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**Middle-Earth and The Circle of the World:
A Comparison of High Fantasy World-Building Tropes**

Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently and that I have listed all primary and secondary sources.

In Olomouc

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Introduction

While the fantasy genre was still in its roots, academic scholars have often overlooked or completely disregarded it. However, the situation shifted in the second half of the 20th century. During this time, there was a massive surge of new fantasy works, alongside critical studies on them and the whole genre. In recent years, there has been a growing interest towards world-building — the study of the creation and analysis of imaginary worlds. Fantasy scholars wrote many essays on the subject. One of the leading experts on the study of imaginary worlds, Mark J. P. Wolf, has gathered these essays and released them in his anthologies. The world-building theory will serve as a theoretical and methodological basis for the analysis of two series within the high fantasy genre.

The first trilogy, which probably needs no introduction, is *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) by J. R. R. Tolkien. Not only is the trilogy often regarded as one of the first examples that set the standards for high fantasy, but it may have also been the cause that helped to change academia's perspective on the whole genre. Tolkien's Middle-earth (a continent of the imaginary world Arda) incorporated many high fantasy tropes that were afterwards frequently implemented by the following fantasy authors. This is one of the reasons why *LotR* is the perfect benchmark to evaluate and analyse other fantasy works. Therefore, in this thesis, Tolkien's trilogy will serve this purpose.

The other series that will be analysed is *The First Law* trilogy (2006-2008) by contemporary fantasy author Joe Abercrombie. His first trilogy comprises *The Blade Itself* (2006), *Before They Are Hanged* (2007) and *Last Argument of Kings* (2008). The novels are set in an imaginary world called the Circle of the World. Abercrombie's series is often regarded as grimdark fantasy. One of the features of this subgenre is to subvert the traditional tropes of high fantasy. For this reason, Abercrombie's series appears as an ideal and contrastive counterpart to Tolkien's work.

The thesis will analyse and compare world-building techniques and tropes relating to the high fantasy genre. The goal of the thesis is to determine the extent of Abercrombie's deviation from the traditional methods and tropes of high fantasy world-building, and whether we can consider him a revisionist of the high fantasy genre.

The thesis is divided into two sections, theoretical and analytical. The theoretical part begins with an introduction to the study of fantastic fiction and fantasy.

This chapter provides and explains the often overlapping terminology relating to fantastic fiction. The chapter will also provide a brief outlook on the origins of the fantasy genre, continuing with the typology of fantasy, and the introduction to the grimdark subgenre. The theoretical part then moves into the world-building theory and the study of imaginary worlds, where Mark J. P. Wolf's method of analysing imaginary worlds will be introduced. The analytical part starts with the examination of Tolkien's imaginary world in terms of its completeness, consistency, and invention, where his methods and tropes will be presented. Finally, the thesis introduces Joe Abercrombie and *The First Law* series. Abercrombie's world-building will be analysed and compared with the traditional tropes of Tolkien's *LotR*.

1. Fantasy Genre

As the *Online Etymology Dictionary* states, the expression ‘fantasy’ has had its place in the English lexicon since the early 14th century. Fantasy initially stood for “illusory appearance,” followed by “fantastic imagination” in the 16th century. However, the term denoting the label of a fiction genre was supposedly established by 1948.¹ Interestingly, this period seems to coincide with the establishment of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, which began publishing in the late 1940s. In the coming decades, the label ‘fantasy genre,’ or simply ‘fantasy,’ has been heavily commercialised and gained the popularity of millions of readers. As a result, nowadays, you would hardly find a bookstore without a fantasy section in it. However, what is fantasy in the literary sense? The term itself is incredibly broad and exceedingly difficult to define. The following subchapter will explore basic terminology relating to fantasy, including the ‘fantastic,’ the ‘marvellous,’ and even ‘fantasy’ itself. The chapter will then proceed to the origins of fantasy and will also investigate how different scholars constructed their ideas around fantasy literature and its ambivalent nature in the literary canon.

1.1 Introduction to the Terminology

Seemingly, the term ‘fantastic’ could be regarded as the adjective form of ‘fantasy’ literature. However, in literary criticism, it is scarcely used in such a way. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute and John Grant state that the ‘fantastic’ was first used as a critical term concerning fiction in the 1930s-40s.² Since then, it served as a term not only comprising fantasy works but also science fiction. The usage of the term further expanded due to the fantastic short stories that were being published in magazines, for instance, in the American *Fantastic Adventures* (1939-53), or *Fantastic* (1952-80). Generally, the fantastic has been used by critics as “a general term for all forms of human expression that are not realistic.”³ Therefore, fantastic may be used as an umbrella term for most non-mimetic (non-realistic) fiction.

However, if we take a step back, the term ‘fantastic’ gained the attention of Anglo-American literary scholars in 1975 due to the translation of *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) by Tzvetan Todorov. In the English translation by Richard Howard, ‘fantastic’ was rather misleadingly derived from the French ‘fantastique.’

¹ “Fantasy,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/fantasy#etymonline_v_1122

² John Clute and John Grant, “Fantastic,” in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 335.

³ Clute and Grant, “Fantastic,” 335.

Brian Attebery, one of the leading scholars of fantasy literature, explains that the French ‘la littérature fantastique’ is an entirely different genre in contrast to the Anglo-American ‘fantastic.’ The French fantastique comprises stories with inexplicable and unusual events that may or may not have been caused by supernatural forces. In the English tradition, the French fantastique can be confined to the 19th-century fiction exemplified by Henry James’s Gothic novella “The Turn of The Screw.”⁴ However, in Todorov’s publication, he does not describe the fantastic as a separate genre and neither as the umbrella term for all non-mimetic fiction. But rather, he describes it as a concept that lies on the boundary between two other genres — the ‘marvellous’ (the supernatural) and the ‘uncanny’ (the natural).⁵ Typically, towards the end of the story, when the cause of the unusual event is discovered, the fantastic vanishes and is replaced by either the marvellous or the uncanny, depending whether the cause of the event was supernatural force or something completely rational. On the other hand, when the uncertainty remains unresolved, the story maintains the fantastic. Conclusively, the fantastic in Todorov’s terminology does not refer to the umbrella term as Clute and Grant described it. In fact, Todorov defined it as a concept that is related to the protagonist’s hesitation and uncertainty in a specific French literary genre.

Due to the misleading nature of the term ‘fantastic,’ some Anglo-American critics and scholars have called for a different expression to be used as a general term for non-realistic fiction. For instance, John Clute promotes ‘fantastika,’ since he believes that most Anglophones still unconsciously exclude science fiction from the umbrella term of the ‘fantastic,’ possibly due to the expression’s misleading morphology.⁶ Fantastika is frequently used in Czech and Eastern European literary criticisms as a label that incorporates science fiction, fantasy, and horror.⁷ Therefore, in these literary traditions, ‘fantastika’ is the closest equivalent to the fantastic as a general term. Furthermore, another term relating to non-mimetic fiction, ‘speculative fiction,’ discards the morphological derivations from ‘fantasy’ altogether and could be

⁴ Brian Attebery, “Is Fantasy Literature?,” in *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 20.

⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, “The Uncanny and the Marvelous,” in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 41.

⁶ “John Clute: Fantastika,” Locus Online (*Locus Magazine*, September 27, 2009), <https://locusmag.com/2009/09/john-clute-fantastika>

⁷ “Fantastika,” SFE: Fantastika, accessed September 28, 2022, <https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fantastika>

also used as an unambiguous umbrella term.⁸ However, speculative fiction is rarely used within academic circles.

To complicate matters even further, in Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), instead of using the fantastic to refer to the umbrella term of all non-mimetic fiction, she uses 'fantasy.' Jackson defined fantasy as a critical term applied "to any literature, which does not give priority to realistic representation."⁹ In her view, fantasy is an umbrella term for myths, legends, fairy tales, as well as science fiction and horror. Therefore, based on Jackson's interpretation, her idea of 'fantasy' to some extent overlaps with Clute and Grant's definition of the fantastic. On the other hand, *The Lord of the Rings*, which would generally be considered part of the genre of fantasy, Jackson describes as 'marvellous' fiction.¹⁰

Possibly one of the most valuable studies on fantasy, which changed the way fantasy works are defined and studied, is *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) by Brian Attebery. One of the publication's essays distinguishes between fantasy as mode, genre, and formula. Attebery proposes that fantasy is both a mode and a formula. He considers mode to be a very broad concept; a way of telling stories.¹¹ Attebery believes that mode is a storyteller's stance on the world as well as their means of portraying it.¹² There are two modes, the mode of imitation, which tries to reflect realism and the faithfulness to the real world; and the fantastic mode, which appears to be limitless in the possibilities of our imagination. Both modes contrast one another, yet, they are not ultimate opposites.¹³ When both modes are placed on a spectrum, realistic fiction lies closer to the mode of imitation. However, even realistic fiction is seldom purely mimetic. Every fiction needs at least a small amount of the fantastic, otherwise, the stories we tell would be precise retellings of our everyday experiences. The same idea applies to the fantastic mode, which has to rely on certain real-world aspects. Fiction cannot completely delve into the fantastic mode, otherwise, it would be incomprehensible and unimaginable to us. Therefore, we need to ground our imagination in certain aspects of the real world to tell our stories.

⁸ "Speculative Fiction," Dictionary.com (Dictionary.com), accessed September 10, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/speculative-fiction>

⁹ Rosemary Jackson, "The Fantastic as a Mode," in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ Jackson, "The Fantastic as a Mode," 14.

¹¹ Brian Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," in *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 2.

¹² Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 2.

¹³ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 2-3.

While some authors may be discouraged by the endless possibilities of the mode of the fantastic, they may retreat to more guaranteed formulaic methods. This is how Attebery introduces fantasy as a formula, which is essentially a commercialised product that is restricted and depends on the already established tropes, settings, and stock characters specific to the genre.¹⁴ The typical example of the fantasy formula would be Tolkien's works, which inspired countless of fantasy authors that came after him. Tolkien received a great deal of praise from Attebery, going as far as considering his works as our "mental template" for fantasy form; and, according to him, they will continue to be so until a different work reaches a similar impact.¹⁵ Conclusively, some fantasy authors rely on the fantasy formula to set their stories alongside the already established tropes and use them as guidelines to ground their stories in the fantasy genre. Others try to delve into other modes to create a work of fiction that would present an innovative perspective on the genre. Therefore, the fantasy genre is then believed to lie in the middle ground between the fantastic mode and the fantasy formula.¹⁶

Continuing with fantasy as a genre, the most essential segment in Attebery's essay is where he introduces 'fuzzy sets.' This is a concept he establishes to provide a classification within the fantasy genre.¹⁷ These fuzzy sets relate to a prototypical theory that divides the genre into centre and edges. Generally, we tend to evaluate fantasy works based on remoteness from the centre, where the formulaic examples of fantasy lie. The further we move from this centre, the less the fiction resembles traditional fantasy. Also, when it lies closer to the edge, it may interfere with other genres. Therefore, the cluster of works, which share similar elements with the centre of the genre, can be considered the fuzzy set of fantasy. Based on the results of an 'unscientific' experiment done by Attebery, in which respondents were to rank specific fantasy works according to their prototypicality, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* stood in the bullseye of what the respondents consider the fantasy genre.¹⁸ This circumstance supports Attebery's hypothesis concerning the centre of fuzzy sets, and, it also proves that *LotR* can be used as a perfect benchmark for the analysis of other fantasy works.

¹⁴ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 2.

¹⁵ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 14.

¹⁶ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 11.

¹⁷ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 12.

¹⁸ Attebery, "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula," 14.

As was already mentioned, there appears to be no definite consensus on the terminology among scholars of fantastic fiction. To sum up a few distinctions, the fantastic was used as an umbrella term for all non-realistic fiction (Clute, Grant), as a concept within the French fantastique genre (Todorov), and as a mode of writing (Attebery). On the other hand, fantasy is often regarded as a genre within the umbrella term of the fantastic, but less so as a general term for all non-mimetic works. While Attebery's definition of the fantasy genre may seem rather vague, his interpretation has been widely accepted by fantasy scholars. For instance, Farah Mendlesohn completely rejects the search for the ultimate definition of fantasy, as she believes that after a long search for it, a consensus has finally emerged.¹⁹ Mendlesohn accepts Attebery's concept of fuzzy sets and even expands on this theory with the typology of fantasy.²⁰

1.2 Origins and Development of the Genre in the Literary Criticism

Although the label for the fantasy genre is relatively recent and goes back only to the previous century, the elements of the fantastic were present in the Western literary canon from its beginnings. Modern fantasy takes its structures, motifs, and fantastic elements from myths, legends and folklore, which are even older than literature itself,²¹ as well as Chivalric Romances.²² Additionally, the literary origins could be traced back as far as to Homer and his epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*. Clute and Grant call these early texts with fantastic elements "taproot texts."²³ Moreover, they believe that although many contemporary readers would think of these earlier works as fantastic fiction, readers before 1600 would not perceive them as such.²⁴ The notion of the fantastic was first brought up as the opposition to realism during the beginnings of the scientific revolution in Western Europe — during the Age of Enlightenment. Before the Enlightenment, whenever stories were told, writers and readers always perceived stories as impossible and the "impossibility of these stories was their point."²⁵ Therefore, the opposition between the fantastic and the realistic

¹⁹ Farah Mendlesohn, "Introduction," in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), XIII.

²⁰ see Mendlesohn's typology in chapter 1.3.

²¹ Brian Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), xli.

²² Ann Swinfen, "Fantasy and the Marvellous," in *In Defence of Fantasy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 2.

²³ John Clute and John Grant, "Taproot Texts," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 921.

²⁴ John Clute and John Grant, "Fantasy," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 338.

²⁵ Clute and Grant, "Fantasy," 338.

modes was then unnecessary as both coexisted alongside one another. The Age of Enlightenment, with its pragmatic views of the world, highly stigmatised fantastic elements in fiction. Although this hostility caused a deliberate decrease in the number of works with fantastic elements, it ultimately helped fantastic works and fantasy to be seen as the opposition to realistic fiction and to be defined as their own genres.²⁶

According to Attebery, the foundation of the fantasy genre can be traced back to the end of the 18th century with *Kunstmärchen*. These *Kunstmärchen* stories are imitations of German folktales, exemplified by the works of Musäus and the brothers Grimm.²⁷ Attebery believes that the foundation of the fantasy genre lies in “the imposition of one particular set of restrictions on the mode of the fantastic.”²⁸ The *Kunstmärchen* stories, which adopted the mood and setting of previous German folktales, were the first such restrictions. Therefore, they can be viewed as the true starting point of modern fantasy. Paradoxically, Attebery states that when such restrictions or “narrowings” of a genre are in place, the more productive the genre becomes with a surge of new texts with similar features being implemented.²⁹ And as the following authors started to impose restrictions on the mode of the fantastic, the fantasy genre began to take form.

The following generation’s most influential writers of fantasy stories were George MacDonald and William Morris. MacDonald was a Scottish writer best known for his fairy tales and fantasy novels, namely *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), which are sometimes credited as the earliest modern fantasy novels.³⁰ Gary Wolfe is convinced that MacDonald was influenced by the German romantics. To prove his point, Wolfe states that many volumes of their works, including the popular two-volume *German Romance* (1827) were translated and published in Edinburgh when MacDonald was still a child. Therefore, they could have affected him.³¹ The German romance fiction and the fantasy genre are in some ways related and this connection would also support Attebery’s claim regarding the *Kunstmärchen* as the starting point of modern fantasy. Furthermore, owing to

²⁶ Clute and Grant, “Fantasy,” 338.

²⁷ Attebery, “Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula,” 10.

²⁸ Attebery, “Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula,” 10.

²⁹ Attebery, “Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula,” 10.

³⁰ Gary K. Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15.

³¹ Wolfe, “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany,” 13.

MacDonald's insights on the fantasy genre in his essay "The Fantastic Imagination," and his later major influence on J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams,³² he can be regarded as the true father of modern fantasy. Therefore, the claim of the general public that Tolkien is the father of the fantasy genre is not entirely accurate, although he was certainly the one who popularised a specific form of fantasy.

While we have already touched upon the roots of the fantasy genre, we can now move to its development within literary criticism. The fantasy genre had a rough start being considered in the great literary canon. In 1968, a collection of *LotR* criticism *Tolkien and the Critics* was released, being one of the first collections of essays on Tolkien's works. Attebery states that, at this time, no single theory has been proposed by critics for the examination of fantasy. Therefore, they were forced to focus on elements that were important for the standard literary theory at that time. The critics were restricted in their discussions to the analysis of stylistic features, themes or evaluation of characters and their values.³³ Some essays in the previously mentioned collection question the literary qualities of *LotR*, and some even believed that the text they were reading was not literature at all. One of these critics was Burton Raffel, the American writer and translator of *Beowulf*. Although he seemed to appreciate Tolkien's work, even calling it 'magnificent,' he stated that "making stories, even wonderful stories, is not the same as making literature."³⁴ According to Raffel, *LotR* did not check the criteria for style, characterisation and incident that would satisfy the standard literary theory. To prove his stance, Raffel calls attention to the fact that Tolkien does not attempt to delve into sensory realities and rather focuses on narrative realities. While speaking of Tolkien's characters, Raffel questioned whether Tolkien has something meaningful to offer to his readers about our existence.³⁵ Another, even harsher critic, Edmund Wilson, who was associated with modernist criticism, went as far as calling *LotR* a "juvenile trash" and that the author had "little skill at narrative and no instinct for literary form."³⁶ Conclusively, as early critics evaluated *LotR* through traditional formalist lenses, it became clear that fantasy should be reevaluated through other means. As a result, this new evaluation would reveal

³² Wolfe, "Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany," 19.

³³ Attebery, "Is Fantasy Literature?," 18.

³⁴ Burton Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," in *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Neil David Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 218-246, 219.

³⁵ Raffel, "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," 236.

³⁶ Edmund Wilson, "Oo, THOSE AWFUL ORCS!," JRRVF, accessed September 5, 2022, https://jrrvf.com/sda/critiques/The_Nation.html

fantasy's merits and, consequently, the genre would be considered worthy of being included in the literary canon.

A theory that emerged and could have been used for the analysis of modern fantasy was narratology. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, narratology is a study, which deals with “the structure and function of a narrative, and its themes conventions and symbols.”³⁷ Narrative theory's ideas were brought to the Anglo-American academia mainly from French structuralism in the 1960s. However, even before the French structuralists, Vladimir Propp, a Russian Formalist scholar, laid the foundation of the theory with *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). This work attempted to detail the structure of fairy tales. While analysing Russian fairy tales, Propp witnessed consistent patterns within the genre. As a result, he established a classification comprising thirty-one functions relating to the stages of the plot, starting with the departure of a family member and ending with the hero's wedding and the ascension to the throne.³⁸ Although not all stages of the plot need to apply to every fairy tale, their sequence is often identical.

Propp also distinguished seven character archetypes he calls the “dramatis personae.”³⁹ These dramatis personae closely relate to psychoanalysis and the Jungian concept of archetypes. C. G. Jung believed that, alongside our immediate consciousness, “there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.”⁴⁰ Jung calls this collective unconsciousness. How can we apply this concept to literary works? There is a belief that every character in a story, even a non-literary one, has a purpose or a certain function. Therefore, through Jung's archetypes, scholars can analyse recurring character types in different types of fiction, including fantasy. Among Propp's character types, he distinguishes ‘the hero,’ whom the readers empathise with the most. According to Propp, the hero often becomes the victim of the villain or departs on a search. On the other hand, ‘the villain’ is the hero's counterpart and prevents him from achieving his goal. A variant of the villain is ‘the false hero,’ who acts

³⁷ Angus Stevenson, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21973.

³⁸ Vladimir Y. Propp, “The Functions of Dramatis Personae,” in *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 26-65.

³⁹ Vladimir Y. Propp, “The Distribution of Functions Among Dramatis Personae,” in *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 79-80.

⁴⁰ C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung: Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*, trans. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 43.

courageously like a hero would. However, when the time comes, he betrays the hero for his own gain. ‘The helper’ is often a wise person and is the type of character who provides support for the hero in his quest. Sometimes, the helper may blend with ‘the donor,’ who provides the hero with wisdom or a special weapon. Before the hero ventures on a quest, he can meet another archetype, ‘the dispatcher,’ who sends him on the quest. The dispatcher can often be identical to ‘the princess’s father.’ Finally, ‘the princess’ is a rather passive character archetype and can be considered as a person the hero is supposed to seek and save.⁴¹

Another study, which opened up new areas of research on narratives was *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) by Joseph Campbell. In this publication, Campbell delves into the field of psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypes to come up with the concept of The Hero’s Journey.⁴² The Hero’s Journey, also referred to as the monomyth, deals with a model that describes the hero’s adventure based on common plot points. Generally, these plot points are assembled into three general stages: departure, initiation, and return. Campbell proposes that the departure starts with the call to adventure, which can be refused by the heroes at first. However, they accept this call and are provided with help from a mentor figure, who guides and assists them with supernatural aid. Afterwards, the heroes set forth from their ordinary life and leave the threshold of their known world. In the initiation stage, beyond the threshold, heroes venture through worlds unfamiliar to them. There, they encounter various trials until they overcome the greatest ordeal and gain the reward, which was the goal of their journey.⁴³ The return stage may start with the so-called Magic Flight, which covers the escape with the reward. Afterwards, the heroes cross the threshold for the second time, returning to the familiar world. The heroes are now shaped by the experiences they have encountered and become comfortable in both familiar and unfamiliar worlds. In the final sub-stage, called Freedom to Live, the heroes begin to appreciate every moment of their lives and are released from their past and future fears.⁴⁴

In the case of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, The Hero’s Journey is perfectly applicable to both Bilbo and Frodo, respectively. Both are guided by the same mentor, Gandalf,

⁴¹ Propp, “The Distribution of Functions Among Dramatis Personae,” 79-80.

⁴² “Hero with a Thousand Faces,” Joseph Campbell Foundation, accessed September 12, 2022, <https://jcf.org/titles/the-hero-with-a-thousand-faces>

⁴³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 227-228.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 182-226.

who accompanies Bilbo and provides Frodo with magical aid and the Ring. The ultimate reward is then the acquisition of the Ring and Arkenstone for Bilbo and the destruction of the Ring for Frodo. Overall, both Propp's functions of the plot and Campbell's The Hero's Journey can equally apply to fantasy works as well as to other types of fiction. Therefore, narratology has become one of the widely accepted ways of how to analyse fantasy fiction. Propp and Campbell's theories will be briefly referred to again alongside the summary of *The First Law* trilogy.

1.3 Typology of Fantasy and its Subgenres

The fantasy genre can be divided into several subgenres based on particular criteria. This subchapter will primarily focus on Farah Mendlesohn's taxonomy of fantasy based on how the fantastic elements enter the narration. The following paragraphs will attempt to disambiguate the overlapping commercial labels of the fantasy subgenre. Furthermore, the contemporary subgenre of fantasy, grimdark, will be introduced in its own subchapter.

In contrast to Attebery's fuzzy set, Farah Mendlesohn, the author of *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), expands on Attebery's theory and breaks up the fantasy genre into four categories. These categories are differentiated based on the mode in which the fantastic enters the text. Namely, these categories are portal/quest, intrusion, liminal and immersive fantasies. Although these are the most prototypical fantasies with distinct patterns, Mendlesohn notes that there are also fantasy stories which fit neither of these categories, calling them irregulars.⁴⁵

At first sight, portal and quest fantasies may appear as two distinct categories. For Mendlesohn, the portal fantasy typically incorporates a gateway (sometimes a metaphorical one) through which characters are transported from the real world into the imaginary one. On the other hand, quest fantasies are usually set in an immersive world where there is no passage to the real world. However, Mendlesohn believes both fantasies depend on similar narrative strategies and each assumes the same movements: transition and exploration.⁴⁶ Therefore, Mendlesohn concludes that portal and quest fantasies should be integrated into the same category. Possibly one of the most prototypical examples of portal fantasy can be seen in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series,

⁴⁵ Mendlesohn, "Introduction," in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, XIV-XXV.

⁴⁶ Farah Mendlesohn, "The Portal-Quest Fantasy," in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 2.

where in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), the passage into the imaginary world is hidden inside of a wardrobe. Additionally, although characters can enter the world of Narnia, the fantastic elements cannot be unleashed into the real world. In the case of the quest fantasy, characters typically transition from ordinary life, where the fantastic is nearly non-existent or suppressed, to direct contact with the fantastic. In the prototypical quest fantasy stories *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, this transition can be seen in Bilbo and Frodo's departure from Shire into the wider world of Middle-earth. The strategy of exploration is then executed similarly in both the portal and quest fantasies, as the protagonists investigate the unfamiliar fantastic worlds.

The following Mendlesohn's category, which happens to be effectively contrasted with the portal fantasies, is the intrusive fantasy. Unlike portal fantasies, intrusive ones are exclusively set in the real world. Additionally, the real and the fantastic worlds overlap in intrusive fantasies. This means that the fantastic elements of the supernatural world often trespass into the familiar world. On the other hand, in the portal fantasy, the real and the fantastic are frequently separated into self-contained worlds. Furthermore, characters in the intrusive fantasy stories can often recognise the norm from the fantastic intrusion.⁴⁷ Mendlesohn believes that the most prominent genre of this category is the horror novel.⁴⁸ Aside from horror fiction, possibly the most popular work of intrusive fantasy is the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007). In this series, the wizarding world covertly exists on top of the familiar world and both worlds directly influence one another.

In Mendlesohn's original article regarding fuzzy sets, "Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy" (2002), she introduced the category of liminal fantasy also as "estranged fantasy."⁴⁹ According to Mendlesohn, these fantasies rely on irony and 'equipoise,' which is a certain balance that closely matches Todorov's conception of uncertainty and hesitation in the Fantastique genre in *The Fantastic* (1970).⁵⁰ Liminal fantasies generally seem to place its readers into a situation where they are questioning the fantastic elements that are being described by the protagonist. In liminal fantasies, the readers are given evidence proving that the story is set in the real world.

⁴⁷ Farah Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 13, no. 2 (50) (2002): 169-183, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308579>, 178.

⁴⁸ Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," 177.

⁴⁹ Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," 179.

⁵⁰ Farah Mendlesohn, "The Liminal Fantasy," in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 182.

In consequence, when the fantastic elements appear, they tend to be foregrounded as they disrupt the real world. However, these fantastic elements do not distress the protagonists. They take these elements for granted and are not overwhelmed by them.⁵¹ Therefore, liminal fantasies can be closely linked to magic realism. According to Mendlesohn, a prototypical example of this category is a lesser-known work *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1927) by Hope Mirrlees.⁵²

The last Mendlesohn's category is immersive fantasy. She describes it as "a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world."⁵³ According to her, the works within this category are typically set in a self-contained imaginary world. The credibility of this imaginary world highly depends on an assumption of realism, which does not need to be explained.⁵⁴ In this respect, immersive fantasy closely resembles realistic fiction. Generally, readers explore the imaginary world through various protagonists.⁵⁵ Through their perspectives, the readers get to accept and interpret the world as the protagonists perceive it. According to Mendlesohn, in immersive fantasy, unlike in the portal and quest fantasies, characters tend to accept the fantastic elements of the world they live in.⁵⁶ This applies unless the world is grounded in realism and the magical elements are seen as abnormal. The prototypical example of immersive fantasy would be *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin, or the *Discworld* stories by Terry Pratchett.

Mendlesohn's typology provides a useful division based on similar patterns of fantasy stories. However, it is hardly ever used as a commercial label. The following paragraphs will briefly explore fantasy subgenre labels that are often used commercially. As the quantity of the subgenres is vast, we will focus on the ones that are crucial for the sake of the thesis.

One of the fundamental labels is the dichotomy of 'high fantasy' and 'low fantasy.' According to Stableford, the labels were first coined by Lloyd Alexander in one of his essays "High Fantasy and Heroic Romance" (1971).⁵⁷ The criteria for the classification is setting, or the type of world. High fantasies are set in secondary

⁵¹ Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," 179.

⁵² Mendlesohn, "The Liminal Fantasy," 184.

⁵³ Farah Mendlesohn, "The Immersive Fantasy," in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 59.

⁵⁴ Mendlesohn, "Introduction," in *Rhetorics*, 20.

⁵⁵ Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," 175.

⁵⁶ Mendlesohn, "Toward A Taxonomy of Fantasy," 175.

⁵⁷ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 198.

worlds. Therefore, the label relates to Mendlesohn's previous categories of immersive fantasy and portal/quest fantasy. High fantasy is frequently applied to Tolkien's *LotR*, however, this trilogy has also been classified as 'quest fantasy,' 'epic fantasy,' as well as 'heroic fantasy.' These labels greatly overlap and are used interchangeably. Stableford points out that the heroic fantasy label continues to be useful as it assembles works, which embrace the archetypal template of The Hero's Journey popularised by Campbell.⁵⁸ A similar thought could also apply to the quest fantasy, as The Hero's Journey closely relates to the character's departure on an adventure, which is often prompted by a quest. Furthermore, Clute and Grant argue that the epic fantasy label is used for larger-scale series, which are set in secondary worlds. However, supposedly, the term has lost its value, as publishers place the label epic fantasy on heroic fantasies that expand to several volumes.⁵⁹

The counterpoint to high fantasy is 'low fantasy.' While high fantasies are associated with secondary worlds, low fantasies are set in the primary world marked by intrusive fantastic elements.⁶⁰ Therefore, considering Mendlesohn's categories, low fantasies would tie in with her concepts of intrusive and liminal (estranged) fantasies.

1.3.1 Grimdark Fantasy

'Grimdark' is a subgenre of the fantasy genre that has risen in prominence at the turn of the millennium. Since the subgenre is relatively recent, there is a lack of thorough academic research on it. However, grimdark and its characteristic features have been discussed by various fantasy authors and reviewers. One of these fantasy authors is Adam Roberts, who believes that the term grimdark came from a tagline of a science fantasy tabletop game *Warhammer 40,000*, which states: "In the grim darkness of the far future there is only war."⁶¹ Afterwards, the label has been popularised and some fantasy authors seem to have reinforced the grimdark label; namely, Joe Abercrombie, who refers to himself as 'LordGrimdark' on his social media profiles.⁶²

⁵⁸ Stableford, *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*, 197.

⁵⁹ John Clute and John Grant, "Epic Fantasy," in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 319.

⁶⁰ Gary K. Wolfe, *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 67.

⁶¹ Adam Roberts, *Get Started in Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy* (London: Teach Yourself, 2014), 42.

⁶² see Abercrombie's official Twitter profile displayed as @LordGrimdark.

Adam Roberts defines grimdark as an opposition to the uplifting “Pre-Raphaelite visions of idealized medievaliana,” and it stresses how violent, amoral and dark reality can be.⁶³ Another British fantasy author, A. J. Dalton, attempted to classify the emerging subgenres of fantasy based on the socio-historical moments, which could have altered the distinctiveness of the subgenres. Considering grimdark, Dalton acknowledged that at the turn of the century, when the world was becoming rapidly more globalised, the certainties of high and epic fantasies “were no longer appropriate or genuinely representative of our shared society and culture.”⁶⁴ Additionally, Dalton believes that people tend to see things in shades of grey more and the prospect of evil is a matter of perspective.⁶⁵ He also states that the rise in popularity of grimdark fantasy was preceded by other subgenres. One of them was ‘dark fantasy,’ which incorporates elements of horror as well as immoral characters. Dark fantasy may pose some similarities with grimdark, however, according to Dalton, dark fantasy provides only a single antagonist at the top of society. On the other hand, grimdark “describes repressive or lawless society in which the majority are the most corrupt, immoral, or bullying.”⁶⁶ Generally, the most essential aspects of grimdark are gloomy atmosphere, depiction of violence, and the absolutes in the dichotomy of good and evil are non-existent, which leads to a morally ambiguous society and characters.

Additionally, grimdark can be considered as a part of a revisionist movement, or ‘Revisionist Fantasy.’ According to Clute and Grant, these fantasy works attempted to break the standardised tropes of the fantasy genre.⁶⁷ In other words, grimdark attempts to revise what Attebery would call the formulaic fantasy, which exemplified by Tolkien’s works and those of his followers. Since grimdark is pitted against the rather optimistic heroic fantasy and its goal is to subvert traditional tropes, it has also been referred to as the “anti-Tolkien” genre.⁶⁸ Merriam-Webster dictionary defines tropes, or clichés, as “a common or overused theme or device.”⁶⁹ While authors can use tropes as guidelines to ground their work in a specific genre, due to the ‘overused’ disposition,

⁶³ Roberts, *Get Started in Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 42.

⁶⁴ A. J. Dalton, “Embodiments of Evil and Reflections of Social Change in Second-World Fantasy,” in *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Francesca T. Barbini (Edinburgh: Luna Press, 2019), 88.

⁶⁵ Dalton, “Embodiments of Evil,” 73-74.

⁶⁶ Dalton, “Embodiments of Evil,” 93.

⁶⁷ John Clute and John Grant, “Revisionist Fantasy,” in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (London: Orbit, 1999), 810.

⁶⁸ Roberts, *Get Started in Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 42.

⁶⁹ “Trope,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trope>

tropes are often viewed with reluctance. This reluctance over the formulaic fantasy tropes may have been one of the reasons for the rise in prominence of the grimdark subgenre.

The leading authors of grimdark are Glen Cook with *Chronicles of the Black Company*, Andrzej Sapkowski and *The Witcher* series, the highly popular George R. R. Martin and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Mark Lawrence and *The Broken Empire* series, R. F. Kuang with *The Poppy War*, and most importantly for this thesis, Joe Abercrombie with *The First Law* series.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Adrian Collins, "Top 10 Grimdark Must Reads," *Grimdark Magazine*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.grimdarkmagazine.com/top-10-grimdark-must-reads>

2. World-Building Theory

World-building theory (or worldbuilding), is a relatively new area of research that is focused on exploring and understanding the creation of fictional worlds and their subsequent analysis. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term began to be used in the 19th century to describe “the imaginative realm of artists and poets.”⁷¹ However, nowadays, it is generally thought of as a component of a work of fiction on par with plot or characters.⁷² Although ‘setting’ may be used to refer to the spatial context in realistic fiction, world-building is largely focused on entirely new secondary worlds within speculative fiction, specifically fantasy and science fiction. In the case of the fantasy genre, the theory is centred on the fantasy categories that were explored in the previous chapter and are set in secondary worlds. Namely, Mendlesohn’s portal/quest and immersive fantasies, Alexander’s more general category of high fantasy, as well as epic fantasy.

We have to note that world-building theory and world design are not only confined to literary fiction. Although it has been this way before the 20th century, Mark J. P. Wolf states that nowadays, due to the advancements in technology and media, the study of world-building has spread to other platforms.⁷³ For instance, to movies, video games and other visual media. Due to this interaction between different forms of media, world-building can be considered a trans-medial study. As filmmaking technologies continued to thrive, there has been a great surge of new speculative fiction movies, especially at the turn of the 21st century. The rise in popularity of movies with secondary worlds can be attributed to *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) adaptation by Peter Jackson, which was praised by both critics and fans of speculative fiction. Also, owing to the developments in computer-generated imagery (CGI), we can now experience secondary worlds in movies and television series more vividly than ever before. Possibly one of the most essential movies that heavily relied upon this technology was *Avatar* (2009) by James Cameron, in which viewers could experience the distant world on the planet Pandora. As similar technologies develop, they are becoming accessible to more creators. Therefore, we can expect the number of visual media implementing secondary worlds to grow exponentially in the future.

⁷¹ “What Is 'World-Building'?” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/what-is-world-building>

⁷² “What Is 'World-Building'?”

⁷³ Mark J.P. Wolf, “World Design,” in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 67-73, 69.

If we take a step back from visual media, role-playing games also deserve to be credited as one of the important ways of practising and experiencing world-building. In role-playing games, for instance, in *Dungeons & Dragons*, players take on the roles of characters they create to solve mysteries in a setting and narrative another player, the Dungeon Master, has created.⁷⁴ Note that, in role-playing games, world-building is rather a collective effort of all participants. As Shrier et al. in “Worldbuilding in Role-Playing Games” state, “worldbuilding *is* the gameplay.”⁷⁵ Therefore, each player can influence the backstory and actions of their character, and thus, can change the course of the world dramatically. The players can choose to abide by the official rule books to select scenarios and templates that have already been created for them, or they can create original imaginary worlds altogether without limitation. However, Edward James states that most settings were largely inspired by Tolkien and other fantasy novels.⁷⁶ Therefore, role-playing games tend to be filled with ideas and tropes of other fantasy works.

The following paragraphs will investigate the concepts of imagination and world-building even further. The primary focus will be placed on studies from anthologies and essays collected by Mark J. P. Wolf, a professor in the Communication Department at Concordia University, Wisconsin. Wolf’s anthologies can be regarded as one of the leading contemporary publications on the study of imaginary worlds.

2.1 Defining the Concepts of Imagination and World-Building

Imaginative activity and creativity are part of human nature and their first traces appear as early as our childhood. It is probably unsurprising that human beings, especially children, create different scenarios or even imaginary worlds as part of playing. Sigmund Freud focused on a similar matter in one of his essays, “The Creative Writers and Daydreaming” (1908). In this essay, Freud compared and related childhood play activities to those of literary authors. He stated that “every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own” and the creative writer does

⁷⁴ Edward James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 75.

⁷⁵ Karen Schrier, Evan Torner, and Jessica Hammer, “Worldbuilding in Role-Playing Games,” in *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*, ed. Zagal José Pablo and Sebastian Deterding (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 349-363, 350.

⁷⁶ James, “Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy,” 75.

a similar act as the child.⁷⁷ If we look into specific documented examples of the creation of imaginary worlds, we may start with one of the famous ones created by the Brontë children. An article in the British Library states that before becoming well-known English novelists, the Brontë sisters and their brother created imaginary worlds called Glass Town, Angria and Gondal. Together, the Brontë siblings wrote scripts that contained stories set in these worlds, which were then populated with invented characters.⁷⁸ The Brontës continued this activity until they reached adulthood. These imaginary worlds created by children are sometimes referred to as ‘paracosms.’ English dictionaries do not seem to register this term, however, it has often been used in the field of psychology, especially in the research of British scientists Cohen and MacKeith, *The Development of Imagination* (1991). Although paracosms are created during childhood, Taylor et al. state that they are frequently “highly elaborated with, for example, their own governments, geographies, languages, cultures, and associated artifacts.”⁷⁹ Therefore, imaginary worlds might be one of the first signs of children’s early projections of the real world. Thus, the study and analysis of world-building can also be significantly useful in the field of psychology and sociology, since it can provide researchers with an intriguing insight into the minds of creators and the way they perceive the real world.

Before the 18th century, the concept of the mind and imagination was dominated by empiricism. Empiric philosophers associated the workings of the mind with the concept of ‘tabula rasa’ or ‘blank slate.’ One of these philosophers, John Locke, described the mind to be initially “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas” and only through our sensory senses and experience, knowledge is founded.⁸⁰ This hypothesis was then questioned by the Romantics, specifically the Lake Poets, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge distinguishes imagination into primary and secondary categories. As for the primary imagination, Coleridge states that it is “the living power and prime agent of all human

⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Edith Kurzweil and William Phillips (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 24-28.

⁷⁸ “Brontë Juvenilia: The History of Angria,” British Library, accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/bront-juvenilia-the-history-of-angria>

⁷⁹ Marjorie Taylor et al., “Paracosms: The Imaginary Worlds of Middle Childhood,” *Child Development* 91, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13162>, 1.

⁸⁰ John Locke, “An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding,” Project Gutenberg, 2004, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10615/10615-h/10615-h.htm>

perception.”⁸¹ In other words, we may understand it as an act of experiencing the external world through our senses. This notion closely correlates with the ideas of empirical philosophy. On the other hand, secondary or poetic imagination is believed to be “an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will” and it “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate.”⁸² Thus, secondary imagination is thought to be a trait that makes creative activity possible for human beings, and especially for artists. It is therefore clear that alongside the more evident activities like fiction writing or composing music, the act of world-building can be considered a similar imaginative activity. All of these imaginary activities come from or reflect our experiences of the external world.

One of the first essays on the creation of fictional worlds was explored by George MacDonald in “The Fantastic Imagination” (1893). MacDonald calls fiction, which incorporates secondary worlds, the work of Fancy. He emphasises that in the process of world creation, artists have to construct a set of laws they have to abide by. These laws usually establish the imaginary world’s reality. In doing so, the authors foreground the differences that are placed against the norms of the real world. MacDonald believes that “the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist.”⁸³ Ultimately, MacDonald highlights that the creators’ primary goal is to be consistent with the laws they have created and they must not forget their existence. Otherwise, the created world would lose its believability.⁸⁴

J. R. R. Tolkien, who was heavily influenced by MacDonald’s ideas, also theorised about the creation of worlds. Tolkien’s thoughts on world-building were published in the essay “On Fairy-stories” (1947), in which he expanded his ideas from a prior lecture in 1939 at the University of St. Andrews.⁸⁵ Similarly to MacDonald’s essay, “On Fairy-stories” is centred on the ideas of laws in the secondary worlds. According to Tolkien, the creator’s goal is to relate to ideas that are true only for

⁸¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Biographia Literaria,” Project Gutenberg 2004, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm>

⁸² Coleridge, “Biographia Literaria.”

⁸³ George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” in *A Dish of Orts*, Project Gutenberg, 2005, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/9393/9393-h/9393-h.htm>.

⁸⁴ MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination.”

⁸⁵ Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, eds., *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 125.

the created secondary world and “the moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken [...], or rather, art has failed.”⁸⁶

Furthermore, aside from defining the world-building theory, Tolkien’s essay also delves into the defence of the importance of the fantasy genre. Flieger and Anderson consider “On Fairy-stories” became the single most referenced critical study on fantasy criticism and world-building of its time.⁸⁷ With its focus on imaginative writing, it continues in the same vein as Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy*, or even Aristotle’s *Poetics*.⁸⁸ Tolkien also coined the terms that relate to world-building, such as ‘secondary worlds,’ the enchanted world of ‘Faërie,’ or ‘sub-creation.’ Generally, various scholars use different terms for these secondary worlds. For instance, C. N. Manlove uses supernatural or impossible worlds to define fantasy in *Modern Fantasy* (1975), and Wolf, together with other scholars, prefers to use imaginary worlds in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2012). Yet, there is no clear distinction between these terms, and all of them can be used interchangeably. Furthermore, Tolkien’s sub-creation is an activity which is comparable to the concept of world-building. Since Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic, his conception of world creation was underlined with religious implications. Tolkien states that

Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.⁸⁹

In this extract, Tolkien refers to fantasy as the act of imagination and creation. He views the process of world creation as an imitation of God’s work. Even the term itself, sub-creation, which contains the prefix *sub-*, conveys the meaning of “subordinate, secondary or inferior to.”⁹⁰ Therefore, every sub-creator or world-builder tries to imitate the complexities and the laws of the primary world. In other words, the created strives to become the creator.

⁸⁶ Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 52.

⁸⁷ Flieger and Anderson, eds., *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, 19.

⁸⁸ Flieger and Anderson, eds., *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, 20.

⁸⁹ John R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” in *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 66.

⁹⁰ “Sub,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sub>

We are now able to move into contemporary research on world-building. The focus will be mainly placed on the form and the structure of imaginary worlds. According to Wolf, imaginary worlds can be evaluated based on the degree of three qualities. These qualities are completeness, consistency and invention.⁹¹ It is important to note that each of these qualities is highly dependent on others. For instance, Wolf explains that with every invention, it becomes more challenging for the creators to be consistent with the laws they have created for their world. Also, to build the illusion of completeness successfully, the more the creators have to invent original aspects of the world.⁹² Each of the qualities will be explored in the following paragraphs.

One of Wolf's essential qualities for studying imaginary worlds, the degree of completeness, can be also referred to as the illusion of completeness. Imaginary worlds, as they currently stand, can never be truly complete. Therefore, creators attempt to build a world that at least pretends to be complete, thus creating an illusion. Lubomír Doležel, a Czech-Canadian literary scholar, stated that this incompleteness is a necessary consequence of the fact that fictional worlds are human constructs.⁹³ According to Doležel, in written fiction, it is inevitable that at certain points in a text, there must be a so-called "zero texture."⁹⁴ This zero texture refers to a gap where there is no description or any other details provided about the fictional world. In written fiction, these gaps are the most apparent. Doležel argues that when they appear, the reader "reconstructs the fictional world constructed by the author" and simply fills in these gaps through their knowledge of the real world.⁹⁵ Let us presume that a character in fiction enters a specific room, for example, a bedroom. If the authors were to describe every detail of the bedroom, it would take a great amount of text to fully describe it. This, of course, does not happen in written fiction. Instead, the readers fill in the details themselves according to their own experiences, unless the author specifies the room differently. Doležel's ideas were primarily specified for written fiction. However, Robertson points out that this incompleteness applies to other forms of media,

⁹¹ Wolf, "World Design," 71.

⁹² Mark J.P. Wolf, "Worlds within the World," in *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 16-64, 34.

⁹³ Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 169.

⁹⁴ Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 169.

⁹⁵ Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 170.

even the audiovisual ones.⁹⁶ No film or TV series will show the entirety of the world, but rather only the necessary frames that were chosen by the filmmakers. The question is, what is the ideal amount of detail in the creation of the imaginary world? World-building scholars often refer to the term ‘saturation.’ Wolf defines it as “the pleasurable goal of conceptual immersion.”⁹⁷ We can view it as a balance of the number of data one’s mind can contain with all the new information. With too much saturation, readers will find comprehending the world in its entirety nearly impossible. On the other hand, if the world is created with low saturation, readers may feel that the world is already too familiar and may lose interest in it.

Wolf’s degree of consistency correlates with the initial ideas of MacDonald and Tolkien. Specifically, the conception of harmony between the established laws by the imaginary world creators. Additionally, Wolf believes that consistency is closely related to contradictions. Generally, every element in world design should logically complement one another without contradicting themselves.⁹⁸ These contradictions are likely caused by the author’s inattention and, due to the lack of consistency, this error may tarnish the imaginary world’s immersion.

Wolf defines the degree of invention as “the degree to which default assumptions based on the Primary World have been changed, regarding such things as geography, history, language, physics, biology, zoology, culture.”⁹⁹ In other words, we may think of it as a way of measuring the degree of imitation (mimesis) in an imaginary world. This closely relates to Attebery’s concept of fantasy as a mode, where fictional works may lie closer to the mode of mimesis or fantasy. Moreover, Wolf believes that inventions are possibly the main factors that captivate the audience to a new imaginary world.¹⁰⁰ Wolf also divides these inventions into four distinct levels, which he calls ‘realms.’ The first set of inventions is grouped in the ‘nominal realm.’ These changes are relatively simple and affect the way already existing things of the primary world are named in the secondary world.¹⁰¹ However, significant changes in this level may extend to entirely new languages. Only slight differences

⁹⁶ Benjamin J. Robertson, “World Completeness,” in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 82-89, 84.

⁹⁷ Mark J.P. Wolf, “Beyond Immersion,” in *World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries*, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 204-214, 206.

⁹⁸ Wolf, “World Design,” 72.

⁹⁹ Wolf, “Worlds within the World,” 34.

¹⁰⁰ Wolf, “World Design,” 71.

¹⁰¹ Wolf, “Worlds within the World,” 35.

in language may imply another set of changes in the society, which relate to Wolf's next level of invention, the 'cultural realm.' This level comprises cultures and all ideas and objects they have invented. Invented cultures may or may not reflect the qualities of certain societies in the real world. However, through these fictional cultures, world-builders may comment on the existing cultures possibly without unwanted connotations.¹⁰² The third set is the 'natural realm.' According to Wolf, this set contains not only locations or continents but also unique ecosystems with different fauna and flora.¹⁰³ The deepest of the four levels is the 'ontological realm.' Generally, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ontology refers to a theory "about the nature of being or the kinds of things that have existence."¹⁰⁴ Wolf's ontological level refers to the parameters of the world's existence, such as the laws of physics, space, and time.¹⁰⁵ In fantasy fiction, the usual ontological rule relates to the magic system and its use. Wolf also notes that the first two levels involve features that human beings can change or influence. For instance, the naming of objects, or slightly influencing cultures, while the latter ones, which cover nature and ontological rules, are way more difficult, if not impossible, to control.¹⁰⁶

As was already explored in the previous chapters, Attebery considers Tolkien's works a prototypical formula for the fantasy genre. This formula is characterised by standardised tropes relating to characters, narrative and even the imaginary world itself. The following subchapter will examine Tolkien's Middle-earth and it will provide its established world-building tropes that have become a template for high fantasy works. By analysing these formulaic tropes, we can explore the extent of the fantasy genre, which will help us identify qualities and distinctions in the world-building of a typical grimdark series by Joe Abercrombie in the following chapter.

2.2 Tolkien's World-Building: Completeness, Consistency, Invention

Before exploring Tolkien's world-building tropes, it would be suitable to examine his world-building through Wolf's degrees of quality first. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* both take place in the Third Age of Middle-earth. Although the narrative is set in a specific timeline, Tolkien has spent most of his life creating an expansive

¹⁰² Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 35-36.

¹⁰³ Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 36.

¹⁰⁴ "Ontology," *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ontology>

¹⁰⁵ Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 36.

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 36.

mythology, covering the world's history over millennia alongside interrelated legends, stories and genealogies.¹⁰⁷ Most of these myths were presented in the novels' appendices or collected in the posthumously published *The Silmarillion* (1977). Overall, the events in this publication cover the entire history of the world up to the Third Age. Therefore, with this extensive account of the world's history, Tolkien has established a convincing illusion of the world's completeness. However, being effective in the imaginary world's completeness comes at a great cost. Wolf believes that the world's history, especially in *The Silmarillion*, requires "a great deal of attention, concentration, and memory" to appreciate the world fully.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Tolkien offers characters with several names in different languages, and some of these names are shared by more than one character.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, backtracking to Wolf's term of saturation, Tolkien's Arda can be regarded as a highly saturated world, which suggests that readers might find comprehending the world in its entirety somewhat challenging.

As was already mentioned, Wolf's degree of consistency closely relates to MacDonald's and Tolkien's concepts of harmony between established laws in an imaginary world. If the imaginary world is inconsistent, it can easily break the reader's immersion in the imaginary world. The editors of "On Fairy-Stories" have identified that based on Tolkien's remarks, he was aware of the flaws relating to consistency and immersion in *The Hobbit*, which was released years before the essay. In *The Hobbit*, disbelief arose due to an often comic intrusive narrator.¹¹⁰ Tolkien attempted to correct the errors he had made. Yet, a similar mistake in immersion can be also found in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), which was released after his influential essay. Probably the most infamous example that seems to damage the immersion is the narrator's remark: "The dragon passed like an express train."¹¹¹ The narrator used this analogy to describe the speed of Gandalf's fireworks at Bilbo's birthday party. In this sense, the express train is an anachronism that is heavily foregrounded. Since trains do not exist in Middle-earth, the immersion is broken and readers are likely to question the laws Tolkien had established in this imaginary world. In *The Cambridge*

¹⁰⁷ Dimitra Fimi, "Tolkien's Arda," in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 377-384, 378.

¹⁰⁸ Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 35.

¹⁰⁹ Wolf, "Worlds within the World," 36.

¹¹⁰ Flieger and Anderson, eds., *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, 16.

¹¹¹ John R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in *Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 28.

Companion to Fantasy Literature, James pointed out that the spell of immersion was also broken by Sam Gamgee's statement that his favourite food is fish and chips. Because of this typical British dish, the reader is immediately thrown back into the primary world.¹¹² Conclusively, the degree of consistency and immersion can be broken through the narrator's explicit analogy to objects that do not exist in the context of the imaginary world or the reader is pushed back to the primary world. Additionally, since J. R. R. Tolkien had been creating his imaginary world for decades, Tom Shippey has pointed out that some stories, for instance, "The Legend of Beren and Lúthien," have different versions.¹¹³ What seems to support this statement is also the fact that some of Tolkien's legends have been posthumously edited and published by his son Christopher. Therefore, since various authors were working on the creation of Middle-earth, inconsistencies regarding world-building arose.

The degree of invention will be considered in the following subchapters, which will investigate Tolkien's world-building methods and tropes. The arrangement of these subchapters is based on Mark J. P. Wolf's four levels relating to the degree of invention: the nominal, cultural, natural and ontological realms. Although Wolf used these levels to measure the degree of changes between the real world and the imaginary one, this thesis also uses the same levels to classify world-building methods and tropes into similar areas for better integrity and comprehensibility. The nominal realm chapter covers Tolkien's world-building in terms of its languages, and the cultural realm provides tropes relating to his world's cultures and civilisation. The natural realm is associated with the world itself, and therefore, it is rather vast in the topics it encompasses, including locations, landmasses, ecosystems, and other natural features of the world. However, the analysis in this realm was specified and centres around the world's geography and topics that are associated with it. Finally, the final subchapter covers the ontological realm, which identifies concepts that are connected to the world's magic system. Keep in mind that certain aspects within these realms may overlap. This is the case for the natural realm, where some tropes can be related to the cultural realm.

¹¹² James, "Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy," 66.

¹¹³ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 313.

2.2.1 Nominal Realm: Languages

While constructing his fictional universe, Tolkien, who was a professional philologist, was primarily focused on language creation. This activity fascinated him from an early age. In one of his essays titled “A Secret Vice” (1931), he recalled one of his earliest introductions to language creation with ‘Animalic,’ which was a language created by his cousins.¹¹⁴ Therefore, Tolkien’s first experience with language creation was through constructing what resembles a paracosm. This fascination continued into Tolkien’s adulthood. While he was constructing languages, he thought of ways how to make the languages believable. To do so, he established logical patterns between the languages and aspects that might have shaped them. As a result, he created “an illusion of historicity,”¹¹⁵ which later developed into the creation of Middle-earth itself. Tolkien believed that language invention is the foundation of his imaginary world’s creation, and its stones “were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse.”¹¹⁶ Tolkien’s languages were so elaborate that he even considered a hypothetical time-lapse and cross-migration of the people in Middle-earth to justify their shifts and changes. Not only did Tolkien invent names, but he also created complete vocabularies, phonologies, grammars, and visual writing systems, which were even provided in the appendices of *LotR*.¹¹⁷ This once again, confirms Tolkien’s considerable attention to detail and completeness in his imaginary world. Therefore, one of the recurring elements of speculative fiction is the implementation of constructed languages, or simply ‘con-langs.’¹¹⁸ Although Tolkien was not the first author to use an invented language in a fictional work, his constructed languages have a level of complexity none of his predecessors could reach. His predecessors in fiction were, for instance, Thomas Moore with the Utopian language in *Utopia* (1516), Francis Godwin and the Lunar language in *The Man in the Moone* (1638), or even Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). According to Fimi and Higgins, the legacy

¹¹⁴ John R. R. Tolkien, “A Secret Vice,” Gwern.net, accessed November 2022, <https://www.gwern.net/docs/fiction/1931-tolkien.pdf>, 200.

¹¹⁵ John R. R. Tolkien, “To Milton Waldman,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 167-178, 167.

¹¹⁶ John R. R. Tolkien, “To the Houghton Mifflin Co.,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 232-234, 233.

¹¹⁷ Fimi and Higgins, “Invented Languages,” 22.

¹¹⁸ Dimitra Fimi and Andrew Higgins, “Invented Languages,” in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 21-29, 22.

of Tolkien's detailed language creation can be seen in the works of Ursula K. Le Guin, Tom Shippey, Marc Okrand or David J. Peterson.¹¹⁹

However, most of the authors that were inspired by Tolkien did not delve into the construction of languages as deeply as he did. Arika Okrent states that in contrast to Tolkien, the authors that come after him often use creations that are usually "not languages so much as they are ideas, a bit of vocabulary, a few phrases. They serve the story, never the other way around."¹²⁰ In other words, these authors merely create an illusion of a constructed language. While doing so, they focus on finding ways to make the vocabulary of the language sound exotic, or other-worldly. Fimi and Higgins state that this can be easily attained by adding infrequent consonant sounds, for instance, Q, X, Z, consonant clusters that usually do not appear in the language the work is written in, or simply by adding apostrophes or other punctuations.¹²¹ Therefore, within the fantasy genre, Tolkien's Middle-earth might have popularised one of the fantasy tropes that can be referred to as 'the exoticisation of names.'

While focusing on specific languages, two of the most elaborate ones Tolkien created were the Elvish languages. Namely, Quenya and Sindarin, which both share a common ancestor, Quendian. Fimi and Higgins point out that the first mentioned, Quenya, with its open vowel sounds, resembles the sound aesthetic of the Finnish language, which Tolkien found attractive.¹²² In the context of Middle-earth, Quenya is considered a High-elven, formal language. Its limited use can closely resemble classical languages, such as Greek or Latin. Although seemingly unapparent, the idea of having or alluding to a higher register language, which is ancient, majestic and only used by a fraction of the population, can be considered one of the recurring tropes in high fantasy.

While the world implements various languages, we may ask a question; how do the cultures of Middle-earth communicate with one another? In *LotR*, the majority of Middle-earth uses a lingua franca called 'the Common tongue,' which is also referred to as Westron.¹²³ It may seem that in the world of *LotR*, Westron is identical to English.

¹¹⁹ Fimi and Higgins, "Invented Languages," 22.

¹²⁰ Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 247.

¹²¹ Fimi and Higgins, "Invented Languages," 22.

¹²² Fimi and Higgins, "Invented Languages," 24.

¹²³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 4.

However, in one of his *Letters*, Tolkien stated that English could not have been the language of Middle-earth. Tolkien dealt with this issue in a way that he

equate[d] the Westron or wide-spread Common Speech of the Third Age with English; and translate[d] everything, including names such as the Shire, that was in the Westron into English terms.¹²⁴

Therefore, Tolkien created an immersive context in which he established his fictional work as the English translation. In other words, he created a glossary, in which the Westron language served as the original, authentic vocabulary within the context of Middle-earth. For example, the formerly mentioned ‘Shire’ is presented as the English translation of the Westron word ‘Sûzat.’ Conclusively, in fantasy, it is fairly common to have a universal language referred to as a ‘Common tongue’ or simply, ‘Common.’ The Common tongue is often presented through languages of the primary world. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the ‘translation convention.’¹²⁵ Immersive fiction operates under this convention simply because its characters speak an imaginary language that does not exist in the primary world. Generally, the readers or audiences are meant to assume that the characters are speaking a language that exists in the context of their immersive worlds. In turn, these imaginary languages are converted to the audience’s language purely for their enjoyment.¹²⁶ Overall, immersive fantasy worlds use real-world languages to ensure the readers’ comprehension by being disguised as the Common tongue. Therefore, the use of this language is yet another recurring trope in fantasy.

2.2.2 Cultural Realm: Civilisations

As was already suggested in the previous paragraphs, the world of Middle-earth comprises a range of different humanoid ‘races.’ At the core of Middle-earth’s population are elves, men, dwarves, and hobbits. Brandon Sanderson, one of the contemporary authors of fantasy, believes that these races, alongside the typical character and narrative tropes, have become the epitome of the fantasy genre. Sanderson also stated that fantasy was not “the genre where the author creates his or her own unique setting. It meant the genre where the books include elves, dwarves, wizards, and

¹²⁴ John R. R. Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchison,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 193-197, 193.

¹²⁵ “Translation Convention,” TV Tropes, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TranslationConvention>

¹²⁶ “Translation Convention.”

quests.”¹²⁷ These races and their stereotypical traits have become a recurring trope in high fantasy for years to come. This, yet again, confirms Attebery’s claim that Tolkien’s works are our mental template for the fantasy genre. The human race is generally the most widespread race of Middle-earth and is culturally and ethnically divided. Because of this, humans tend to be more varied in temperament. Their characteristics range from the heroic Aragorn, the easily tempted Boromir to the villainous Grima Wormtongue. Humans can be viewed as imperfect in contrast with another race, the elves. In one of his *Letters*, Tolkien interpreted elves as a race similar to men in appearance. However, he stated that they represent “men with greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties, greater beauty and longer life, and nobility.”¹²⁸ Elves are also closely linked to nature and can be seen as embodiments of wisdom. However, elves were not entirely Tolkien’s invention, since they were inspired by supernatural beings from Norse and Germanic mythology where they were called “álfar.”¹²⁹ Dwarves are another race that was inspired by Norse mythology. In this mythology, as well as in Tolkien’s world, they are portrayed as miners, smiths and master craftsmen.¹³⁰ However, they are rather secretive since they are unwilling to share their language with other races.¹³¹ Hobbits are generally considered Tolkien’s original idea. However, in a letter to W. H. Auden, Tolkien stated that he might have been inspired by Edward Wyke Smith’s *Snergs* from the children’s book *The Marvellous Land of Snergs* (1927).¹³² Just like these *snergs*, hobbits are of smaller stature in comparison to humans. They also have slightly pointed ears, just like the elves. However, according to Tolkien, they were meant to be seen as a ‘branch’ of the human race. Due to this and the fact that they share the same language, hobbits and humans can both co-exist.¹³³ Other than the physical attributes, hobbits are closely associated with their lifestyles. They prefer a settled and peaceful way of life, focusing mostly on agriculture. In one of his interviews, Tolkien stated that hobbits were created

¹²⁷ Brandon Sanderson, “EUOLogy #17: Actually, I Don’t Hate Tolkien,” Brandon Sanderson, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150813035459/http://brandonsanderson.com/euology-17-actually-i-dont-hate-tolkien>

¹²⁸ Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchison,” 194.

¹²⁹ Claude Lecouteux, “Introduction,” in *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore, Mythology, and Magic*, ed. Michael Moynihan, trans. John E. Graham (Inner Traditions, 2016), IV.

¹³⁰ Lecouteux, *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore*, 82.

¹³¹ Tolkien, “To Naomi Mitchison,” 194.

¹³² John R. R. Tolkien, “To W. H. Auden,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 227-230, 229.

¹³³ Tolkien, “To Milton Waldman,” 176.

to bear a resemblance to “rustic English people.”¹³⁴ Because of the hobbits’ settled nature, they tend to be inexperienced with the outside world and are rather naïve, which makes them the ideal model for the hero archetype of Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey*.

A race that is excluded from the free peoples of Middle-earth, but also deserves to be mentioned, are orcs. According to Tolkien, they were supposed to depict and personify “corruptions of the ‘human’ form seen in elves and men.”¹³⁵ This statement implies that the orcs were not ‘created’ like other races of Middle-earth. Instead, their creation lies in the corruption of the already existing races. Nevertheless, orcs can be still described by distinctive physical features. Tolkien’s description of them may emerge as problematic by today’s standards. In one of his *Letters*, he described orcs as “squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types.”¹³⁶ Orcs embody specific trope that is, by the fantasy fandom, referred to as “the cannon fodder.”¹³⁷ The core idea behind this trope lies in the role of orcs in the narrative and the world. The cannon fodder trope centres around creatures or characters who are degraded to being ideal servants. Orcs are the embodiments of evil who were enslaved and during the War of the Ring, they sided with the Dark Lord, Sauron. Therefore, the role of orcs is limited to serving as foot soldiers for the side of evil. Additionally, for the trope to be effective, the race should be greatly dehumanised so that the audience would not feel remorse over their deaths, which is also the case for orcs in *LotR*.¹³⁸

While creating his imaginary world, medieval literature greatly influenced Tolkien. According to the editor of the *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, medieval literature for Tolkien was not just an inspiring place for names or images. It was “the vineyard in which he laboured every day and to which he devoted years of study and contemplation.”¹³⁹ As a result, Tolkien’s Middle-earth is grounded in a setting that is heavily inspired by the Middle Ages of European culture. This inspiration by

¹³⁴ Sídh Aníron, “J.R.R. Tolkien 1964 Interview,” Youtube Video, 39:39, October 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzDtmMXJ1B4>, 10:55.

¹³⁵ John R. R. Tolkien, “From a Letter to Forrest J. Ackerman,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 291-294, 293.

¹³⁶ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Forrest J. Ackerman,” 293.

¹³⁷ “Cannon Fodder,” TV Tropes, accessed November 1, 2022, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CannonFodder>

¹³⁸ “Cannon Fodder,” TV Tropes.

¹³⁹ Michael D. C. Drout, “Introduction” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), xxix-xxx, xxx.

the medieval in fantasy stories is referred to by Hassler-Forrest as “pseudo-medievalism.”¹⁴⁰ Although elements of pseudo-medievalism were present before Tolkien’s works, for instance, in the works of Romantics, Pre-Raphaelites, or specifically his predecessor, George MacDonald, Tolkien nevertheless left an imprint on the following high fantasy stories. Therefore, pseudo-medievalism became one of the recurring high fantasy tropes.

Although the world of Middle-earth has an extensively detailed history and mythology, the society does not seem to develop beyond the medieval era. A trope that is directly linked to pseudo-medievalism is the stagnation of medievalism, which is sometimes referred to as the “medieval stasis.”¹⁴¹ The stasis itself also applies to the stagnation of scientific, technological and other developments. Moreover, an important aspect of Tolkien’s work is that some cultures of Middle-earth are affected by industrialisation. However, this industrialisation is limited only to the technologies that were available in the medieval era. In *LotR*, industrialisation is connected to the evil empire, especially Mordor, and its demands for warfare. The affected areas of industrialisation are fatally destroyed by deforestation and the establishment of mines. On the other hand, cultures that are unaffected by it are greatly romanticised. For instance, the realms of elves, Rivendell and Lothlórien, or even Hobbiton, are depicted as safe havens. As was observed by multiple scholars, including Curry, Tolkien’s statements about industrialism were frequently hostile.¹⁴² Therefore, since he stood against industrialism, *LotR*, with its rather romanticised medievalism, can be seen as a condemning response to it.

2.2.3 Natural Realm: Location and Geography

Possibly one of the most effective ways to simulate the imaginary world’s continents and geography is through the creation of maps. Yet, according to Hynes, they are not essential to world-building as only 30-40% of fantasy fiction contains maps.¹⁴³ However, in one of Tolkien’s interviews for the BBC, he pointed out that “if you are going to have a complicated story, you must work to a map, otherwise you can never

¹⁴⁰ Dan Hassler-Forrest, “Worlds and Politics,” in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 305-313, 309.

¹⁴¹ “Medieval Stasis,” TV Tropes, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MedievalStasis>

¹⁴² Patrick Curry, “Industrialization,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 294-295, 294.

¹⁴³ Gerard Hynes, “Geography and Maps,” in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 98-106, 98.

make a map of it afterwards.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Map-making and maps as para-texts were immensely important for Tolkien and his storytelling. The map of Middle-earth is left-justified, meaning that the ocean is detailed on the left-hand side of the map. Interestingly, this is a common trope that many medieval fantasy worlds incorporate. The popularity of this trope may lie in the similarity and the attempts to imitate Europe’s geography with the Atlantic Ocean to the West and the extensive land to the East.¹⁴⁵ Also, when this map orientation is applied, it is often the case that the aim of the story will take the characters on a quest to the East. If we identify specific locations of Middle-earth, the North-western part of it is the most evocative of Europe and, especially, England. Interestingly, while constructing the world, Tolkien intended to implement certain parallels with real-world locations. For instance, as one of his *Letters* suggests, he purposefully placed Hobbiton and Rivendell, essentially the most peaceful locations of Middle-earth, on the same latitude as Oxford, his alma mater, residence and final resting place.¹⁴⁶ It is therefore undeniable that certain aspects of the geography of the Middle-earth are founded upon the one of Europe.

Although the cultural and racial aspects have already been discussed, the following two paragraphs will consider a related issue. Based on John Magoun’s research, Middle-earth implements “moral geography.”¹⁴⁷ Moral geography studies the connection of geographical space with morality and ethics. The idea behind Magoun’s study was to prove that Tolkien implicitly illustrated the West, with the Hobbiton and the Shire at its centre, as morally good, almost as the epitome of paradise. On the other hand, the Eastern locations, including Mordor, Harad and Eastlands, are considered the polar opposites of the West, since all of these lands sided with the Dark Lord. As was already mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, Tolkien compared the Hobbits to the rural English population. Also, to a certain extent, the East and West division may seem to parallel the division of Europe during Tolkien’s lifetime. For this resemblance, some critics accused Tolkien of “racial and moral bias”

¹⁴⁴ Sídh Aníron, “J.R.R. Tolkien 1964 Interview,” 24:40.

¹⁴⁵ “Left-Justified Fantasy Map,” TV Tropes, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki/Main/LeftJustifiedFantasyMap>

¹⁴⁶ John R. R. Tolkien, “To Charlotte and Denis Plimmer,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 405-408, 407.

¹⁴⁷ John F. G. Magoun, “The East,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 139.

towards Eastern nations beyond the iron curtain.¹⁴⁸ Also, we may see that the War of the Ring, the war between good and evil, can be interpreted as an allegory for the two world wars. However, Tolkien rejected these claims. He often explained that “There is no ‘symbolism’ or conscious allegory in [his] story.”¹⁴⁹ He further stated that although there was no intentional allegory, it does not mean that there can be no applicability.¹⁵⁰ In other words, even if he did not intend to reflect the contemporary world affairs, it does not mean that the readers will not be able to spot similarities between the events of the real world and the ones of Middle-earth.

Another feature that also relates to the east-west dichotomy is a type of ‘othering’ described in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Winegar defines orientalism as “a way of looking at other people with preconceived assumptions and assigned notions of essential characteristics.”¹⁵¹ In the real world, this theory is related to post-colonialism, and it is concerned with the views of Westerners who establish a certain image of easterners from a perspective of superiority.¹⁵² However, aspects and ideas of Orientalism are often projected into secondary world fantasies, including *LotR*. In Middle-earth, the image of Orientalism can be seen in two distinct descendants of the human race. Specifically, in the Haradrim, who come from Harad in the South, and the Easterlings, who come from the East. The Haradrim are presented as “cruel and tall,”¹⁵³ “black men like half-trolls with white eyes and red tongues,”¹⁵⁴ who ride on war elephants, called oliphants. Also, the land of Harad comprises mostly deserts. On the other hand, according to Straubhaar, the Easterlings are classified by Westerners as mounted invaders, adding that the real-world inspirations for them might have been the Huns.¹⁵⁵ However, what poses a problem is that all the races who sided with the Dark Lord, including the Haradrim and the Easterlings, happen to be of darker

¹⁴⁸ John R. R. Tolkien, “From a Letter to Herbert Schiro,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 282.

¹⁴⁹ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Herbert Schiro,” 282.

¹⁵⁰ Tolkien, “From a Letter to Herbert Schiro,” 282.

¹⁵¹ Astrid Winegar, “Aspects of Orientalism J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” *The Grey Book* 1 (2005), 1.

¹⁵² Winegar, “Aspects of Orientalism J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.”

¹⁵³ John R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, in *Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 817.

¹⁵⁴ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 846.

¹⁵⁵ Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, “Easterlings,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 140-141, 141.

complexions and are incidentally portrayed as evil.¹⁵⁶ This issue was investigated in Myles Balfe's "Incredible Geographies? Orientalism and Genre Fantasy" (2004). Balfe argues that the fantasy genre is not transcendental, however, just like all texts, even fantasy texts are socially and culturally embedded.¹⁵⁷ Overall, the geographic East in the secondary world fantasies often incorporate elements of Orientalist ideas and prejudices that are connected with the real world cultures, predominantly the ones of the Middle East.

Another feature that is connected to location and geography is the alteration of the environment. In Tolkien's world, there are environmental catastrophes that drastically altered the course of events and therefore, they often serve as the world's backstories. Fimi calls these occurrences "cataclysmic changes."¹⁵⁸ At first, the world of Arda was a flat world surrounded by ocean, which resembles the depiction of a flat Earth in medieval texts.¹⁵⁹ However, Tolkien's world of Arda changed significantly after the destruction of Númenor, an island kingdom of Men. The inhabitants of Númenor were advised to obey the rules set by the deities. However, the Númenoreans, striving for immortality and knowledge, broke these rules. As a divine punishment, the deities drowned the island and the creator of the world reshaped Arda from flat to round. This idea seems to echo the Biblical original sin and the subsequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, as well as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins. Overall, the 'cataclysmic change' trope has its origins in a real-world legend, since Tolkien described the Downfall of Númenor as his "personal alteration of the Atlantis myth and/or tradition, and accommodation of it to [his] general mythology."¹⁶⁰

2.2.4 Ontological Realm: Magic System

As was already mentioned, the magic system of imaginary worlds lies in the deepest level of world invention, which Wolf would call the 'ontological realm.' The changes in the ontological realm are the ones that signify a complete shift from the laws of our

¹⁵⁶ Christine Chism, "Race and Ethnicity in Tolkien's Works," in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 555-556, 555.

¹⁵⁷ Myles Balfe, "Incredible Geographies? Orientalism and Genre Fantasy," *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 1 (2004): 75-90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1464936042000181326>, 75.

¹⁵⁸ Fimi, "Tolkien's Arda," 378.

¹⁵⁹ Dimitra Fimi, *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 124.

¹⁶⁰ John R. R. Tolkien, "To Dick Plotz," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 386-387, 387.

world. Although these shifts can extend to having completely different laws of physics and nature, the inclusion of magic may seem as merely a minor addition. Generally, *LotR* employs a magic system that has a “vague, undefined, or mysterious set of rules, and limitations to being used.”¹⁶¹ Although magic is ever-present in Middle-earth, readers never get an explanation of how the magic functions. The contemporary fantasy writer Brandon Sanderson describes the magic used in Tolkien’s world as a ‘Soft Magic’ system. According to him, this system often shows that men are a small part of the mystical workings of the universe.¹⁶² In the case of *LotR*, the wizard Gandalf reinforces a sense of wonder in the readers as his powers are never explicitly confined. Also, since the hobbits are the focal point of the series, and magic is seen as abnormal to them, it makes it easier for the readers to easily identify with the hobbits. Therefore, the readers get to experience a sense of wonder and suspense as the story progresses just like the hobbits do. Tolkien’s concept of magic is directly linked to the world’s mythology. Additionally, it has striking parallels with Christianity. Speaking of magic users, all races, except for men and hobbits, can utilise magic in various degrees. For instance, Tolkien described elven magic as “Art,” specifically the art of craftsmanship.¹⁶³ The elven bread, *lembas* or waybread is described as “more strengthening than any food made by Men” and that “one will keep a traveller on his feet for a day of long labour.”¹⁶⁴ Also, their ‘magic’ cloaks “are light to wear, and warm enough or cool enough at need.”¹⁶⁵ However, some beings seem to embody magic itself. Tolkien called them the ‘Istari,’ or simply, wizards, “those who know.”¹⁶⁶ These wizards took physical forms and were sent to Middle-earth to aid people against the rising power of Sauron.¹⁶⁷ Tolkien himself describes them as “*incarnate* angels,” since they were sent by divine beings called the Valar and the single creator Eru Ilúvatar.¹⁶⁸ Although these angels were sent to stand against evil, one of the Istari, Saruman, attempted to abuse his position to control Middle-earth. Kathryne Hall points

¹⁶¹ Hello Future Me, “On Writing: Soft Magic Systems in Fantasy,” Youtube Video, 13:10, February 10, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVrnfnQiS8>, 0:32.

¹⁶² Brandon Sanderson, “Sanderson’s First Law,” Brandon Sanderson, February 20, 2007, <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law>

¹⁶³ Tolkien, “To Milton Waldman,” 168.

¹⁶⁴ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 370-71.

¹⁶⁵ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 371.

¹⁶⁶ John R. R. Tolkien, “To Robert Murray, SJ. (draft),” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 216-220, 216.

¹⁶⁷ Jonathan Evans, “Saruman,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (New York: Routledge, 2007), 589-590, 589.

¹⁶⁸ Tolkien, “To Robert Murray, SJ. (draft),” 216.

out that Saruman functions as a symbol of Satan, the personification of evil in Christianity. Also, just like the fallen angel, Lucifer, Saruman was fascinated by the prospect of gaining power, and as a result, he stains his original purpose to be good.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, another Istari, Gandalf, uses his magic for good. Therefore, magic is used by both sides of the War of the Ring conflict. Tolkien believes that magic is neither inherently good nor bad, instead, it is the users' motives that count.¹⁷⁰ Overall, the wizards in *LotR* are presented as the prototypical examples of the mentor or wizard archetype since they appear as older, wise men who wield supernatural powers. Although these wizards were sent by deities to serve with goodwill, the magic can be used for both good and evil intentions.

In one of his *Letters*, Tolkien stated that death and immortality are the dominant themes in *LotR*.¹⁷¹ Overall, in Tolkien's world there are several instances which closely relate to the prospect of immortality. Tolkien commented on the wizards Istari as being "immortal spirit[s] taking a visible physical form."¹⁷² However, although their spirits are immortal, their physical forms can be killed. Other immortal beings in Tolkien's world are elves. Tolkien describes them as immortal, but not eternally.¹⁷³ When they are killed, "by the injury or destruction of their incarnate form, they do not escape from time, but remain *in* the world, either discarnate, or being re-born."¹⁷⁴ In other words, after being slain, elves continue to live as spirits, and, if they wish to, they can be reincarnated. And this can be seen as a burden since they are tied to the world of Arda as long as it exists. In a letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien expressed that although immortality might be seen as desirable to humans, it is essentially the doom of elves and, on the other hand, mortality is both the doom and the gift of men.¹⁷⁵ Overall, the fantasy trope that closely relates to magic users, which in *LotR* includes the elves, is that they have substantially longer lives than those who do not inherently use magic.

¹⁶⁹ Kathyne Hall, "Beings of Magic," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016* 10, no. 1 (2016): 388-394, 391.

¹⁷⁰ John R. R. Tolkien, "To Naomi Mitchison (draft)," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 215.

¹⁷¹ John R. R. Tolkien, "From a Letter to Joanna de Bortadano," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 263.

¹⁷² John R. R. Tolkien, "From a Letter to Mrs Eileen Elgar," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 346-350, 350.

¹⁷³ John R. R. Tolkien, "To Michael Straight (drafts)," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 252-255, 254.

¹⁷⁴ John R. R. Tolkien, "To Michael Straight (drafts)," 254.

¹⁷⁵ Tolkien, "To Milton Waldman," 169.

In relation to mortality and immortality, we may also explore the possibility of resurrection further. As we have already explored in the previous paragraph, elves have the possibility of being reincarnated once slain. In one of his *Letters*, Tolkien further explained this notion, stating that they could even recover the memory of their past and physically remained ‘identical’ to their previous physical form.¹⁷⁶ However, the most prominent resurrection appeared in the trilogy. In *LotR*, “Gandalf sacrificed himself, was accepted, and enhanced, and returned.”¹⁷⁷ The resurrection of Gandalf in *The Two Towers* parallels the Christian dogma of the resurrection of Jesus, who was brought back to life by God. Similarly, Gandalf was resurrected by Arda’s creator, Eru Ilúvatar. A member of the Inklings, C. S. Lewis, also employs this trope with the resurrection of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. While Tolkien and Lewis were both devout Catholics, this parallel with Christianity is probably more than incidental. Tolkien called Christ’s resurrection “the greatest ‘eucatastrophe’ possible.”¹⁷⁸ Eucatastrophe is a term Tolkien himself coined, and it is described as “the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.”¹⁷⁹ In the same letter, he also argued that eucatastrophe is the highest function that a fairy-story can produce. Therefore, because of this emotional response, Tolkien wanted to implement a similar impact in *LotR* and the possibility of resurrection became one of the fantasy tropes relating to the magic system.

In high fantasy, magical artefacts often play a major role. These artefacts are usually searched for, protected, or sought to be destroyed. In *LotR*, the most essential artefact is the Ring, since it drives Campbell’s monomyth. In contrast to the power of the wizards, which was by Sanderson described as the ‘Soft Magic’ system, the Ring has a defined power and clear consequences of this power. During the story, it is clearly manifested that the one who wears the ring becomes invisible and, as long as the owner possesses it, his lifespan extends. On the other hand, the ring has repercussions for these abilities. The Dark Lord and his servants, Ringwraiths, can sense the wearer. Because of these specific rules and attributes, Sanderson would consider the Ring as an example of

¹⁷⁶ John R. R. Tolkien, “Draft of a Continuation of the Letter to Rhona Beare,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 300-302, 301.

¹⁷⁷ Tolkien, “To Robert Murray, SJ. (draft),” 217.

¹⁷⁸ John R. R. Tolkien, “To Christopher Tolkien,” in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 115-117, 116.

¹⁷⁹ Tolkien, “To Christopher Tolkien,” 115.

what he calls the ‘Hard Magic’ system.¹⁸⁰ Due to the artefact’s significance, some scholars have pointed out that the Ring is an allegory of an atomic bomb. Tolkien, as much as he disliked allegorical readings, stated that the idea of the Ring came to him long before the atomic bomb was invented.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, magical artefacts are significant facets of the fantasy genre and, therefore, can be considered one of the high fantasy tropes.

Conclusively, these subchapters introduced and analysed Tolkien’s world-building methods and tropes structured according to Wolf’s realms of the degree of invention. In terms of the nominal realm, we have explored the extent of Tolkien’s language creation. Tolkien’s constructed languages were so elaborate that they were even provided with an illusion of historicity to justify their hypothetical changes. In this sense, Tolkien might have popularised one of the fantasy tropes, which we can refer to as ‘the exoticisation of names,’ which creates merely an illusion of a constructed language. Another fantasy trope within this realm was the use of a ‘high register language.’ Also, Tolkien introduced ‘the Common tongue’ trope that is used as a lingua franca by the majority of the population of Middle-earth.

In the cultural realm, we have explored the different humanoid ‘races,’ which have become the epitome of high fantasy. These were namely elves, dwarves and hobbits. Additionally, Tolkien portrayed orcs as a dehumanised and enslaved race, whose role was limited to serving as foot soldiers for the side of evil. This is another trope that could be referred to as ‘cannon fodder.’ The last tropes in the cultural realm discussed the resemblance of Tolkien’s world to the Middle Ages. These tropes were ‘pseudo-medievalism’ and ‘medieval stasis.’

The topics discussed in the natural realm included the notion of map-making, which is one of the ways to project and simulate the imaginary world’s geography. Tolkien uses the trope of a ‘left-justified’ map that closely resembles the geography of Europe. The following tropes greatly overlapped with the cultural realm and considered cultural variation based on geographical location. These tropes were ‘moral geography’ and ‘orientalism.’ Finally, this subchapter also considered ‘cataclysmic changes,’ which can alter the world’s ecosystems.

¹⁸⁰ Brandon Sanderson, “Lecture #5: Worldbuilding Part One.” Youtube Video, 1:12:25, March 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATNvOk5rIJA>, 17:14.

¹⁸¹ Sídh Aníron, “J.R.R. Tolkien 1962 Interview,” Youtube Video, 6:26, January 7, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bi8q1Eopk2U>, 5:46.

The final subchapter focused on the laws of the world, which is in fantasy fiction often represented by its magic system. The tropes associated with the magic system were the possibility of ‘immortality’ of the magic users, the possibility of ‘resurrection’ or reincarnation and we also discussed the nature of the ‘magical artefacts.’ All of these tropes will be compared with the world-building features in Joe Abercrombie’s the Circle of the World.

3. *The First Law Trilogy*

This chapter will focus on the analysis of *The First Law* trilogy. Initially, the chapter will introduce the necessary background for the analysis, including the basic information about the author and the summary of the first three novels that make up the trilogy. Finally, the chapter will proceed to the analysis of the world-building techniques and specific aspects of the Circle of the World, which will be contrasted with Tolkien's formulaic world. The analysis will also point out whether Abercrombie uses the same tropes as Tolkien did, or whether he subverts them or does not use them at all. The results may reveal how the grimdark subgenre of fantasy relates to the world-building tropes of the prototypical high fantasy.

3.1 Joe Abercrombie

The author of *The First Law* series is a British contemporary fantasy writer, Joe Abercrombie. As the biography section of his website states, before becoming a writer, he pursued a degree in psychology at Manchester University. Afterwards, he became a freelance film editor, working mostly on documentaries and videos related to the music industry.¹⁸²

From a young age, Abercrombie got acquainted with fantasy through playing video games and role-playing games. Therefore, role-playing games were one of his initial introductions to fantasy world-building. Due to this, he got acquainted with the typical fantasy tropes from a young age, since, as was discussed by James in the theory section, fantasy role-playing games tend to be filled with the ideas of fantasy novels, namely Tolkien's. Abercrombie began to create maps of worlds, which he then populated mainly for entertainment and interaction with his friends.¹⁸³ However, one of the fantasy works that greatly influenced the way he viewed fantasy was *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin. Abercrombie states that before reading the first book of the series in the 1990s, he always thought of fantasy as "shiny, heroic and predictable" in contrast with Martin's "dark, gritty and shocking" world.¹⁸⁴ As a result, during his studies at the university, a dream of redefining the fantasy genre took hold of him. He decided to work on an epic fantasy series "about the misadventures of thinking

¹⁸² "About Joe," Joe Abercrombie, September 15, 2021, <https://joeabercrombie.com/author>

¹⁸³ "About Joe," Joe Abercrombie.

¹⁸⁴ Waterstones, "Shelfie with Joe Abercrombie," YouTube Video, September 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N1tIZbAuh0>, 2:20.

man's barbarian Logen Ninefingers." However, he abandoned this project and continued working on it 6 years later.¹⁸⁵

In 2004, Abercrombie managed to have his debut novel, *The Blade Itself*, published by the British Gollancz publishing house. The sequels *Before They Are Hanged* and *Last Argument of Kings* were then each released a year apart from the previous one, thus concluding *The First Law* trilogy. Due to the trilogy's popularity among fans of grimdark and critics alike, Abercrombie decided to continue telling stories from the Circle of the World. However, this time, he intended to write novels with focused, self-contained stories resembling "filmic plots."¹⁸⁶ As a result, Abercrombie took inspiration from his favourite movies and wrote *Best Served Cold* (2009), a typical revenge story, followed by *The Heroes* (2011), a war story focusing on a single battle, and *Red Country* (2012), a story with typical western genre motifs. Additionally, a collection of short stories called *Sharp Ends* (2016) was released. In this collection, some of the stories serve as prequels to the original trilogy. Abercrombie continued to be prolific with the series and started a second trilogy called *The Age of Madness*, which takes the Circle of the World into an industrial and social revolution. This follow-up trilogy consists of *A Little Hatred* (2019), *The Trouble With Peace* (2020) and *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2021). This trilogy follows the next generation of characters that are often related to the ones from the original trilogy.

Apart from writing grimdark intended for adult readers, Joe Abercrombie also tried his hand at young adult fantasy with *The Shattered Sea* trilogy (2014-15). This series takes inspiration from the Viking Age and Norse culture. At first glance, the world of *The Shattered Sea* poses as a secondary world. However, the readers later discover that the novels are set in post-apocalyptic Scandinavia and the 'elves,' that are often mentioned, are in reality people who lived before a cataclysmic event. Additionally, the world map featured in the trilogy closely resembles the Baltic Sea and its shores. Therefore, in contrast to *The First Law*, *The Shattered Sea* is an example of low fantasy, since it is set in the primary world, albeit the post-apocalyptic version of it.

¹⁸⁵ "About Joe," Joe Abercrombie.

¹⁸⁶ Daniel Greene, "Joe Abercrombie Talks First Law, Fantasy, & Writing," YouTube Video, 48:14, May 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UApwCU92VTI>, 6:05.

3.2 Introduction to the Trilogy – Narratology and Summary

Following Chatman's terminology from *Story and Discourse* (1978), all volumes of Abercrombie's *The First Law* use a 'covert narrative voice,' which, in Jahn's words, "is an inconspicuous and indistinctive narrator – a narrator who fades into the background."¹⁸⁷ The covert narrators do not signal any emotions or subjectivity. When it comes to the involvement of the narrator in the story, *The First Law*'s narrator tells the story of other people. He is not present as a character, nor does he protrude in the narration. Therefore, this leads us to classify him as a third-person narrator. In the modern analysis of narratology, this term is often substituted by 'heterodiegetic narrative' from Genette's terminology in *Narrative Discourse* (1980).¹⁸⁸ However, most importantly, *The First Law* series is told from the point of view of multiple characters, where each chapter is restricted to the perception of a single character. These characters can be described as 'internal focalisers' (or reflectors). In other words, readers experience the events of the story through the protagonist's eyes. In *The First Law*, this happens on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Following Stanzel's *A Theory of Narrative* (1982), *The First Law* can be also classified as a 'figural narrative,' which is essentially "the specific configuration of a heterodiegetic-covert narrative plus a prominent internal focalization."¹⁸⁹

On the other hand, the classification of the narrative in Tolkien's works is more complex. For instance, in *The Hobbit*, the narrative voice is 'overt' due to his frequently intrusive presence. Flieger and Anderson comment on the narrator as being intrusive, jokey and someone who often establishes a dialogue between the authorial *I* and the audience *you*.¹⁹⁰ This is a typical characteristic of an overt narrative voice. Additionally, the narrator distances himself from the secondary world as if he stood outside of the story's context. Also, he does not present himself as one of the characters in the story. Therefore, just like in *The First Law*, Tolkien used a third-person narrator, or in Genette's terminology, 'heterodiegetic narrative.' Altogether, with its overt voice and the heterodiegetic narrative, the narration in *The Hobbit* can be established as 'authorial narration.' However, Tolkien attempted to completely withdraw from the narrator's overt voice in the *LotR* trilogy. Instead, he moved towards a more focused

¹⁸⁷ Manfred Jahn, "Narratology 2.3: A Guide to the Theory of Narrative," English Department, University of Cologne, 2021, www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.pdf, 5.

¹⁸⁸ Jahn, "Narratology," 5.

¹⁸⁹ Jahn, "Narratology," 9.

¹⁹⁰ Flieger and Anderson, eds., *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*, 17.

narrator. In contrast to *The First Law*, *LotR*'s narrator does not restrict the narration to the perception of characters. *LotR*'s story is narrated by a rather all-knowing and unrestricted narrator with an omniscient point of view, which can be labelled as “non-focalization,” or “zero-focalization.”¹⁹¹ However, at certain times, the narrator enters the minds of the characters as he sees fit, and shifts through their perception even within a single chapter. When this happens, these characters become focalisers. Interestingly, Christine Barkley noticed a consistent pattern in Tolkien's choice of focalisers. She mentions that Tolkien chooses “a less powerful, less ‘in charge’ character for his point of view.”¹⁹² These characters are mostly the four hobbits since they are exploring foreign lands outside of their homeland for the first time. However, Abercrombie still perceives the narration in *LotR* and its focus on characters as rather “dignified and distant” as if it was narrated “by a dignified wizard.”¹⁹³ Conclusively, the narrative in *The First Law* can be classified as a figural narrative situation due to its covert narrative voice and the heterodiegetic (third-person) narrator, whose knowledge is restricted only to the chapters' focalisers. The fact that the readers get to experience the story and the world through the perception of characters greatly supports the immersion into the imaginary world. Due to this, *The First Law* would classify as Mendlesohn's immersive fantasy. Also, note that a similar technique in narration is also used in the popular *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R. R. Martin. As was already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Abercrombie was greatly influenced by Martin, and as a result, Abercrombie implemented Martin's style into his own fantasy series, which is heavily focused on its characters.

The following paragraphs will summarise the main plotlines of *The First Law* trilogy. Each protagonist's story begins in a different place and only later on, do their stories begin to intertwine. Therefore, it might be fruitful to briefly summarise the story one character at a time. By doing so, we will also explore how Abercrombie handles character archetypes and narrative tropes relating to fantasy. Overall, Abercrombie's trilogy tells the story of six character focalisers, three of which cover a substantial part of the narrative. These are Logen Ninefingers, Sand dan Glokta and Jezal dan Luthar.

¹⁹¹ Jahn, “Narratology,” 30.

¹⁹² Christine Barkley, “Point of View in Tolkien,” *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 21, no. 2 (October 15, 1996), <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol21/iss2/38>, 257.

¹⁹³ Greene, “Joe Abercrombie Talks First Law, Fantasy, & Writing!,” 13:50

The First Law is set in an imaginary world called the Circle of the World. The premise of *The First Law* series lies in the world's mythology. It is believed that the world was once a place of absolute chaos since it was inhabited by both humans and demons. Finally, Euz, a descendant of both humans and demons, was provided with magical powers that helped him separate the world into the realm of men and the realm of demons, which is often referred to as the Other Side. Euz closed the gates to the Other Side so that its entities would not break through to the realm of men. As a consequence of the separation, Euz also created the eponymous first law. The law states that "it is forbidden to touch the Other Side direct. Forbidden to communicate with the world below, forbidden to summon Demons, forbidden to open gates to hell."¹⁹⁴ This law was to be obeyed by Euz's sons and their followers, all of whom possessed magical powers. In this sense, Euz wanted to protect his sons and their apprentices from the evils of the Other Side that could potentially corrupt them. Since the world is divided into two realms, one of which is undeniably more supernatural, and both have the tendency to influence one another, we might be misled into categorising *The First Law* as intrusive fantasy. However, note that Mendlesohn classified intrusive fantasy settings as primary worlds only. Therefore, since Abercrombie created an entirely new world, the label of intrusive fantasy would not apply to it. Instead, as was already mentioned, since the trilogy is centred around the world's immersion through the perception of its protagonists, it would classify as immersive fantasy. While applying Alexander's more general dichotomy, the series can be classified as high fantasy.

The first novel of the trilogy, *The Blade Itself*, paradoxically opens with a prologue titled 'The End.' A threat of war looms in the Circle of the World as three major factions, the Union, the North and the GURKISH Empire, are set against one another. The readers are first introduced to the North, where people live in a clan-based society. Logen Ninefingers, an infamous barbarian, sometimes referred to as the Bloody Nine, is the first introduced focaliser. An ancient wizard, Bayaz, sent his apprentice to bring Logen to him. As soon as Logen meets Bayaz for the first time, readers might notice Abercrombie's subversive tendencies. Wizards are usually portrayed as old, long-bearded men in robes, holding a magical staff. Instead, Logen mistakes Bayaz for

¹⁹⁴ Joe Abercrombie, *Before They Are Hanged* (London: Gollancz, 2008), 80.

a heavily built butcher.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, Abercrombie purposefully subverts readers' expectations of what the prototypical wizard would look like. Even Logen is not the typical inexperienced, morally good hero of Campbell's Hero's Journey. He is already an experienced warrior who became infamously known for his ruthless and dishonourable actions. However, while attempting to redeem himself, he accepts the mentor's (Bayaz's) offer and the call to adventure, starting his Hero's Journey. Logen and Bayaz set out for the capital of the Union, Adua, crossing the threshold of the known world for Logen. In Adua, Logen's story begins to interweave with the storylines of the other protagonists.

Another focaliser, Sand dan Glokta, used to be a famous, bold, yet reckless knight fighting for the Union Army. However, he was captured and imprisoned by the Union's rival, the Gurkish empire, which caused Glokta to change beyond recognition. After being tortured by the Gurkish, Glokta was released as a crippled man unfit for the army. Instead of being useful on the battlefield, Glokta became an inquisitor for the King's Inquisition. The Inquisition is an institution that is tasked to expose secrets from within the Union and eradicate potential threats to the kingdom. To do so, the Inquisition favours brutal interrogative tactics. Therefore, Glokta, who was formerly tortured, became a torturer. Glokta, yet again, embodies a subversion of the typical hero archetype and, due to his lack of idealistic characteristics, he can be considered anti-heroic. Overall, in the first novel, Glokta does not physically cross the threshold of the familiar world. His crossing is rather metaphorical since he delves into secrets and conspiracies to frame the wizard Bayaz as a fraud.

Another protagonist is Jezal dan Luthar. Jezal is a young nobleman serving in the Union army. He is egocentric and often resents the low-born and his superiors in the army. For the majority of the first novel, he is preparing for the Contest, a popular fencing competition that names its winner the best swordsman of the Union. It is at this fencing contest where all the focalisers assemble, mostly as spectators. On his Hero's Journey, Jezal is primarily aided by his superiors from the army, who are his mentors. However, just like Glokta, Jezal does not cross the physical threshold of the familiar world. Instead, we can see the crossing in his developing emotional attachment to his superior's sister, Ardee, essentially falling in love for the first time. In the final round of the Contest, Jezal seems to be losing against his opponent. However, the tides

¹⁹⁵ Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself* (London: Gollancz, 2006), 91.

suddenly turn due to Bayaz's magic and Jezal is declared the winner. It is undeniable that Bayaz served as the mentor and provided Jezal with magical aid to help him in his Hero's Journey.

The first novel of the trilogy mainly sets up the pieces for the next volumes. In one of his recent interviews, Abercrombie stated that the plot of the first book may seem a bit directionless.¹⁹⁶ However, he defends its structure, as the story was always intended to be read as a trilogy, not as a standalone novel. Only after reading the whole trilogy, the readers are then able to pick up on small details that were planned out from the first novel.

The second novel of the trilogy, *Before They Are Hanged*, takes on the prototypical narrative structure of quest fantasy, which closely resembles The Hero's Journey. Consequently, this novel can be also classified as quest fantasy in Mendlesohn's terminology. The wizard Bayaz plans to assemble a group that would venture to the edge of the world to acquire a mysterious relic called the Seed. He convinces everyone that the Seed would help them fight off the Gurkish empire from their future attacks. Half of the protagonists, namely Logen, Jezal and Ferro Maljinn, are on a quest to find it, starting their Hero's Journey. In the end, all of them accept the call to adventure and cross the threshold of their familiar world. While they venture through the Old Empire they encounter various ordeals, confronting bandits and beast-like creatures called the Shanka. However, once the heroes reach the edge of the world, the Seed is not where Bayaz thought it would be. Therefore, the protagonists are forced to return to the familiar world, without acquiring their reward. On the other hand, the torturer Glokta is also sent on his own journey by his superiors to help defend the city of Dagoska from upcoming Gurkish attacks. Although he was aided by a powerful banking company, Valint & Balk, he was unable to defend the city and is forced to flee without success. Therefore, Abercrombie substantially subverted the typical structure of the quest trope and Campbell's monomyth. In one of his interviews, Abercrombie justified this subversion, stating that high fantasy "often reads like an academic paper."¹⁹⁷ What he meant by this statement is that there is a typical structure that is entirely predictable. For instance, in the introduction, or the departure stage, the protagonists are precisely told what to do in order

¹⁹⁶ Liene's Library, "Abercrombie: A Chat With The Man Himself," 16:48.

¹⁹⁷ Liene's Library, "Abercrombie: A Chat With The Man Himself," 16:15.

to complete their quest. In the conclusion, everything is disentangled the way everyone expected. In other words, in the case of *LotR*, Frodo is told by Gandalf to destroy the Ring by throwing it into Mount Doom, and in the end, their quest is accomplished by the destruction of the Ring. On the other hand, in *Before They Are Hanged*, the artefact sought after is not even found and the expected reward for the heroes' ordeal is non-existent. However, this does not mean the journey was wasted, since during the initiation stage of the monomyth, the readers witness major character developments within the group. Additionally, Abercrombie provides world-building insight into history and geography through the exploration of the Old Empire, a region that was once a home of a glorious civilisation. In this sense, Abercrombie highlights that the journey is essentially more important than the goal itself.

While the protagonists are gone from the capital, another conspiracy breaks loose. The heir to the throne was brutally murdered. Additionally, in the North, the Union King's other son and heir to the throne is also killed. Therefore, since there is no heir apparent to the Union's throne, the political authorities in the capital decide that the right to succession should be resolved before King Guslav V dies. And the final novel of the trilogy, *Last Argument of Kings*, opens with this challenge.

After the death of the king, the Council members were ready to elect his successor. However, Bayaz stops the voting and presents his judgement. The wizard reveals that Jezal is, in fact, the king's illegitimate son and, if he were to be legitimised, he would be a great fit for a king. The wizard convinces everyone of Jezal's heroic deeds during their journey through the Old Empire and is later chosen to be the rightful King of the Union. Since Jezal accepted the call to adventure in the previous novel and underwent major character development throughout this journey, he perfectly fits Campbell's hero in Hero's Journey, as well as Propp's hero from *The Morphology of the Folktale*.

Finally, the capital, Adua, is besieged by the Gurkish. Luckily for Bayaz, he manages to find the Seed in the capital itself. Once the Gurkish led by Khalul breach through Adua's walls, they directly target Bayaz. In a surprising turn of events, the readers realise that the purpose behind the war between the Union and the Gurkish Empire was an ancient clash between two wizards, Bayaz and Khalul. Khalul wants Bayaz to be held responsible for killing their common master Juvens. Overall, Bayaz is revealed to be the ultimate puppet master who manipulated everyone in the Union to his

liking. The wizard is directly responsible for prominent world affairs and also has complete control over the political, economic and military affairs of the Union. Bayaz then proceeds to use the Seed and, by unleashing power from the Other Side, he breaks the First Law. The Gurkish army is wiped out and a significant part of the capital is destroyed with many casualties on both sides. Bayaz later justified his actions by stating that “Power makes all things right. That is my first law, and my last. That is the only law that I acknowledge.”¹⁹⁸ Bayaz also acknowledges that the First Law is purposeless since there is no one who would enforce it and that he is the only authority that matters. Overall, throughout the story, Bayaz was perceived as the mentor archetype in Campbell’s monomyth. While the mentor often provides wisdom and guidance for protagonists, this archetype was greatly subverted by Abercrombie. Also, based on Propp’s dramatis personae, Bayaz embodied various character types. At first, Bayaz appeared as both the helper and the dispatcher for multiple heroes. He sent the protagonists on a quest to acquire a powerful artefact and even assisted them with magical aid. However, in the end, Bayaz is revealed as the true villain.

While the ultimate reward in the Hero’s Journey would be the downfall of the villain, *The First Law*, yet again does not reward its heroes. Although the Gurkish threat was resolved and their attack was repelled, Bayaz still influences world affairs from behind the curtain. Moreover, although both Glokta and Jezal have ascended to higher social status, they are equally, or even more, restrained than at the beginning of the story. Glokta and Jezal became the Arch Lector and the king respectively. However, they are both directly subject to Bayaz and are forced to do his bidding. Also, in the case of Ferro and Logen, they are both the same characters with the same motives they had at the start of their journeys. Ferro still seeks vengeance on the Gurkish just as she did in *The Blade Itself* and Logen returns to the North, struggling to get rid of the violent past that follows him. Moreover, Logen’s fate is left uncertain since he is betrayed by his companions and is forced to jump off a cliff, which mirrors the first chapter of *The Blade Itself*. This cyclical nature of the protagonists’ development is also supported by the fact that the first chapter of the trilogy is called ‘The End,’ and the last one is ‘The Beginning.’ Overall, this miserable ending stands against Tolkien’s idea of eucatastrophe, the happy turn in the fairy stories. Moreover, these rather grim endings are one of the characteristic features of the grimdark genre to which *The First Law*

¹⁹⁸ Joe Abercrombie, *Last Argument of Kings* (London: Gollancz, 2008), 610.

series undeniably belongs. Since we have already explored the narrative and Abercrombie's subversive tendencies of the typical character archetypes and narrative structure, we may now explore its extent in the study of his world-building.

3.3 World-Building Analysis: Completeness, Consistency, Invention

Just like with the analysis of *LotR*, before moving on to the comparison of the traditional high fantasy world-building tropes, Wolf's degrees of quality will be applied to Abercrombie's world. As was already mentioned in the world-building chapter, the idea of completeness in fiction is always an attempt to create an illusion of a believable world. Although Abercrombie has released ten narrative-focused volumes set in the Circle of the World, there are substantial gaps in certain areas of the world, mainly the world's history. Although history might be seen as one of the main pillars of making the imaginary world believable, Abercrombie believes that world-building in great detail is a big mistake world-builders tend to make.¹⁹⁹ He thinks that world-builders often have the notion that they need to create every bit of history, and have every area of the map filled right at the start. Abercrombie concludes that this is "Tolkien's standard," which still, rather negatively, navigates the fantasy genre.²⁰⁰ However, these empty spaces, or zero-texture, in world-building, are also essential for world-building since they can create a sense of wonder in the readers and the creators can get inspiration as their stories progress. Therefore, Abercrombie's trilogy can be regarded as a minimalist fantasy, since when it comes to the illusion of completeness and world-building, these aspects are less convincing in contrast to Tolkien's. However, considering Wolf's saturation, since Abercrombie's world is less saturated, it is easier for readers to absorb information without any major challenge. Also, there is an important distinction between the method of world-building in both Tolkien and Abercrombie. In an interview for the BBC, Tolkien expressed that he had created the world's mythology many years before he started working on the story of *The Hobbit* and *LotR*.²⁰¹ Therefore, it is clear that world-building, or certain aspects of it, came as a priority to Tolkien even before he started writing the novels. On the other hand, it appears that Abercrombie's approach was the complete opposite. He primarily wanted to create a story with compelling characters, and the world-building came second in

¹⁹⁹ Dicebreaker, How to Create your own World, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVWaSIYEKdk&t,> 5:08.

²⁰⁰ Dicebreaker, How to Create your own World, 7:36.

²⁰¹ Sídh Aníron, "J.R.R. Tolkien 1964 Interview," 26:36.

importance as he worked on the story. This is also supported by the fact that Abercrombie began working on stories that were focused on Logen Ninefingers before expanding them into a fully-fledged trilogy.²⁰²

Another Wolf's degree of quality is consistency. As was already explored in the theoretical part, Wolf states that completeness and consistency are highly dependent on one another. While the Circle of the World is a less detailed world, in contrast to Middle-earth and Arda, it is therefore easier for Abercrombie to maintain the world's consistency. Overall, consistency in *The First Law* trilogy is in accordance with the laws Abercrombie established for the world. However, although he never refers to the primary world within the narration in any form, the titles of his books often relate to real-world quotes. For instance, the name of the first novel *The Blade Itself* was taken from a quote in *The Odyssey* by Homer: "The blade itself incites to deeds of violence."²⁰³ However, these quotes stand outside the story's context and do not break the immersion of the imaginary world. In the trilogy, Abercrombie's narrator also avoids using the explicit analogy between the secondary and the real-world objects that do not exist in the secondary world's context. Additionally, although Abercrombie alludes to the Seed being similar to an atomic bomb, the similarity is never explicitly stated within the narration. On the other hand, Tolkien's narrator did this with the already mentioned 'the dragon passed like an express train.' Therefore, immersion in the secondary world is not broken due to these analogies. Also, because the only person working on the creation of the world is Joe Abercrombie, there appear to be no errors in consistency.

Finally, the degree of invention will be considered alongside the high fantasy tropes in the following sub-chapter, yet again, structured according to Wolf's levels of invention. Each of the following paragraphs covers the same topics and tropes that were introduced in Tolkien's world-building chapter.²⁰⁴ Therefore, we will explore Abercrombie's subversive tendencies of these traditional high fantasy tropes. Additionally, as was already mentioned, George R. R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* helped Joe Abercrombie see the fantasy genre from a different perspective. Therefore, Martin's take on these tropes will also be briefly examined to explore whether Abercrombie's use or subversions of them might be considered innovative.

²⁰² "About Joe," Joe Abercrombie.

²⁰³ Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 5.

²⁰⁴ see chapter 2.2 of this thesis.

3.3.1 Nominal Realm: Languages

Just like with the analysis of Tolkien's world, the first area that will be considered is concentrated on the construction of languages. Abercrombie did not invent a specific functioning language with phonological and grammatical rules to the same extent as Tolkien did. Nevertheless, the Circle of the World is described as a place of cultural and linguistic variety. Generally, every continent of this secondary world has its language. For instance, the majority of the Northern continent speaks the Northern tongue, the lands under the rule of the Union speak the Common tongue, and the Southern continent speaks Kantic. This appears to be a rather simplistic approach since there appears to be no linguistic variety within the continents themselves and there is no 'illusion of historicity,' which would provide a context for the development of languages. Moreover, the only area where these languages are used is in naming. Which is, according to Fimi and Higgins, the most frequent usage of invented languages.²⁰⁵ Therefore, in the works of Abercrombie, the construction of a language is practically minimal. However, this does not mean that these languages will not be constructed in the future. This was the case for High Valyrian and Dothraki in the prominent grimdark series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. In the novels, their usage was comparable to the one in Abercrombie's work. However, while being adapted for television, the creators of the show approached linguistic experts from the Language Creation Society to construct languages based on Martin's already-created names and phrases.²⁰⁶ Nowadays, these languages have become so systematic that they are being taught in language learning applications.²⁰⁷ This demonstrates that world-building may require a collective effort, and as experts in the field get involved, the world can become more convincing and immersive. Also, there is a possibility that if *The First Law* trilogy receives a TV show or movie adaptation, some of the languages might get constructed with it.

Since we have explored the extent of Abercrombie's creation of language, we may advance and analyse whether his naming techniques implement exoticisation. It appears that for the most of crucial names, Abercrombie focuses on making them sound unusual but familiar to primary world names. For instance, regarding place names, one of the states on the Northern continent is called England, which noticeably

²⁰⁵ Fimi and Higgins, "Invented Languages," 22.

²⁰⁶ Fimi and Higgins, "Invented Languages," 27.

²⁰⁷ see the language learning application Duolingo.

resembles the spelling and pronunciation of England. Furthermore, the adjective Gurkish, in the name Gurkish Empire, sounds peculiarly similar to Turkish. A similar technique is also applied to character names. For instance, Prince Ladisla is comparable to the Slavic name Ladislaus. Also, the name of Union King Guslav resembles the Swedish name Gustaf, and the Gurkish name Uthman-ul-Dosht is essentially identical to the Arabic name Uthman. Abercrombie also frequently uses nobiliary particles or prepositions for characters with a noble background. For example, in the names Jezal *dan* Luthar, or Sand *dan* Glokta. The particle *dan* in Abercrombie's world comes across as similar to the real-world equivalents in Italian *da* and German *von*. Moreover, his version is fundamentally a combination of both. Abercrombie commented on this technique by stating that he "stole" some of the names "in the hope that the names might carry in them some echoes of the real world cultures from which they were drawn."²⁰⁸ Therefore, we might not be speaking of pure exoticisation by adding infrequent consonant clusters or apostrophes in the way Fimi and Higgins described. Instead, Abercrombie took the path of least resistance, used names from real-world languages and subtly modified them to create the effect of sounding slightly unusual, yet familiar. Therefore, we may be speaking of a light subversion of the typical exoticising trope. Due to this, the readers can make assumptions from the real world about the characters and places they are reading about. Generally, Abercrombie embraces a minimalistic approach in naming his characters and places. In the case of Martin's world-building, he often implements strategies Fimi and Higgins would consider as exoticising. Especially, for one of his world's dynasties, he uses names such as Daenerys, Aerys or Aegon. On the other hand, a technique similar to Abercrombie's is also apparent in the names Eddard, Petyr or Rickon, which relate to the real-world names Edward, Peter and Richard respectively. Although Martin used this technique, in Abercrombie's world it manifests itself as more prominent.

As was already explored, in most fantasy series, the idea of high-register languages lies in their limited usage. Generally, they are used by a fraction of the population, usually for scientific, religious, or noble purposes. In *The First Law*, a specific language that could potentially apply to this is the Old Tongue. In the trilogy, the language is referred to only scarcely. On one instance, the wizard Bayaz, as part of his teaching methods, urged one of his apprentices to name a specific plant in this

²⁰⁸ Joe Abercrombie, "Interview: Joe Abercrombie, Part 3," *Writer Unboxed*, September 18, 2008, <https://writerunboxed.com/2008/09/26/interview-joe-abercrombie-part-3>

language.²⁰⁹ On another occasion, a university librarian was able to read from an old parchment, which was written in the old tongue, stating that “few can read it now.”²¹⁰ Therefore, with its archaic status and limited usage, the old tongue shares similarities with the real-world classical languages, such as Latin or Ancient Greek. The old tongue is used only by a small number of people, especially by the wizards, their apprentices and scholars at the University of Adua, for scholarly purposes. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* also uses a high register language, High Valyrian, which was spoken in the past by ancient civilisation and one of the noble dynasties use it to maintain their social status. Therefore, both *The First Law* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* implement the trope of high-register language into their world-building.

As was already indicated in the previous paragraphs, the world of *The First Law* incorporates a Common tongue. This language is primarily spoken in the Union, which is where the majority of the trilogy takes place. While in *LotR*, the Common tongue serves as a lingua franca, the one in *The First Law* is universal only in the Union and its territories. However, this raises a question of how the language variety is handled since the focalisers have different mother tongues. In several instances, the non-native speakers of the Common tongue frequently manifest their improficiency in the Common language. For instance, both Logen and Ferro, the native speakers of the Northern tongue and Kantic, respectively, often misunderstand words from the Common. This lack of proficiency is often presented through descriptive means. For instance, “his grip on the language wasn’t good enough to catch the details,”²¹¹ or “they spoke in some language she didn’t understand.”²¹² Also, while speaking the Common, Logen gives the impression of impoliteness to the native speakers. The same applies to Ferro. Moreover, her vocabulary is greatly limited and she can produce only simple sentences. Furthermore, since every language is presented in English, we are speaking of the implementation of the translation convention trope. This is indeed the most common solution for the implementation of invented languages in speculative fiction. Conclusively, *The First Law* utilises both the Common and translation convention tropes. In comparison with the other grimdark work, Martin’s world also implements both tropes. However, while Tolkien’s Common tongue was substantially used as

²⁰⁹ Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 191.

²¹⁰ Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 342.

²¹¹ Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 408.

²¹² Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 450.

a lingua franca, in the worlds of Abercrombie and Martin the universality of it is restricted to a single continent.

3.3.2 Cultural Realm: Civilisations

Just like with the naming of characters and places, Abercrombie took “the route of least resistance” and based his cultures and civilisations on the already existing ones of the real world.²¹³ Moreover, the majority of the population of the Circle of the World are humans of different ethnicities. In contrast to Tolkien, Abercrombie’s world does not implement most of Tolkien’s races. Thus, Abercrombie does not use the typical high fantasy trope of including elves, dwarves, hobbits, or even races that would resemble them. Therefore, instead of Tolkien’s homogeneous races with stereotypical traits, Abercrombie uses a rather heterogenous human race. While being inspired by history and real-world cultures, Abercrombie disclosed that the Union was based on the Holy Roman Empire with a political system resembling the Venetian Republic. The Union’s rivals the GURKISH Empire were inspired by Middle Eastern cultures, specifically the Ottoman Empire, and North African cultures. Finally, the North implements ideas from both Viking and Scots cultures.²¹⁴ Interestingly, Abercrombie’s other series, *The Shattered Sea*, also takes inspiration from Viking culture. Conclusively, in contrast to Tolkien’s focus on Norse mythology and romanticised depiction of races, Abercrombie’s world-building is largely based on the realistic portrayal based on real-world cultures. Therefore, in Attebery’s terms, Abercrombie delves into the mode of imitation rather than the fantastic and creates a world that closely resembles the real one. Considering the other grimdark series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*’s population is in majority of the human race that is also varied in ethnicities. However, Martin also presents another humanoid race, ‘the Children,’ who used to live in the world before humans did, and in certain aspects, they could resemble Tolkien’s elves. Conclusively, considering the inclusion of Tolkien’s typical races, neither Abercrombie nor Martin uses this trope.

Aside from humans, Abercrombie’s world also integrates a greatly dehumanised race, called the Shanka. The Shanka are described as “something between a man and an animal.”²¹⁵ In contrast to Tolkien’s orcs, who were created through the corruption of already existing races, the Shanka were created artificially by Kanedias, the Master

²¹³ Abercrombie, “Interview: Joe Abercrombie, Part 3.”

²¹⁴ Abercrombie, “Interview: Joe Abercrombie, Part 3.”

²¹⁵ Abercrombie, *Before They Are Hanged*, 393.

Maker, to do his bidding. Kanedias intentionally “let them loose upon the world—to grow, and breed, and destroy.”²¹⁶ In this sense, they can be seen as an enslaved race who were forced to spread destruction. Other than that they can mine materials, forge weapons and they speak their own language. However, the focalisers describe it as unintelligible “gibbering and squeaking.”²¹⁷ Overall, they distance themselves from the rest of the civilised world and live in solitude. During the events of the first trilogy, most of the Shanka sided or were forced to side, with the King of the Northmen, Bethod. Therefore, they are one of the central enemies of the protagonists and, possibly due to this, their culture or motivation was not explored in greater detail. In many cases, they resemble Tolkien’s orcs from *LotR* since their primary goal is to serve and destroy. Conclusively, Abercrombie embraces the typical dehumanised race and uses the ‘cannon fodder’ trope. A similar example can be also found in Martin’s series, which has wights, who are reanimated bodies raised by the mysterious Others.

As was already suggested in the previous paragraphs, the Union, as well as the Gurkish Empire, are both largely based on medieval cultures and real-world empires, especially of the Middle Ages. Generally, the world in the first trilogy is built on a foundation that resembles the medieval period, as it incorporates kingdoms, knights, barbarians, and the technology is restricted to what was available during the Middle Ages. In this sense, Abercrombie’s *the Circle of the World* is in accordance with what Hassler-Forrest calls pseudo-medievalism. Considering Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*’s Westeros also resembles medieval Europe, and therefore, both Abercrombie and Martin use the typical Tolkienesque trope of the medieval setting.

Most formulaic high fantasy worlds embrace the medieval stasis trope and remain in the medieval period. The first trilogy of *The First Law* series does not develop beyond the pseudo-medieval period, and therefore, Abercrombie applied the medieval stasis trope. However, in one of his interviews, Abercrombie mentioned that he was often frustrated by how fantasy worlds operate. He dislikes the idea of having a world that has been frozen in time and static for thousands of years without any substantial development.²¹⁸ Instead, what is more compelling for him is “a world that is lived in,

²¹⁶ Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*, 424.

²¹⁷ Abercrombie, *Before They Are Hanged*, 404.

²¹⁸ Dicebreaker, *How to Create your own World*, 12:50.

moving and changing.”²¹⁹ In the later volumes of the series, banking companies become more prominent, the Circle of the World undergoes an industrial revolution. In an interview for *Grimdark Magazine*, Abercrombie mentions that due to this sudden change, a lot of conflicts ensue, which he finds intriguing for the storytelling. For instance, believes that this period is inherently associated with the tension between the rich and poor, tradition and innovation, and monarchy against democracy.²²⁰ Overall, Abercrombie, yet again, acknowledged that he chiefly drew on early industrial revolution in Europe, as well as, the French and Russian revolutions. Moreover, he even suggested that the current real-world political mood certainly might have had an impact on his writing.²²¹ Thus, yet again, Abercrombie delves into the mode of imitation, portraying his world in a realistic manner. Therefore, Abercrombie subverted the formulaic medieval stasis trope. Taking into consideration Martin’s world, while he explored the history of one of his world’s dynasties, which spanned for centuries, there was no significant social or technological development. Therefore, just like Tolkien, Martin incorporated the medieval stasis trope.

3.3.3 Natural Realm: Location and Geography

Although map-making may be the most effective method to provide an imaginary world’s geography, Abercrombie was dismissive of it early in his career. As was already mentioned, his central idea was to focus primarily on the story and characters, therefore, some aspects of world-building were neglected. In one of Abercrombie’s blog posts from 2007, he stated that maps “can damage the sense of scale, awe, and wonder that a reader might have for your world.”²²² Therefore, this outlook stands in opposition to Tolkien’s substantially positive attitude towards maps. As a result of Abercrombie’s stance, Abercrombie did not include maps as para-texts in the first trilogy. However, the situation seems to have changed with the release of the standalone novels. *Best Served Cold* includes pieces of the map of the Circle of the World, *The Heroes* includes a detailed map of a battlefield and *Red Country* is supplied with a continent Far Country. Also, Abercrombie’s other series, *The Shattered Sea*, implemented the world map from the first volume onwards. Therefore, this suggests that as Abercrombie’s

²¹⁹ Dicebreaker, *How to Create your own World*, 13:39.

²²⁰ Adrian Collins, “Discussing the Wisdom of Crowds with Joe Abercrombie,” *Grimdark Magazine*, September 12, 2021, <https://www.grimdarkmagazine.com/discussing-the-wisdom-of-crowds-with-joe-abercrombie>

²²¹ Collins, “Discussing the Wisdom of Crowds with Joe Abercrombie.”

²²² Joe Abercrombie, “Maps,” Joe Abercrombie, <https://joeabercrombie.com/maps-craps-2>

world-building expanded, he might have concluded that the inclusion of a map is useful, if not even necessary. Considering the orientation of maps, Tolkien implemented a map that is left-justified, with the ocean to the west, which closely resembles Europe's geography. In contrast, Abercrombie's world consists of continents that are scattered, and together they form a shape that resembles a circle. Although Abercrombie based *The First Law's* cultures on real-world ones, the world's geography does not seem to resemble Europe's geography whatsoever. Therefore, the left-justified map was not used in *The First Law*. Interestingly, just like in Tolkien's case, Martin's map of Westeros is left justified with the ocean to the west and another continent to the east, which resembles the geography of Europe.

Since the previous paragraph already introduced the extent of geography, we may now consider the connection between geography and culture, specifically Magoun's idea of moral geography. As was explored in Tolkien's world-building section, he implemented the west-east dichotomy of morality. On the other hand, in Abercrombie's trilogy, the majority of events occur between the North and the South with the Union at the centre of those events. Therefore, the north-south division would be more applicable to the Circle of the World. However, considering morality, from the perspective of the central Union, both the people of the North and the South are viewed as uncultivated, amoral savages or even religious fanatics. Moreover, the Union itself does not present itself as morally good since its people are driven by corruption and backstabbing practices. As the summary of *The First Law* explored, the primary feature of the series is the moral ambiguity of the world and its characters. Also, what appears to dismiss the idea of moral geography is the fact that the readers are provided with perceptions of various focalisers who come from different places. Therefore, in contrast to *LotR*, which implicitly divides the continent into 'good' west and 'evil' east, morality based on geography does not seem to apply in the world of *The First Law* trilogy. This grim nature of the world also appears to be one of the primary features of the grimdark genre. Concerning Martin's world, it is divided into a 'civilised' west and an 'uncultivated' east, however, the division of the world based on morality is rather blurred as it depends on the perspectives of the focalisers, just like in *The First Law*.

Considering the topic of Said's Orientalism, *The First Law* implements a culture that was created to resemble the real-world Middle East and the Ottoman Empire. As was already mentioned in the previous subchapter, this culture is the Gurmish

empire. Moreover, the Gorkish names to a great degree resemble names in Arabic, therefore, similarities are more than incidental. The Gorkish are portrayed as people of darker complexions who recognise their religious prophet Khalul as their true leader. *The First Law* introduces them as the enemy of the Union and a major threat to the protagonists. Also, its people are portrayed in problematic and even monstrous ways. Those who directly serve the prophet, the Eaters, are willing to absorb magical powers through cannibalism. What seems to reinforce these negative assumptions is the fact that *The First Law* series never established a Gorkish character as one of the focalisers. Therefore, the readers are only provided with assumptions from the foreigners, especially the ‘Westerners’ from the Union, which means that the series uses orientalism as one of the world-building tropes. Also, note that the first novel of the trilogy was released in 2006, which was the time when the Western world highly stigmatised Islam mostly due to the war on terror in the Middle East after the September 11 attacks in 2001. Therefore, Abercrombie might have been influenced by these real-world events as is often the case for his world-building. Although, in the final novel of the trilogy, the Gorkish are not the primary antagonists and their intentions are fully revealed, Abercrombie still projected an underlying anti-Islamic sentiment into his world-building through Orientalism. Considering Martin’s world-building, the cultures of the continent Essos also resemble cultures of the Middle East and therefore, uses the orientalism trope. Also, just like Abercrombie, he does not provide the readers with the perspective of one of the natives of Essos.

Considering the events that dramatically alter the world’s ecosystem, this paragraph will inspect elements of what Fimi called the cataclysmic changes within *The First Law* series. In the world of *The First Law*, we can observe several instances of what can be considered cataclysmic changes. For instance, the change that had an immense impact on the world was its division into realms of men and demons, which was caused by Euz, half-man and half-demon. The other, possibly more essential case, is the destruction of the Old Empire. The Old Empire was once “the cradle of civilisation.”²²³ However, because of the conflict between two mages, one of them was forced to misuse a powerful artefact, the Seed. After its use, the capital “was laid waste, the land around it forever poisoned,” destroying its ecosystem and leaving it

²²³ Abercrombie, *Before They Are Hanged*, 50.

uninhabitable.²²⁴ This description is highly evocative. Petzold has pointed out the Seed's devastating power and its after-effects, which are similar to radiation sickness, are comparable to a nuclear device or other weapons of mass destruction.²²⁵ This goes to show that, yet again, Abercrombie's world is largely based on the real world and, to a certain extent, mirrors it. Therefore, in contrast to Tolkien's world-building, it appears that most of the cataclysmic changes were caused by humans and not by natural or divine intervention. Therefore, to some degree, Abercrombie has subverted the cataclysmic changes trope. When it comes to George R. R. Martin, he attempted to reflect on current world affairs and employs a metaphor for the climate crisis by the fact that the 'winter is coming.'²²⁶ Also, he uses the trope through the destruction of Valyria, which was, however, caused by natural events. Therefore, only Abercrombie seems to have subverted the typical concept of this trope.

3.3.4 Ontological Realm: Magic System

When it comes to the magic system of *The First Law*, it is rather intrusive, since it often disrupts an otherwise realistic world. The magic itself is believed to be drawn from the 'Other Side.' To absorb magic powers, its users have to disobey laws created by Euz. To break the first law and to access magical powers, the users have to 'touch' the Other Side, which is essentially a demon realm that can evoke similarities to the Christian Hell. Also, another way to gain magic powers is to break the second law, in other words, becoming a cannibal. Therefore, just like in Tolkien's world, Abercrombie uses parallels to religion, especially Christianity, albeit to contrasting aspects of it. While Tolkien's magic is associated with deities and angelic beings, Abercrombie associates magic with the realm of demons, which is essentially the epitome of Hell. Overall, the explanation of the magic system is rather vague and is never explicitly detailed or explained how it functions properly. Therefore, Sanderson would classify it as the Soft Magic system. Overall, magic in *The First Law* is rather a demonic subversion of the formulaic magic system, since in order to access magic, the users have to perform actions which resemble satanic practices. Also, these immoral methods reinforce the features of a typical grimdark world. In terms of Martin's world,

²²⁴ Abercrombie, *Before They Are Hanged*, 115.

²²⁵ Jochen Petzold, "Constructing and Deconstructing the Fantasy Hero: Joe Abercrombie's 'First Law' Trilogy," in *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction since 1800: Case Studies*, ed. Barbara Korte and Stefanie Lethbridge (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 135-150, 145.

²²⁶ Aneesh Barai, "The Earth Is My Home Too, Can't I Help Protect It?," in *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene*, ed. Marek Oziewicz, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dědinová (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 116-129, 118.

the magic system is more diminished in contrast to both Tolkien and Abercrombie. Sanderson would classify it as the Soft Magic system since it is not described. However, its sources are believed to be of divine intervention, which stands in opposition to Abercrombie's world.

One of Tolkien's themes in his world's magic system was the prospect of immortality. In *LotR*, the magic users have prolonged lives and can even be considered immortal. In *The First Law*, the most prominent of the magic users is Bayaz. Allegedly, Bayaz has lived for centuries and has become somewhat of a mythical figure for the people of the Union. The same case applies to other magic users, for instance, Khalul, who used to be an apprentice together with Bayaz, and therefore, they might be of similar age. Therefore, the magic users have significantly longer lives in Abercrombie's world. However, in the world's history, there was a case when one of the wizards, Juvens, was murdered. Therefore, although wizards have substantially longer lives than mortals, they are certainly not immortal. Conclusively, wizards in *The First Law* cannot die of old age, unless they are killed. However, this has not been fully explained in the first trilogy, which supports the fact that the world belongs to Sanderson's Soft Magic system. Therefore, the immortality trope was used in *The First Law*. Considering Martin's series, the number of magical users is fairly limited. However, those who possess some form of supernatural powers, for instance, Bloodraven, live longer than mortals. Therefore, all the considered world-builders use this trope.

In *LotR*, the resurrection also supported immortality. In the first trilogy of Abercrombie's series, any sign of the resurrection trope was not observed. However, in the follow-up *The Age of Madness* trilogy, readers may notice that a sorceress that was decapitated was later resurrected by the savage creatures, the Shanka. Therefore, instead of being brought back by divine intervention, which was the case in *LotR*, the sorceress's head was stitched back onto her corpse by a golden wire and was resurrected. Moreover, since the sorceress sided with one of the antagonists in the first trilogy, her resurrection does not reinforce Tolkien's eucatastrophe, the sudden happy turn in a story, which was a term Tolkien related to the resurrection of Christ. Conclusively, Abercrombie implemented the resurrection trope in the second trilogy of the series. The fact that he used it later on in the series might suggest the fact that Abercrombie develops world-building features to greater detail as his series progresses.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the resurrection was mentioned and utilised several times. All the cases were supposedly caused by divine intervention, specifically the Lord of Light. Therefore, all the mentioned writers implemented this trope in their stories.

The First Law's magical artefact was already presented in the analysis of the cataclysmic changes trope. This artefact was the Seed, which is the most prominent in Abercrombie's world. By one of the focalisers it was described as: "nothing more than an uneven chunk of dark stone the size of a big fist."²²⁷ In *LotR*, artefacts often took the form of imposing objects. In comparison, the Seed resembles a simple stone. Therefore, its appearance subverts the typical imagery of a magical artefact. Also, since the Seed was a goal that was not achieved at the end of the journey, it was used as a subversion of the quest trope and the reward of Campbell's Hero's Journey. Moreover, the artefact holds unimaginable power, which has clear consequences. However, the details of how precisely it is used are not provided. Therefore, in contrast to Tolkien's Ring, the Seed would still belong to Sanderson's concept of the Soft Magic system. In *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, Martin also employed the magical artefact trope by including the dragonglass and Valyrian steel weapons, which help protagonists defeat the Others. Conclusively, all the discussed fantasy series use the magical artefact trope. However, although Abercrombie uses it in *The First Law*, the trope was slightly altered due to the artefact's seemingly ordinary appearance.

²²⁷ Abercrombie, *Last Argument of Kings*, 439.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to determine the extent of Joe Abercrombie's alteration of the traditional tropes of high fantasy in terms of world-building, and whether we can consider him a revisionist of the high fantasy genre. I used Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a template for the analysis, since his work helped to establish traditional tropes of high fantasy and, therefore, had an immense impact on the following fantasy authors. As a justification for the choice of *The Lord of the Rings*, I addressed Brian Attebery's theory of 'fuzzy sets,' which marks Tolkien's work as the most prototypical text of the whole genre. I also used Attebery's theory of genre modality, which classifies fictional works on a scale defined by mimetism (imitation) on one side and fantasy on the other.

The world-building theory served as a theoretical and methodological basis for the analysis of world-building methods and tropes of two imaginary worlds, Tolkien's Middle-earth and Abercrombie's the Circle of the World. I examined the two imaginary worlds through three degrees of quality, which were introduced by one of the leading scholars of world-building theory, Mark J. P. Wolf. These degrees of quality are completeness, consistency, and invention.

Most importantly, the degree of invention assesses the similarities and differences of the imaginary world in relation to the real one. In other words, invention measures the degree of imitation (mimesis) and fantasy. Additionally, I used the degree of invention to explore the traditional high fantasy tropes exemplified by Tolkien's formulaic work, which were then compared with Joe Abercrombie's updates on them. Overall, the analysis was structured into four 'realms,' which were presented by Wolf, and they correspond to specific areas of the imaginary world. These realms are *Nominal*, *Cultural*, *Natural*, and *Ontological*. Both imaginary worlds and their tropes were analysed within these realms accordingly in separate subchapters.

Based on the analysis and comparison of tropes, I observed that some tropes were used by both Tolkien and Abercrombie, with only minimal variation. In the *Nominal Realm*, it was the 'high register language' and the 'Common tongue' tropes. In other words, both worlds include languages that resemble classical languages and a Common tongue that is used as lingua franca. The analysis within the *Cultural Realm* showed that both series share the dehumanised race, the 'cannon fodder' trope, which is exemplified by orcs and the Shanka in both works. The first trilogy of *The First Law* series also incorporated the 'pseudo-medievalism' trope, just like Tolkien's series did.

In the *Natural Realm*, the only common trope was ‘orientalism.’ Finally, in the *Ontological Realm*, the ‘immortality’ of magic users was utilised in both series. With this overlap, we may hypothesise whether these tropes could lie at the intersection of traditional high fantasy and other works of its subgenre, grimdark. However, more quantitative research would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

On the other hand, the rest of the traditional tropes that demonstrated a contrast in Abercrombie’s fantasy can be comprised into two groups. I have observed that in contrast to Tolkien, Abercrombie’s world-building tropes were altered by moving towards the mode of imitation (mimesis) rather than fantasy, and additionally, he portrays the world in a grim, naturalistic manner.

One of the tropes that exhibited a shift towards mimesis was, for instance, the ‘exoticisation of names.’ In many cases, Abercrombie took the route of least effort and used proper names from real-world languages by slightly changing them to create certain assumptions about the characters and places we read about. Another case which exhibited mimesis was the exclusion of the ‘humanoid races’ trope. While Tolkien gravitated towards the mode of fantasy in the creation of elves, dwarfs, and hobbits, Abercrombie did not use this trope and instead presented a world that is predominantly inhabited by the human race. Moreover, Abercrombie based the imaginary world’s cultures and civilisations on the real world ones, specifically, on the Holy Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire and Scots culture. In the case of the portrayal of the pseudo-medieval age, Tolkien’s world was rooted in ‘medieval stasis’ with no apparent signs of technological or social development, which became one of the tropes of fantasy. However, Abercrombie embraces a world that is dynamic and, therefore, his imaginary world moves towards its industrial and social revolution, which, yet again, imitates the turn of events of the real world.

The First Law series also presents grim aspects in its world, which correlates with the typical features of the grimdark genre. While *LotR* uses the ‘moral geography’ trope, where the world is geographically separated into morally good and bad regions, in *The First Law*, this division is nearly non-existent. The reason for this is that the world incorporates morally ambiguous characters who are not necessarily good or bad. Therefore, the ‘moral geography’ trope does not apply to Abercrombie’s series. Additionally, the world’s magic is drawn through satanic-like practices and even the ‘resurrection’ is achieved in a similar way rather than by divine intervention, which was

the case in *LotR. The First Law* incorporates the ‘magical artefact’ trope. However, its appearance is not of a majestic artefact, but rather of a simple stone. The artefact’s use causes damage to the world’s ecosystem, which relates to the ‘cataclysmic changes’ trope. And while in *LotR* these cataclysmic changes were prompted by divine beings, in Abercrombie’s series it is the human race who damages or radically alters the world.

Overall, in contrast to Tolkien, Abercrombie portrays his world in a realistic, even naturalistic manner. In terms of Attebery’s fuzzy set, where Tolkien’s world would lie at the centre, Abercrombie’s world delves into the mode of imitation (mimesis) and resembles the real world more than its predecessor. In this sense, within the fuzzy set of high fantasy, Abercrombie’s series would lie closer to realistic fiction. With its grim depiction of reality, Abercrombie’s world would belong to the same category as other imaginary worlds of the grimdark genre. As we know from history, the Age of Enlightenment highly stigmatised fantastic elements in fiction, yet it helped fantasy to be seen as a separate genre. Since Tolkien stood in opposition to realistic fiction and presented an idealised Medieval setting with fantastic elements, the grimdark genre opposes this portrayal. Therefore, with its realistic and grim depictions, it was able to manifest itself as a separate subgenre within the high fantasy genre. However, Joe Abercrombie was not the first author to use these typical grimdark elements and therefore, he cannot be considered the sole innovator of high fantasy. Nevertheless, due to his minimalistic tendencies for world-building, Abercrombie might inspire the following fantasy authors who may have been discouraged by the attention to detail of his predecessors.

Resumé

V této diplomové práci jsem použil teorii tvorby fikčních světů jako teoretický a metodologický prostředek pro analýzu metod a tropů dvou sérií britské hrdinské fantasy, trilogie *Pán prstenů* J. R. R. Tolkienu a *První zákon* současného autora Joea Abercrombieho. Cílem práce bylo zjistit, do jaké míry se Abercrombieho svět odvrací od tradičních tropů fikčních světů hrdinské fantasy a zda se dá považovat za revizionistu tohoto žánru.

První kapitola vymezila základní termíny spjaté s fantastickou literaturou. Konkrétně s termíny předních akademiků, např. Cluta, Granta, Todorova, Jacksonové. Velká část kapitoly se soustředila na studie Briana Atteberyho, který zavedl termín *neostré množiny* („fuzzy sets“), čímž klasifikuje fantasy žánr podle prototypických textů. V samotném jádru tohoto žánru je podle Atteberyho Tolkienův *Pán prstenů*, který může sloužit jako šablona pro analýzu jiných fantasy děl. Z tohoto důvodu jsem zvolil Tolkienovo dílo jako vzor pro analýzu série Joea Abercrombieho. Další podkapitola z velké části pojednává o historii fantasy žánru a jeho začátcích v akademické analýze. Závěr kapitoly pak uvádí klasifikace žánru podle Farah Mendlesohnové a představuje subžánr grimdark, do kterého spadá Joe Abercrombie, a jehož primárním rysem je aktualizovat tradiční tropy hrdinské fantasy.

Druhá kapitola vykresluje teorii tvorby fikčních světů a zabývá se především metodou analýzy fikčních světů Marka J. P. Wolfa. Wolf je přesvědčen, že se fikční světy dají posuzovat na základě tří kategorií: míry úplnosti („completeness“), konzistence („consistency“) a invence („invention“). Pro samotnou analýzu byla nejdůležitější kategorie invence, kterou Wolf popisuje jako míru odlišnosti fikčních světů vůči reálnému světu. Tímto můžeme hodnotit fikční světy z hlediska míry imitace (mimetismu), tedy podobnosti s reálným světem, a míry fantastična. Avšak tato práce nezkoumá pouze míru imitace, ale také porovnává aktualizaci tradičních tropů hrdinské fantasy v díle Joea Abercrombieho, který se dá považovat za žánrového revizionistu. Wolf rozděluje invenci do čtyř oblastí fikčního světa, přesněji do nominální („nominal“), kulturní („cultural“), přírodní („natural“) a ontologické („ontological“). V analýze tropů byly tyto oblasti zohledněny a tvoří tedy strukturu samotné analytické části.

V analytické části je pak Tolkienův svět zkoumán z hlediska Wolfovy metody pro analýzu fikčních světů. Největší zřetel je kladen na invenci, kde jsou představeny

tradiční tropy hrdinské fantasy v oblasti budování světa. Souhrnně, podkapitola *Nominální oblast: jazyky* se zabývá Tolkienovou tvorbou jazyků a tropy, které se k této oblasti vážou, tedy konkrétně tropy *exotizace jmen*, *formálních jazyků* a tzv. *Společného jazyka*. Podkapitola *Kulturní oblast: civilizace* se zpočátku soustředila na tropy *humanoidních ras*. V Tolkienově díle mezi tyto rasy patří např. elfové, trpaslíci a hobiti. Kromě těchto ras však Tolkienův svět také zahrnuje orky, tedy tzv. *znelidštěnou rasu*, jejíž hlavním účelem je sloužit straně antagonisty. Další tropy v této oblasti jsou spojeny s imitací středověku. Jedná se o tropy *pseudo-středověku* a *stagnace středověku*. *Přírodní oblast* je ve Wolfově pojetí značně rozsáhlá a může zahrnovat různé lokace, ekosystémy, ale i faunu a flóru. Pro analýzu jsem se však zaměřil výhradně na geografické oblasti a tropy s nimi spjatými. Jednou z nejefektivnějších metod k promítnutí prostředí a oblastí fikčního světa je mapování. Proto byl představen trop *mapy zarovnané doleva*, která do jisté míry imituje geografii Evropy. Následující tropy, *morální geografie* a *orientalismus*, značně souvisely s kulturní oblastí a zabývaly se různorodostí kultur podle geografické lokality. V neposlední řadě byl v přírodní oblasti představen trop *kataklyzmatických pohrom*, které jsou spojovány se změnami ekosystémů fikčních světů. Nakonec, podkapitola *Ontologická oblast: magický systém* zahrnuje tropy související s magií. Přesněji se jednalo o tropy *nesmrtelnosti*, *vzkříšení* a *magických artefaktů*.

Ve třetí kapitole byly následně tyto tradiční tropy porovnány s jejich ztvárněním v díle Joea Abercrombieho a byla sledována jejich aktualizace. Souhrnně, tropy, které byly v rozporu s jejich tradičním pojetím, se dají rozdělit do dvou kategorií. Tropy v první kategorii jeví rysy odklonu od fantastična, a naopak směřovaly k módu imitace (mimetismu), tedy k podobnosti s reálným světem. Druhá kategorie tropů vyobrazuje svět ponurým způsobem a jeví tedy typické rysy subžánru grimdark.

Z hlediska tropu *exotizace jmen*, Abercrombie v mnoha případech využil jména z reálného světa a mírně je pozměnil, aby vyvolal jisté domněnky o postavách a místech, o kterých čteme. Podobně postupoval i při vytváření kultur, které se záměrně podobají těm skutečným, např. Svaté říši římské, Osmanské říši a severské kultuře. Obecně tedy často využívá metodu minimální mimetické odchylky. Dále, Abercrombie nepoužívá tradiční tropy *Tolkienových ras*, ale prezentuje svět, který je z velké části obýván pouze lidskou rasou. Oproti Tolkienovu světu, který vykazoval rysy idealizovaného *pseudo-středověku*, Abercrombie ukazuje ponurý pohled na středověkou

éru a představuje dynamický svět, který později prochází průmyslovou a sociální revolucí. Abercrombie tedy nepoužívá trop *středověké stagnace*. Svět *Prvního zákona* také působí chmurným dojmem, který se přímo pojí se subžánrem grimdark. Na rozdíl od Tolkiena, který z hlediska *morální geografie* rozdělil svět na morálně dobré a zlé oblasti, Abercrombie tohoto tropu nevyužívá a jeho svět zahrnuje nejednoznačné postavy, které nejsou nutně ani dobré, ani zlé. Další chmurné pojetí světa se projevuje v systému magie, ve kterém je magie čerpána z tzv. Druhé strany, která v podstatě připomíná křesťanské „peklo.“ Navíc, použití *magického artefaktu* „Semene“ způsobuje následky, které jsou prakticky totožné s použitím zbraní hromadného ničení.

Celkově vzato, Abercrombie svůj svět vyobrazuje metodou minimální mimetické odchylky a prezentuje jej až naturalisticky. S ohledem na Atteberyho neostré množiny se Abercrombieho svět přibližuje realistické próze a díky svému ponurému vyobrazení reality se řadí do stejné kategorie jako ostatní fikční světy podžánru grimdark. Tolkien se stavěl proti realistické próze a ve své tvorbě využíval idealizovaného středověkého prostředí s fantastickými prvky. Díky tomu se grimdark se svým realistickým a chmurným vyobrazením dokázal projevit jako samostatný subžánr hrdinské fantasy. Abercrombie však nebyl prvním autorem, který těchto prvků využíval, a nedá se tedy považovat za samotného inovátora žánru. Jeho předchůdci jsou například Glen Cook, Andrzej Sapkowski a v neposlední řadě i George R. R. Martin, jehož dílem se Abercrombie do jisté míry inspiroval. Přesto, díky svému poněkud minimalistickému pojetí fikčního světa, může Abercrombie inspirovat další autory, které detailnost Tolkienova světa odrazovala.

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Annotation

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Abstract: This diploma thesis introduces concepts relating to the fantasy genre and the world-building theory. The main focus is placed on the analysis of world-building techniques and its tropes in epic fantasy series by two British authors. The analysis and comparison of world-building tropes is centred around the world of *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien and *The First Law* by a contemporary author Joe Abercrombie. The goal of the thesis is to determine the extent of Abercrombie's deviation from the traditional tropes of high fantasy world-building, and whether we can consider him a revisionist of the fantasy genre.

Anotace

- Autor:** Štěpán Svoboda
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- Klíčová slova:** J. R. R. Tolkien, Joe Abercrombie, Mark J. P. Wolf, Pán prstenů, První zákon, hrdinská fantasy, grimdark, world-building, světotvorba, tvorba fikčních světů, Středozem, Kruh světa, tropy
- Abstrakt:** Tato diplomová práce seznamuje čtenáře s terminologií žánru fantasy a teorií tvorby fikčních světů. Hlavní důraz je kladen na analýzu metod tvorby světa a tropů spjatých s žánrem hrdinské fantasy u dvou britských autorů. Analýza a srovnání tropů tvorby fikčních světů se soustředí na světy *Pána prstenů* od J. R. R. Tolkiena a *Prvního zákona* od současného autora Joea Abercrombieho. Cílem práce je zjistit, do jaké míry se Abercrombieho svět odvrací od tradičních tropů fikčních světů hrdinské fantasy a zda se dá považovat za revizionistu tohoto žánru.