of a foot.³¹¹ Interestingly,

³⁰⁰ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 13.

³⁰¹ Sanderson, 11.

³⁰² “Brandon Sanderson: «I want to show in my writing that there is something inherently good inside human beings»,“ Jot Down, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.jotdown.es/2016/12/brandon-sanderson-i-want-to-show-in-my-writing-that-there-is-something-inherently-good-inside-human-beings/>.

³⁰³ Sanderson, 10.

³⁰⁴ Sanderson, 156.

³⁰⁵ Sanderson, 106.

³⁰⁶ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 453.

³⁰⁷ Sanderson, 156.

³⁰⁸ Sanderson, 75.

³⁰⁹ Sanderson, 459.

³¹⁰ Sanderson, 156.

³¹¹ “Why Have the Safehand Covered?,” Brandon Sanderson, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://faq.brandonsanderson.com/knowledge-base/why-have-the-safehand-covered/>.

as the series moves on and the magic is more prevalent, these dogmas are less adhered to and society is becoming more liberal. When women, like Shallan, are becoming Knights Radiant, more females are becoming regular soldiers.³¹² Dalinar breaks the masculine norm by learning to read and write.³¹³ Most importantly, the relevancy of the social structure based on eye colour is diminishing, and eventually it will be removed entirely because more people can become Surgebinders which automatically lighten their eyes, as was the case with originally darkeyed Kaladin.³¹⁴ The argument is also supported by a precedent from a distant past when the Surgebinders were common and the society based on eye colour did not exist.³¹⁵

The political system of Alethkar is a monarchy economically focused on the military, with a king elected based on hereditary law; the crown passes upon the oldest male in line.³¹⁶ Other Vorin kingdoms adopted this system with the exception of business-focused Thaylenah where the monarch is elected more democratically by a council of merchants.³¹⁷ Alethkar's king holds supreme power over the federation of ten pryncedoms, each ruled by a highprince.³¹⁸ The pryncedoms are at war with Parshendi due to their alleged assassination of the former Alethi king Gavilar, but the war is lacking progress because the highprinces are acting independently.³¹⁹ A similar situation is visible on a global scale among individual nations, concerned only with domestic affairs. Dalinar aims to change this status quo by uniting the highprinces and eventually the whole Roshar in the so-called coalition of monarchs³²⁰ against a greater threat in the form of Voidbringers, vengeful creatures residing in one of the forms of the next race.³²¹

Apart from Aimians,³²² the only non-human race are black and red-skinned³²³ Parshendi, which is ironic because, as it is revealed in the third book, they are the descendants of the native people of Roshar, speaking Dawnchant, and humans are the alien invaders which caused the first Desolation.³²⁴ *Stormlight*, in this way, introduces the postcolonial theme when the protagonists

³¹² Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 368.

³¹³ Sanderson, 1193.

³¹⁴ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 1047.

³¹⁵ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 437.

³¹⁶ Sanderson, 1120.

³¹⁷ Sanderson, 591.

³¹⁸ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 233.

³¹⁹ Sanderson, 233.

³²⁰ Sanderson, *Rhythm of War*, 159.

³²¹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 1225.

³²² "Q&A with Brandon Sanderson," 17th Shard: The Official Brandon Sanderson Fansite, accessed March 18, 2024, <https://www.17thshard.com/forums/topic/2383-qa-with-brandon-sanderson/page/6/#comment-42469>.

³²³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 10.

³²⁴ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 1043.

have to deal with the atrocities done by their ancestors who partially enslaved the natives by making them thoughtless and completely docile. These are called parshmen³²⁵ to differentiate them from stronger Parshendi, but both names are human; they call themselves singers³²⁶ and listeners.³²⁷ The mute aspect of singers' slavery is significant because their rhythm-based communication is an essential part of their culture, as essential as other feature taken away from parshmen, the 'forms'.³²⁸ These define their physical and mental characteristics; for instance, a warform physically creates a carapace armour out of their body³²⁹ but also makes one more aggressive.³³⁰ There are more forms like workform, nimbleform, dullform, or mateform.³³¹ Each of these forms is represented in the democratic governmental body of Parshendi called the Council of Five which determines the future of the race. One of the decisions was to consent to a new form, stormform, which led to the return of their Voidbringer powers.³³²

The vindicative motives of the 'enemies' diverge *Stormlight's* conflict from Tolkien's fairy tale motif of good versus evil. The singers are not portrayed as a destructive race of Orcs but as a developed civilised race with a democratic government and a rich culture which was taken away from them by the imperialistic force of humans who inhabited their lands and enslaved them. To deepen the reader's empathy, from the second volume onward, chapters have been included from the perspective of Parshendi characters.

Intermixing of humans and singers formed new human races with tanned skin, like red-haired Unkalaki³³³ and brown-haired Herdazian³³⁴ which show physical signs of the Parshendi heritage, namely extra molars of Unkalaki, and Herdazian carapace fingernails.³³⁵ The inspiration for Horneater Peaks dwellers, the Unkalaki, came from Polynesians and Russians,³³⁶ and for Herdaz people there was a Hispanic influence.³³⁷ This is reflected in their political systems. Herdaz is, similarly to contemporary Spain, a monarchy,³³⁸ whereas Unkalaki, like

³²⁵ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 68.

³²⁶ Sanderson, *Rhythm of War*, 34.

³²⁷ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 163.

³²⁸ Sanderson, 165.

³²⁹ Sanderson, 164.

³³⁰ Sanderson, 713.

³³¹ Sanderson, 163.

³³² Sanderson, 204.

³³³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 254.

³³⁴ Sanderson, 604.

³³⁵ “[Oathbringer] I think flashback Dalinar is based off of Genghis Khan,” Reddit, accessed March 28, 2024, https://www.reddit.com/r/Stormlight_Archive/comments/3suo4l/comment/cx0p3t3/.

³³⁶ “[Oathbringer] I think flashback Dalinar is based off of Genghis Khan,” Reddit, accessed March 28, 2024.

³³⁷ “JordanCon 2014,” Arcanum: The Brandon Sanderson Archive, accessed March 29, 2024, <https://wob.coppermind.net/events/216-jordancon-2014/#e6467>.

³³⁸ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 468.

many Polynesian islands in the past, is a decentralised nation fragmented into numerous clans without a paramount ruler.³³⁹ The opposite of the human-Parshendi races are people of Shinovar called Shin who did not intermix at all due to their xenophobia.³⁴⁰ They are known for their pale skin in comparison with other races³⁴¹ and also for their social structure which is opposite to the Alethi one; farmers are at the top of the hierarchy and warriors at the bottom.³⁴² The last race left to be mentioned are skilled merchants from the island of Thaylenah who are most notable for their long white eyebrows.³⁴³

To summarise the subchapter, *Stormlight* offers a wide variety of original human races, each with unique physical or social characteristics. Some of these features have traceable inspiration from the primary world's cultures, but there is no sign of Roshar being a mythological history of any Earthen nation. Rather than the past, cultures in Roshar mirror current societal issues like racism, gender roles, religion, or postcolonialism. All of these are prevalent in Alethi society, and the views on them are getting less conservative and more liberal as magic becomes more common. That counts as yet another instance of the interrelatedness of realms where the ontological realm has an impact on the cultural one. However, the realm, apart from the cultures, also describes the main conflict of the series in comparison with Tolkien, presenting the antagonists in a more empathetic light. A different approach from Tolkien is likewise taken in the next realm.

4.3.3 Natural Realm

The defining concept of Roshar's ecology and geography are the aforementioned destructive hurricanes, called highstorms to which every creature, plant, and land is subordinated and had to adapt. Thus, the primary aim of the next few paragraphs is to convey in what various ways the invented fauna, flora, and geography are different from the primary world's equivalents due to the special circumstances. The secondary aim is to introduce another original concept called spren.

In general, Roshar's native fauna developed a defence mechanism in the form of various carapaces or shells, reminiscent of the primary world's crustaceans. A typical representative of these qualities are chulls, large crabs used for pulling wagons which can hide in their shells

³³⁹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 424.

³⁴⁰ "Idaho Falls Signing," Arcanum: The Brandon Sanderson Archive, accessed March 29, 2024, <https://wob.coppermind.net/events/355-idaho-falls-signing/#e10455>.

³⁴¹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 372.

³⁴² Sanderson, 537.

³⁴³ Sanderson, 56.

during a highstorm.³⁴⁴ A primary world equivalent would be oxen. Another example of an earth-like animal that evolved with a shell is the axehound whose name and small four-legged appearance reminds of dogs.³⁴⁵ Interestingly, there are mammals on Roshar that are not just imitations but identical to primary world animals, like horses or hogs, which were domesticated.³⁴⁶ A possible rationale for their presence is that they were brought by humans during their invasion of Roshar.³⁴⁷ A special breed of horse, Ryshadium shows signs of sapience because it chooses its rider and hardly allows anyone else to ride it.³⁴⁸ Other examples of advanced sentience are massive aquatic creatures called santhids which save humans from drowning.³⁴⁹ Santhids belong to a larger group of Roshar's shelled animals named greatshells because of their extraordinary sizes which may reach the extent of an island populated by humans.³⁵⁰ Common greatshells are chasmfiends which are hunted for their immensely valuable gemhearts used for Soulcasting, the magic of transforming rocks into food.³⁵¹ However, the systematic hunting has dwindled the numbers of this species without natural predators, thus making it endangered.³⁵² This issue of overhunting represents an ecocritical theme of *Stormlight*.

The flora also had to adjust to the unfavourable conditions of storms by retreating to safety. Grass, for example, hides underground when it feels vibrations in the air from approaching danger.³⁵³ Plants usually conceal their vines inside rocky shells,³⁵⁴ like the most frequent rockbud family which includes the eponymous 'true' rockbud and also vinebud.³⁵⁵ They usually serve as a feed for chulls,³⁵⁶ but there are flowers which have a use for humans as well, like antiseptic knobweed³⁵⁷, poisonous blackbane,³⁵⁸ or euphoric firemoss.³⁵⁹ When it comes to

³⁴⁴ Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive: A Pocket Companion to The Way of Kings and Words of Radiance*, 18.

³⁴⁵ Sanderson, 18.

³⁴⁶ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 460.

³⁴⁷ "Roshar," Coppermind: The Brandon Sanderson Wiki, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://coppermind.net/wiki/Roshar#Fauna>.

³⁴⁸ Sanderson, *Rhythm of War*, 353.

³⁴⁹ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 140.

³⁵⁰ Sanderson, 182.

³⁵¹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 268.

³⁵² Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 574.

³⁵³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 48.

³⁵⁴ Sanderson, 36.

³⁵⁵ Sanderson, 852.

³⁵⁶ Sanderson, 85.

³⁵⁷ Sanderson, 312.

³⁵⁸ Sanderson, 188.

³⁵⁹ Sanderson, 549.

trees, they are usually protected by stone barks, as is the case with dalewillow and dendrolith,³⁶⁰ and their leaves grow only to the west which is visible on stumpweight trees.³⁶¹

These defensive measures are present among almost all living things throughout the rocky geography of Roshar except for Shinovar where the conditions are much akin to those on Earth – the grass does not hide and mammals like horses are more prevalent. That is caused by its far eastern position, surrounded by the Misted Mountains which shield it from highstorms.³⁶² Shinovar, the Misted Mountains, and all the other natural and national structures can be seen on the detailed map of Roshar which, in general, shows the southern hemisphere of the planet where its only continent is situated.³⁶³ The books include a multitude of other maps depicting various cities,³⁶⁴ warcamps³⁶⁵ or specific lands³⁶⁶ and nations.³⁶⁷

The last aspect of the Natural Realm might be the most original one and certainly the most essential one for the following chapter, a spren. It is a spirit which physically personifies emotions (painspren), natural phenomena (flamespren), or concepts (creationspren).³⁶⁸ Besides being attracted to its titular idea,³⁶⁹ each is recognisable by different shapes and appearance; for example, painspren shows around wounded in a form crawling orange hands with long fingers³⁷⁰, while flamespren is a little humanoid beam of light dancing around a fire during which they change shapes.³⁷¹ These spren are not sapient, and they are called lesser spren. Its sapient analogues would be true spren which represent higher concepts,³⁷² like honour (honorspren), truth, lies (Cryptic), and more.³⁷³ True spren, who form their own societies in a Cognitive Realm called Shadesmar,³⁷⁴ can bond with a human in a Physical Realm which endows him with the magic of Surgebinding, making the person a Knight Radiant.³⁷⁵ Lesser

³⁶⁰ Sanderson, *The Words of Radianance*, 752.

³⁶¹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 672.

³⁶² Sanderson, 535–536.

³⁶³ “Prague Signing,” Arcanum: The Brandon Sanderson Archive, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://wob.coppermind.net/events/398-prague-signing/#e13208>.

³⁶⁴ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 1144.

³⁶⁵ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 104.

³⁶⁶ Sanderson, *The Words of Radianance*, 138.

³⁶⁷ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 8.

³⁶⁸ Sanderson, *The Stormlight Archive: A Pocket Companion to The Way of Kings and Words of Radianance*, 23–25.

³⁶⁹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 135.

³⁷⁰ Sanderson, 44.

³⁷¹ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 371.

³⁷² Sanderson, 60.

³⁷³ “Spren,” Coppermind: The Brandon Sanderson Wiki, accessed April 1, 2024, https://coppermind.net/wiki/Spren#True_Spren_2.

³⁷⁴ Sanderson, *The Words of Radianance*, 42.

³⁷⁵ Sanderson, 254.

spreen can bond as well, for instance, with animals like Ryshadium,³⁷⁶ or with Parshendi which is how they gain their forms.³⁷⁷

The most outstanding feature of Roshar's worldbuilding in *Natural Realm* is that it, unlike *LotR*, provides a cause for the appearance and characteristics of the shelled fauna, flora, and rocky geography. However, the main theme of this realm in Tolkien, the ecocriticism, is only outlined. For the lack of it, Sanderson compensates with high-quality mapmaking and more original ideas, mostly visible on the visually entertaining concept of spirits of emotions and ideas called spreem which are a gateway to the magic system of Surgebinding.

4.3.4 Ontological Realm

The purpose of this realm is to categorise Roshar's magic, namely Surgebinding, Old Magic, and magical items, on a scale between Hard and Soft Magic based on Sanderson's Laws of Magic devised by the *Stormlight* author Brandon Sanderson. The division is specifically in the First Law which describes the two types of magic systems. Soft Magic is defined as a tool for enhancing the fantasy feeling with the goal of kindling wonder inside the reader, achieved by not revealing its functioning. Whereas the main characteristic of Hard Magic is the understandability of the impossible, realised by a series of rules and limitations that must be abided by for the desired effect.³⁷⁸ The analysis will start with the main limitation of the magic systems, their source, called Stormlight which relates to the previous realm.

So-called highstorms devastate the land, making all the living develop a series of precautions against them. But they also bring a vapour called Stormlight³⁷⁹ which lights smaller gemhearts called gemstones,³⁸⁰ used as a currency and also as a light.³⁸¹ It neither originates in the Physical Realm nor the Cognitive Realm but in the Spiritual Realm,³⁸² the realm of the ideal representation of all things in the Physical Realm.³⁸³ Sanderson states that the direct inspiration for the creation of realms, especially the Spiritual, was Plato's theory of the forms,³⁸⁴ which

³⁷⁶ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 263.

³⁷⁷ Sanderson, 198.

³⁷⁸ "Sanderson's First Law," Brandon Sanderson, accessed March 8, 2024, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/>.

³⁷⁹ Sanderson, 639.

³⁸⁰ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 649.

³⁸¹ Sanderson, 72.

³⁸² Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 639.

³⁸³ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 309.

³⁸⁴ "I AM(still)A novelist named Brandon Sanderson. AMA!," Reddit, accessed March 17, 2024, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/1ced7z/comment/c9fosdo/>.

argues for the existence of ideals or Forms.³⁸⁵ It is the highstorm that “pierces all three realms”³⁸⁶ and thus in the Physical Realm can appear Stormlight absorbed by humans bonded with spren and fuel their powers, the Surges. But unlike gemstones, the human body is ineffective at keeping the Stormlight because the gas leaks through the body’s pores.³⁸⁷ This presents one of the fundamental parts of Hard Magic, the limitation of the powers which is, in this case, the inevitable exhaustibility of the magic’s source. This feature then provides further immersion for the reader who can simultaneously with the characters keep track of the amount of Stormlight used, how much of it is left in the gemstones, and whether there is any in close vicinity.

The magic powered by Stormlight is called a Surge, and there are ten types of it, each dealing with different forces of the world: pressure, gravitation, friction, light, transformation, growth, decay, motion, cohesion, and tension.³⁸⁸ The series reveals the Surges progressively, and thus, due to the ongoing state of the series, only the first half of the Surges was properly introduced. However, the pattern of the Surges’ rules and limitations has already been set in the “Prologue” of the first volume by the powers of pressure and gravitation wielded by the assassin of Alethi king Gavilar, Szeth Szeth-son-son-Valano. The “Prologue” firstly shows the limitation of the Surges, the Stormlight stored in gemstones, for which Szeth actively looks.³⁸⁹ Secondly, it summarises that a Surge can be used in various forms of named abilities, all of which have specific conditions for their use. The instances of these conditions and abilities will be described in the next paragraph, focusing on Szeth’s Surges of Adhesion and Gravitation which were chosen not only to represent the properties of all Surges but also to show Sanderson’s worldbuilding feature of creating visually pleasing concepts in a non-visual medium.

The tandem of Adhesion-Gravitation is controlled by an order of Knights Radiant called Windrunners whose member is one of the protagonists, Kaladin. Windrunners use abilities commonly known as the Three Lashings,³⁹⁰ the first of which is a product of Adhesion, “The Surge of Pressure and Vacuum”.³⁹¹ In other words, Adhesion provides abilities that can bind things together with an almost indestructible bond,³⁹² as is the case with Full Lashing which

³⁸⁵ Plato, *Republic* (Hertfordshire: Woodsworth Editions Limited, 1997), 225–230.

³⁸⁶ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 639.

³⁸⁷ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 13.

³⁸⁸ Sanderson, *The Words of Radianc*e, 1084.

³⁸⁹ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 12.

³⁹⁰ Sanderson, 1086.

³⁹¹ Sanderson, 1084.

³⁹² Sanderson, 1084.

can connect two objects by infusing one of them with Stormlight. In the “Prologue” of *The Way of Kings*, the Full Lashing is used on the doorframe which permanently closed the door when it was shut.³⁹³ This ability can be combined with Basic Lashing which is a power of the Gravitation Surge. As the name of the Surge suggests, the person using the second ‘Lashing’ controls the gravitational force of objects and people, including himself, which allows him to run on a ceiling,³⁹⁴ or even fly³⁹⁵ by changing the gravitational pull upwards. The last Windrunner ability, called Reverse Lashing, also interestingly utilises control of gravity. As with Full Lashing, the person infuses an object with Stormlight, but this time it does not glow; rather, it pulls the nearby light and objects in towards the infused object.³⁹⁶ Again, in the first book’s “Prologue”, Szeth uses the ‘Lashing’ to change the course of thrown spears towards a doorframe instead of his body.³⁹⁷ All this information is available to the reader, so he can think along with the characters about how to manage different situations. Overall, the number of conditions and limitations could be higher to produce a truly elaborate magic system, but the main requirement of Hard Magic is fulfilled, the Surges are understandable.

Magical objects also play a large role in Roshar, not just in battles but also in societal functioning. The latter is the purpose of fabrials, an umbrella term for items powered by gemstones with imprisoned spren.³⁹⁸ One type of it was already implied in the “Completeness” subchapter, where it is mentioned that some magic can transform rock into food. The magic is an effect of a fabrial called Soulcaster, an imitation of a Surge of Transformation.³⁹⁹ There are two limitations of fabrials. The first one is that it needs a specific gemstone; for instance, the Soulcaster needs an emerald,⁴⁰⁰ to capture a specific spren.⁴⁰¹ The second limitation is, as in Surges, a sufficient amount of Stormlight for the desired effect.⁴⁰² There are many other types of fabrials, but it is not clear whether an all-piercing magical sword Shardblade⁴⁰³ or power-enhancing armour Shardplate⁴⁰⁴ are among them because neither possess both limitations. Shardplate requires infused gemstones⁴⁰⁵ and Shardblade a bound spren⁴⁰⁶ but in general, it can

³⁹³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 16.

³⁹⁴ Sanderson, 23.

³⁹⁵ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 611.

³⁹⁶ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 18.

³⁹⁷ Sanderson, 18.

³⁹⁸ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 1084.

³⁹⁹ Sanderson, *Rhythm of War*, 1414.

⁴⁰⁰ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 72.

⁴⁰¹ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 347.

⁴⁰² Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 1084–1085.

⁴⁰³ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 15.

⁴⁰⁴ Sanderson, 20.

⁴⁰⁵ Sanderson, 21.

⁴⁰⁶ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 347.

be said that each magical item has some kind of limitation and a condition of use that makes their effects understandable. Similarly to Surges, Roshar's magical items are not the 'hardest' magical system, but their functioning is known to readers.

The same cannot be said about the only instance of Soft Magic in Sanderson's series, Old Magic. Its use is infrequent, and it is produced by only one large spren called Nightwatcher⁴⁰⁷ which essentially grants one wish called a boon to every visitor. Everyone has the right to one boon, but with it also comes a curse.⁴⁰⁸ In the past, Dalinar wished to forget the pain of losing his wife which was granted, but, at the same time, he was cursed with not remembering anything about her.⁴⁰⁹ Instead of her name, he heard a noise.⁴¹⁰ The boon and curse compile the effects of Old Magic, but its actual workings have never been explained. The focalisers, who are intimately acquainted with the workings of fabrials and Surges, are during their encounter with Nightwatcher in the same position as hobbits in *LotR* when they are observing Gandalf's magic. Neither understands the conditions or limitations of the happenings which is why the Old Magic, like the magic in *LotR*, can be classified as a Soft Magic.

Overall, the subchapter presents reasons why the Rosharan magical system and objects are, according to Sanderson's Laws, Hard Magic systems with clearly defined abilities and conditions for their usage. The incomprehensible Soft Magic is also incorporated in the form of Old Magic. The analytic section will be concluded by the last subchapter covering the extent of Sanderson's personal beliefs in his secondary world which were intentionally included in his secondary world.

4.4 Author's Ideologies

The primary objective is to discern whether Sanderson's Latter-day Saints belief transcends into his writing, and if so, in what ways and whether it is intentional. The interest is particularly in the questions of race, feminism, and LGBTQ+ representation because of the conservative nature of the Mormon church.

The answer to the primary question is that there are some parallels to Mormonism in *Stormlight*, but none of them were intentional. Similarly to Tolkien, Sanderson has on multiple occasions

⁴⁰⁷ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiancy*, 309.

⁴⁰⁸ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 881.

⁴⁰⁹ Sanderson, 911.

⁴¹⁰ Sanderson, 1104.

refused any intentional religious agenda in his writing,^{411,412} but admits that it comprises a large part of his life and that some aspects of it may be found in his stories.⁴¹³ An example of such an aspect in *Stormlight* can be the similarity between the oaths of the Knights of Radiance and the ‘covenant path’ in LDS.⁴¹⁴ To clarify, Radiants have to speak five oaths which serve as a guidance for their future actions,⁴¹⁵ and they may lead to more powers.⁴¹⁶ ‘Covenant path’ on the other hand requires speaking covenants, sacred agreements between a man and God which apart from salvation also provide unspecified “blessings”.⁴¹⁷ One of the first covenants is being baptised and receiving the Holy Ghost which serves as a spiritual direction in life.⁴¹⁸ Apart from the similarity between oaths and covenants, blessings and powers, guidance and direction, the breaking of oaths in *Stormlight* and abandoning of covenants in LDS lead to the same result of losing Surges⁴¹⁹ and blessings.⁴²⁰ I would even draw a similarity between the gift of the Holy Spirit and Kaladin’s bound honorspren which, besides the fact that it personifies a moral compass, is also a part of one of Roshar’s gods.⁴²¹ Another parallel is seen between Dalinar and the first prophet of the LDS, John Smith.⁴²² Both of them received visions from their gods where was revealed that none of the churches were correct. In Smith’s case, it was explicit,⁴²³ while in Dalinar’s case, it is more implicit from the god’s message that he is dead.⁴²⁴ Afterwards, both Smith and Dalinar were considered to be reformists in their religions. But none of the parallels presented are enough to negate Sanderson’s refusal of religious allegory in his books; thus, the inference is the same as in Tolkien – *Stormlight* is not a Mormon allegory but rather an output of a Mormon imagination.

⁴¹¹ “Brandon Sanderson: «I want to show in my writing that there is something inherently good inside human beings»,“ Jot Down, accessed March 27, 2024.

⁴¹² “Tell Me More About Your Religion And Writing,” Brandon Sanderson, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://faq.brandonsanderson.com/knowledge-base/tell-me-more-about-religion-and-your-writing/>.

⁴¹³ “Does Your Religion Shape Your Writing?,” Brandon Sanderson, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://faq.brandonsanderson.com/knowledge-base/does-your-religion-shape-your-writing/>.

⁴¹⁴ Liz Busby, “The Most Mormon Magic System: How Brandon Sanderson Turned Agency into Fantasy,” SFRA 51, no. 3 (Summer 2021): 170, <https://sfrareview.org/2021/07/18/the-most-mormon-magic-system-how-brandon-sanderson-turned-agency-into-fantasy/>.

⁴¹⁵ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 1036.

⁴¹⁶ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 1198.

⁴¹⁷ Wouter Van Beek, “Covenants,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 333.

⁴¹⁸ Bruce Douglas Porter, “Gift of the Holy Ghost,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 543.

⁴¹⁹ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 806.

⁴²⁰ Van Beek, “Covenants,” 333.

⁴²¹ Sanderson, *The Words of Radiance*, 243–244.

⁴²² Busby, “The Most Mormon Magic System: How Brandon Sanderson Turned Agency into Fantasy,” 169.

⁴²³ Richard L. Bushman and Dean C. Jessee “Smith, Joseph: The Prophet,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 1334.

⁴²⁴ Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, 1246.

Concerning political ideologies, the argument is opposite to the previous one – Sanderson consciously includes his political views in his fiction. Politically, Sanderson identifies himself as a liberal democrat⁴²⁵ and when it comes to issues of feminism and LGBTQ+, he stands on different grounds than the teaching of LDS. Where Sanderson and LDS only concur is the question of racism and its clear rejection.^{426, 427} The handling of this subject in *Roshar* has already been discussed in *Stormlight*'s "Cultural Realm", concluding that society's racism based on eye colour will eventually grow irrelevant with increasing numbers of automatically lighteyed Surgebinders. This inclusion of racism and its critique were conscious decisions.⁴²⁸ The same can be said about strict gender roles where the lines between men's and women's places in society get blurrier as the series goes on. Even at the beginning, women are portrayed in traditionally men's positions of academic researchers rather than in maternal settings which should be in the women's forefront, according to LDS.⁴²⁹ But the point where Sanderson and LDS diverge the most is the topic of LGBTQ+. LDS prohibits any relationship outside of a heterosexual one⁴³⁰ and does not approve of biological or social transitioning.⁴³¹ Meanwhile, Sanderson currently supports all of the above and purposefully introduces LGBTQ+ characters in his books.⁴³² In *Stormlight* specifically, there is a homosexual character called Drehy whose relationship with another man sparks up a conversation during which Kaladin has a comment encapsulating Sanderson's views and their conscious representation in the text: "...try to understand what they want out of life, and respect that, rather than projecting onto them what you think they *should* want out of life".⁴³³

⁴²⁵ "On Brandon Sanderson's Views," Reddit, accessed April 6, 2024,

https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/7a5x50/on_brandons_sanderson_views/.

⁴²⁶ Cassia C. Flores and Enoc Q. Flores, "Race, Racism," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 1191.

⁴²⁷ "Brandon Sanderson: «I want to show in my writing that there is something inherently good inside human beings»,“ Jot Down, accessed March 17, 2024.

⁴²⁸ "Brandon Sanderson: «I want to show in my writing that there is something inherently good inside human beings».“

⁴²⁹ Barbara B. Smith and Shirley W. Thomas, "Women, Roles of," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 1574.

⁴³⁰ Victor L. Brown, Jr., "Homosexuality," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 656.

⁴³¹ "Transgender Individuals," in *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), 38.6.23.

⁴³² "I've heard you are a practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

What are your opinions on gay rights, particularly in light of the church's controversial relationship to the LGBTQ+ community? (Also related: Do you still agree with the views you expressed in 2008 in your essay about Dumbledore's homosexuality?)" Brandon Sanderson, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://faq.brandonsanderson.com/knowledge-base/ive-heard-you-are-a-practicing-member-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-what-are-your-opinions-on-gay-rights-particularly-in-light-of-the-churchs-controversial-rel/>.

⁴³³ Sanderson, *Oathbringer*, 366.

In sum, the researched question of whether Sanderson's Mormon belief influences his writing has a positive answer, with the addition that the influence is not intentional but rather a product of his Mormon imagination. The opposite finding was reached with the topics of feminism and LGBTQ+ for which Sanderson, unlike LDS, advocates and deliberately portrays them in his fiction like *Stormlight*. This demonstrates one of many differences between Sanderson and Tolkien found in the next chapter where the ideologies and each of Wolf's measurements are compared between the two personages of epic fantasy.

5. Results

The third and final section of the thesis will use the gathered data from the analytic section and compare them to provide the titular evolution of epic fantasy and also to predict its future. The sequence of comparisons will follow the analytic section structure, starting with completeness and ending with the author's ideologies.

Regarding completeness, *Stormlight* proves not only that Sanderson pondered upon the functioning of various fields like Tolkien did with economics and architecture, but also that he builds upon them and adds so-called interrelatedness of realms where each Wolf's realm impacts others. However, where *Stormlight* does not meet the worldbuilding standards of *LotR* is the extensive history of Middle-earth and the impression that the adventures of hobbits are only a small part of it. Every epic fantasy after *LotR*, including *Stormlight*, is aware of the importance of the secondary world's history, but the vastness of Middle-earth's three ages was never replicated, and presumably, it never will be.

On the other hand, Sanderson adds to the completeness other forms of worldbuilding that were not included in *LotR* or anywhere else to this extent without impeding the story. These forms include interludes from various settings and illustrations of fauna, flora, or buildings with notes about their functioning. To achieve this level of saturation, *Stormlight* currently includes four out of ten planned volumes, each of which has around 400,000 words.⁴³⁴ In comparison, *Fellowship* has only 180,000.⁴³⁵ The progress in this field is evident but not new, as shown in older epic fantasy series like the fourteen-volume *The Wheel of Time* and the planned seven-book-long *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, where individual novels contain around 300,000⁴³⁶ or more⁴³⁷ words. Finally, Tolkien's idea of creating a mythology for England with his secondary world did not become a trend in epic fantasy. Naturally, in many cases, there was a direct inspiration from medieval history, as is the case with Martin's epic fantasy and *The War of the Roses*.⁴³⁸ But mostly, the epic stories draw inspiration from all around the world and from

⁴³⁴ "Words of Radiance," Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.arbookfind.com/bookdetail.aspx?q=182838&l=EN&slid=635697763>.

⁴³⁵ "The Fellowship of the Rings," Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.arbookfind.com/bookdetail.aspx?q=737&l=EN&slid=635696660>.

⁴³⁶ "The Eye of the World," Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.arbookfind.com/bookdetail.aspx?q=32815&l=EN&slid=638311866>.

⁴³⁷ "A Dance with Dragons," Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.arbookfind.com/bookdetail.aspx?q=149240&l=EN&slid=638311820>.

⁴³⁸ Elisabeth Brander, "Read this Book, and You Will Find All the Grand and Marvelous Things to be Found": *A Song of Ice and Fire* Travelogues," *Mythlore* 41, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2022): 91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48692595>.

different parts of history, as in *Stormlight*. Overall, the most possible trend in the future of epic fantasy regarding completeness is the mentioned interrelatedness of realms and the multiform approach to the ‘encyclopedic’ impulse, which lies in the interludes and illustrations.

The consistency findings point out only timeline issues in the contemporary series, while *LotR* has a few secondary problems and even more concerning background information. The secondary inconsistencies of *LotR* stem mostly from the fact that its prequel, *The Hobbit*, was not supposed to be part of the legendarium. The effect of it in *LotR* is that neither Sauron nor Lothlorien elves are familiar with the existence of an entire race of hobbits. The issues in background information include minor plot discrepancies, like the conflicting statements about who is the eldest in Middle-earth. In sum, there is a positive development and the reason for it is most probably the presence of a professional editorial team, which includes a person specializing in consistency. But this profession has a long tradition in epic fantasy now; it goes far back to *The Wheel of Time* and its continuity editor, Maria Simons.⁴³⁹

Since Tolkien, there has not been an epic fantasy author who would possess his philological education and a lifelong passion for creating functional languages that would be capable of forming poems like “*Namárië*” in Quenya or “*A Elbereth Gilthoniel*” in Sindarin. Despite that fact, *Stormlight* still works with its languages in an interesting way. For example, apart from Tolkien’s features of translated Common Speech and the existence of a protolanguage, Sanderson created each of his more frequent tongues as a different type of language based on morphology: Alethi is synthetic, Parshendi is fusional, and Unkalaki is a polysynthetic language. However, this does not hide the fact that their occurrences in the text are scarce. A similar situation is with languages in *A Song of Ice and Fire* where Dothraki and High Valyrian have only a limited vocabulary.⁴⁴⁰ Both of the instances support the assumption that epic fantasy authors will continue to draw less importance to constructing functional languages and focus more on other parts of worldbuilding, like fictional cultures.

Races of Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, and Men from *LotR* form one of the most glaring parts of Tolkien’s legacy to the fantasy genre, appearing in numerous formula fantasy works like R. A. Salvatore’s *Legend of Drizzt* (1988–present) and also in some epic fantasy like Tad Williams’ *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn* trilogy (1988–1993) or Andrzej Sapkowski’s *The Witcher Saga* (1994–1999). At the same time, there have always been epic fantasy series that did not include

⁴³⁹ “Interview with Maria Simons,” Dragonmount: A Wheel of Time Community, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://dragonmount.com/blogs/entry/299-interview-with-maria-simons/>.

⁴⁴⁰ David J. Peterson, *The Art of Language Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 97, 207.

them, starting as early as only thirteen years after the release of *LotR* with the first instalment of *The Earthsea Cycle* (1968–2001) by Ursula K. Le Guin. Thus, an argument about *Stormlight* diverging from Tolkien's races is correct, but nothing new in the genre. More interesting is Sanderson's actual approach to the races, which also differs from Tolkien's. Most notably, the race of antagonists, the singers, have, unlike orcs, their own focalisers which provide sufficient background for understanding their motives, making them sympathetic. However, *Stormlight* does not thoroughly explore each of his thirteen races this way. The rest of the focalisers focus more in-depth on one culture called Alethi which deals with the same societal issues as primary world nations, like racism, gender roles, the influence of religion, or relations with other nations in the postcolonial period. These topics develop throughout the series as the society grows to be more liberal, proportionately to the amount of magic in the secondary world. This qualitative approach of exploring only one culture to reflect our society may be the future of cultural realms. Another possibly influential feature of Sanderson's worldbuilding is the sympathetic race of antagonists and the societal changes within the cultures because a similar dynamism of the environment is visible in the next realm.

The natural realm is peculiar to compare because it seems that each author focused on a different part of it. Both Middle-earth and Roshar include a variety of named flora with specific purposes, original sentient fauna serving as helpers, and exquisitely produced maps covering every aspect of the worlds. But Tolkien on top of this utilises his flora to convey one of the central themes of *LotR*, the ecocritical and anti-industrialist "Machine". Sanderson also touches upon the subject by mentioning the danger of overhunting chasmfiends, but that is truly only a brief remark compared to the whole storyline of Saruman deforesting Fangorn Forest. *Stormlight*'s focus is more on the functionality of the world based on the causes and effects of his invented features. The periodical hightstorms not only radically change the scenes in which the characters act, but they mainly determine the appearance and behaviour of plants, animals, and land on Roshar. Thus, based on Roshar, the future fictitious natures in epic fantasy will be created mainly to support the overall understandability of worldbuilding rather than to bear serious themes of ecocriticism. The theme seems to have shifted more into a genre of science fantasy like *Dune Chronicles*, *Dragonriders of Pern* series (1967–present) by the McCaffreys, or the contemporary *The Broken Earth* series (2015–2017) by N.K. Jemisin which are still part of Heroic Epic in Palmer-Patel's terms⁴⁴¹ but not purely fantasy anymore. Lastly, part of Roshar's nature are also spren, spirits embodying abstract emotions and ideas. These symbolise

⁴⁴¹ Palmer-Patel, *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy*, 177–179.

another presumably important worldbuilding feature of simple yet visually pleasing concepts as if they were made for a visual medium. It is not a coincidence that spren are closely connected with another easily imaginable concept, Surgebinding.

The two approaches to the ontological realm could not be more different than those of Tolkien and Sanderson. Tolkien applies magic as another feature of fantasy to produce a sense of wonder for the hobbits and readers alike. The charm of it is in the fact that we cannot understand it and thus can be surprised every time it is used. Magic seems limitless in most of the classic fantasy, like *The Earthsea Cycle*.⁴⁴² This type also has its appearance in *Stormlight*, but Sanderson mostly wants to limit the fantasy elements and lead readers to understand them by providing a set of rules for the magic. This way, readers do not have to be just observing hobbits, but they can get under the skin of magicians and perform the magic with them. These two approaches are called Soft and Hard Magic. Surgebinding in *Stormlight* stands among many other Hard Magic systems in modern fantasy, for instance, Sympathy in *The Kingkiller Chronicle* (2007–present) by Patrick Rothfuss,⁴⁴³ Chromaturgy in *Lightbringer* series (2010–2019) by Brent Weeks⁴⁴⁴ or Allomancy in another Sanderson’s Cosmere series *Mistborn* (2006–present).⁴⁴⁵ This trend will most likely continue and some of the Hard Magic may be influenced by Sanderson’s ideas, which rationalise such visual spectacles as a man changing his gravitation to run on walls or even fly.

Proposing an exact evolution of authors’ ideologies being purposely incorporated in epic fantasy is difficult because there does not seem to be a time when all of the authors would choose only one of the two options – to consciously include them or not. Since the ‘beginning’ there have been these two parallel approaches. The first was promoted by C. S. Lewis, which is visible in *Narnia*, and the second by Tolkien. Throughout the history of epic fantasy, there were authors on both sides of the barricades. Phillip Pullman’s *His Dark Matters* (1995–2000)⁴⁴⁶ and Terry Goodkind’s *The Sword of Truth* (1994–2020) stand on ‘Lewis’ side’⁴⁴⁷ while G. R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* stands⁴⁴⁸ on ‘Tolkien’s side’. Sanderson seems to lie

⁴⁴² Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (Berkeley, California: Parnassus Press, 1968), 30–31.

⁴⁴³ Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind* (London: Gollancz, 2007), 75.

⁴⁴⁴ Brent Weeks, *The Black Prism* (New York: Orbit, 2010), 13.

⁴⁴⁵ Brandon Sanderson, *The Final Empire: Mistborn Book One* (London: Gollancz, 2009), 58–59.

⁴⁴⁶ Marek Oziewicz and Daniel Hade, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition,” *Mythlore* 28, no. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 2010): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26814910>.

⁴⁴⁷ “Brandon Sanderson: «I want to show in my writing that there is something inherently good inside human beings»,“ Jot Down, accessed March 27, 2024.

⁴⁴⁸ Aegon Targaryen, “George R. R. Martin on Religion,” YouTube Video, 3:15, April 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFBEh1345fE&ab_channel=AegonTargaryen, 1:14.

somewhere in between. The symbolism of his church in *Stormlight* is more of an output of Mormon imagination than a knowing decision, but the choice to include liberal themes of feminism, homosexuality, and racism was intentional. The finding implies that at least the implementation of the author's political stances will remain in epic fantasy, and thus that the two sides will prevail.

To summarise, the results show that some features of *Stormlight*'s worldbuilding are not original, specifically the lack of functioning languages and original races without Tolkien's elves or dwarves. Also, to improve consistency, Sanderson employs a person in an already established position of a continuity editor. Nevertheless, in almost every other realm, *Stormlight* innovates. For example, a sense of completeness is provided by interludes, illustrations, and the interconnectedness of the realms. The latter can be demonstrated by an understandable and highly visual magic system that influences society's views on the primary world's issues. Both the visually pleasing magic and the reflection of contemporary issues in fictional society are also potentially significant worldbuilding features. Among them can be counted the dynamism of a natural realm that due to the frequent highstorms, unlike *LotR*, provides the cause for the impossible characteristics of flora and fauna. Lastly, Sanderson differs from Tolkien by incorporating his political ideologies into the epic fantasy.

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to propose an evolution and possible future of worldbuilding in epic fantasy based on the comparison of worlds from the quintessential fantasy *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien and contemporary representative *The Stormlight Archive* by Brandon Sanderson. To achieve a comprehensive conclusion, the thesis was structured into three sections, namely theoretical, analytic, and results. The theoretical section introduced the genre, the authors, their works, and Mark J. Wolf's methodology of analysing worldbuilding which was applied in the following analytic section on the individual worlds. The last section presented the comparison of the data and provided the ultimate answer for the evolution and the future of epic fantasy worldbuilding. These findings will also help discern where *Stormlight* stands in the evolution of epic fantasy and whether it can be considered a work of revisionism, natural progression, or antithesis.

The findings show a betterment of consistency due to the presence of specialised continuity editors and it has been also proven that Tolkien's elaborate approach to history and constructed languages will not be repeated. But along with the high number of instalments in the series and the divergence from Tolkien's races of elves, dwarves, and orcs, these trends were part of the genre for decades, and *Stormlight* only affirms their continuation. The results also proved that the unexplained marvellous magic, established by *LotR*, will be replaced by understandable magic bound by specific rules and that the nature will always be filled with original flora and fauna. But more importantly, the natural realm will not explore one of the principal themes of *LotR*, the ecocritical theme, and instead, it will focus on the explanation of nature's 'secondariness'. Regarding my own degree of author's ideologies, the thesis predicts that based on the intentionally placed political stances in *Stormlight*, the epic fantasy authors will continue expressing their political views in their fiction. *Stormlight* also demonstrates progress in the completeness of fictional worlds with a plethora of interludes, illustrations and mainly with the interrelatedness of Wolf's realms, where each invention affects the whole world on every level. Another new piece of future worldbuilding gained from the analyses is the gradual change of natural and social settings under the influence of weather and highly visual magic, regardless of the literary medium.

All of the findings lead to the final research question: what role does *Stormlight* play in the evolution of epic fantasy? The lack of originality, mainly in the nominal realm or cultural realm, would suggest it is only a product of its predecessors, following time-proven techniques and

methods. However, the worldbuilding in completeness, the natural realm, and the ontological realm provide new and innovative features that will presumably influence future writers. Thus, the answer is that *Stormlight* can be considered a revisionist work regarding worldbuilding in the epic fantasy genre.

In conclusion, after almost seventy years, the classical worldbuilding of *LotR* still has an undeniable influence upon contemporary works like *Stormlight*, but to progress the evolution of the genre even further, Sanderson builds upon these foundations and offers new features and techniques, proving himself as another significant persona of epic fantasy and also as Tolkien's worthy successor who will in another seventy years resonate with future writers.

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Annotation

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- Supervisor:** prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.
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Abstract:

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to discover and describe evolutionary steps in epic fantasy worldbuilding over the course of several decades. I will use M. J. P. Wolf's framework of analysing fictional worlds and Brian Attebery's theory of fantasy. The contrastive analysis will focus on two significant series in the epic fantasy genre – J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) and Brandon Sanderson's *The Stormlight Archive* (2010–present). The creation of their worlds, Middle-Earth and Roshar, is compared on the basis of completeness, consistency, invention and authors' ideologies. These two series represent classical and modern approaches towards fantasy worldbuilding and the results of their comparison reveal which traditional tropes persevered, which are obsolete and which tropes are completely new and might be expected in the future works of the genre.

Anotace

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- Klíčová slova:** J. R. R. Tolkien, Brandon Sanderson, Brian Attebery, Mark J. P. Wolf, Pán Prstenů, Archiv bouřné záře, tvorba fikčních světů, fantasy, epická fantasy, Středozem, Rošár, kontrastivní analýza, tropy

Abstrakt:

Cílem bakalářské práce je nalézt a popsat evoluci tvorby fikčních světů v epické fantasy za posledních několik dekad. Využiji teoretického rámce analýzy fikčních světů M. J. P. Wolfa a teorie fantasy Briana Atteberyho. Kontrastivní analýza je zaměřena na dvě významné série v žánru epické fantasy – Pán prstenů J. R. R. Tolkiena (1954–1955) a Archiv bouřné záře Brandona Sandersona (2010–doposud). Tvorba jejich světů, Středozemě a Rošáru, je porovnána na základě celistvosti, konzistence, invence a ideologií autorů. Tyto série představují klasický a moderní přístup k tvorbě fikčních světů ve fantasy a výsledky jejich porovnání ukážou, které tradiční tropy přetrvaly, které jsou zastaralé a které jsou zbrusu nové a mohou být očekávány v budoucích dílech žánru.