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J.R.R. Tolkien: The Founder of Modern Day Fantasy World Building

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Abstract:

This paper explores why J. R. R. Tolkien's works have proven so influential on modern fantasy authors through analyzing one critical, and understudied, component of his works. Among the most beloved twentieth century novels, his works have become a benchmark for measuring excellence in fantasy literature. However, there is little criticism that actually explores the reasons for his impact on the fantasy genre as most critical conversations generally focus on the contexts for his writing. I will explore one of the reasons why his works have been so influential. Epic and High fantasy worlds all partake in world building, but Tolkien was the first great world builder. I suggest that his groundbreaking world-building techniques have served as the models for modern authors' creative practices. In particular, I argue that Robert Jordan's world-building systems were greatly influenced by Tolkien's own. Jordan wrote *The Wheel of Time*, a fourteen volume Epic fantasy saga that has become a standard in modern fantasy. In the world of fantasy literature, this work is similar to Tolkien's works in the way that the worlds have been established. I will analyze these two authors in comparison as a means to understand both writers' world-building practices better, thereby throwing light on an important and understudied element of Tolkien's creative process and on how it has influenced others, Jordan in particular. In this way, the project attempts to enhance our understanding of two influential authors.

The world of Middle Earth has captured the imaginations of countless millions for generations. This world, created by J.R.R. Tolkien, is one filled with political intrigue, myth, and wonder. It is an entity that has a life of its own. Tolkien's works, though widely read, have not been studied in regards to the extent that his model of world building has influenced. His works have shaped hundreds of other authors work's, and the way that those works are accepted by the general populous. Tolkien made it possible for fantasy authors to write stories about fairies and magic while still being taken seriously. Through his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and overall mythos, *The Silmarillion*¹, Tolkien laid out the framework from which other authors could create their own works with his innovations in world building. Robert Jordan is one such author who followed the path set by Tolkien. The author of an epic fourteen book Epic saga, *The Wheel of Time*, Jordan took hold of the principles that Tolkien laid out and used them in his own works. Tolkien and Jordan both practice the art of world building, but it is Tolkien's creative model that has shaped the field in which they work.

Tolkien put forth a model for world building that tackled many different concepts when creating a fictional world. This model was used by Jordan when he wrote his own novels. Tolkien's model addresses language creation with careful character development. Next are carefully laid political structures that help create intricate cultures. To pull it all together, Tolkien established a very strong example of how to use light and dark as the core driver of conflict. Jordan followed this model closely, especially in regards to Tolkien's example of how to write novels as if they were translated from past literature. Tolkien, and Jordan, both wrote their works in the fantasy genre. This allowed them to explore, and create, new worlds.

¹ "*The Silmarillion* (italicized) is the title of the single book published in 1977. The *Silmarillion*, without italics, refers to the whole corpus of his (Tolkien's) mythology as it developed over a span of fifty years" (Interrupted Music xi).

Fantasy as a genre has grown tremendously since the mid twentieth century. Tolkien was unique in his time by having his works published in book form as: “Before 1945 only a small handful of stories from the sf and fantasy pulp magazines found their way into general publishers' lists” (*SFE*). The number of authors, publishers, and individual novels printed has grown tremendously in the past seventy years. According to worldswithoutend.com, a science fiction, fantasy, and horror publication website, as of March 1, 2016, at least 1,004 publishers print horror, science fiction and fantasy novels which amounts to thousands of authors and books being published yearly. The impact of the fantasy genre has grown exponentially since Tolkien.

Fantasy is a difficult genre to define, as there are so many subsets within the genre. A brief definition of fantasy is: “any work of fiction in which the laws of nature are violated or suspended” (*The Worlds of Fantasy*). This definition is rather broad, but has to be in order to encompass the many subgenres that fall into the overarching genre of Fantasy. According to Bestfantasybooks.com, “The fantasy genre as a whole is STILL growing with new subgenres forming every few years and old ones updated, combined, and mashed in with other genres,” with 58 subgenres at the present (*Fantasy Subgenre Guide*). Of these many genres some are much more prevalent than others. Two of the prevailing genres in fantasy are High and Epic fantasies. Epic fantasy writer Brandon Sanderson spoke about what makes a fantasy an Epic during a panel discussion held by TOR books: “For Brandon Sanderson, Epic fantasy is a matter of immersion in a world, through many inhabitants’ eyes. Their dramas, choices, failures. It’s a cycle that is never-ending” (Delucci). This immersion that Sanderson talks about is known as world building. It is one of the main distinctions between Epic and High fantasies. While both genres maintain a unique system of cultures, peoples, and tend to be multivolume series, High fantasy has an element that takes place in the real world, whereas Epic fantasy is strictly in a

fictional world created by the author. One example of High fantasy is C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which is High fantasy because it is partially set in the real world while another part takes place in the mythical world of Narnia. Lewis had the story grounded in the real world. What makes Epic fantasy different is that it is solely set in a fictional world created by the author. The practice of creating another world is known as world building.

World building is one of the understudied reasons why Tolkien's works were such successes. Kelly Swails, a published fantasy author, wrote in a 2011 article for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's website that:

Building a unique world for characters to live in is complex, even more so when an author is writing fantasy and science fiction. An author must juggle hundreds of details and facts, only a fraction of which may end up in the final manuscript. Those details include—but are certainly not limited to—dates of historical events, geography, languages, government, economics and currency, and dietary habits of imaginary or long-forgotten tribes. (Swails)

This is a concise and quick definition of what it means to world build. World building can be seen with G.R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea Cycle*. Authors of Epic fantasy have a monumental job with world building, because they must address thousands of minute details. The author has to create an entirely new world, and reality with all of the baggage that world entails. Tolkien's extensive, and extremely in-depth, Middle Earth is the pinnacle of world building with his various peoples, geography, history and mythos associated with the world. This attention to detail can be seen with his work in regards to language creation.

With the nature of world building, and Epic fantasy, it is inevitable that the subject of language will arise. The importance of language creation in world building cannot be understated, as a created language gives the world that houses it credibility, and also gives its characters their own culture and identity. This helps the world builder create something that is

much more cohesive while adding depth to the story. Many writers, and ordinary people, participate in the art of language creation. David Peterson² talks about what it means to be a member of the language creation community: “Any language that that has been consciously created by one or more individuals in its fullest form is a conlang (created language), so long as either the intent or the result of the creation process is a fully functional linguistic system” (Peterson 18). The real world has many languages which each serve to add to its depth and culture by allowing culture to grow and develop. In creating a world from scratch there must be a way to create some sort of constant. Language serves as the constant in which culture can build on and mature. In this way language creation is essential to world building, and Tolkien provided an extremely detailed and in-depth example of how to create language.

Tolkien was a philologist, someone who studies the history and meanings of words. He taught philology for many years at Oxford and wrote on the subject in several essays over the course of his career like: “On Fairy-Stories” and “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.” This background made him the perfect candidate to create a new language for his world. Peterson says, “Tolkien was a language creator before he penned his major works. In a way, the languages themselves served as progenitors to the tales” (10). The concept of language being the progenitor to Tolkien’s works is very important as language is central to the world that Tolkien built. The languages of Middle Earth are its core. The entirety of Middle Earth was created through language, or the song, of the Elven God Ea. They serve to create a basis for the races of Elves and their distinctive cultures. In this Tolkien went above and beyond in his language creation for: “In addition to being the first person on record to create a full language for a fictional context, Tolkien also did something no other language creator had done to that point: he created a

² David Peterson is a well known linguist. He has created several languages including Dothraki for HBO’s *Game of Thrones*.

language family” (Peterson 10). Here Peterson touches on the idea that Tolkien created a parent language. Then that language, over the time of his mythos, followed the course of real life languages and split off into other languages distinct from one another but related. This splitting happened multiple times thus creating not one, but a multitude of languages. In this way each race of elves has their own language which is a variant of the first Elven language. This in turn led to the different cultures of the elves on both sides of the oceans and even in different areas of Middle Earth. The languages that Tolkien created not only added depth and a basis for his novels, but are actually tangible. Fans can learn, and actually speak, the language of the elves. In this way Jordan follows the example set down by Tolkien.

Jordan uses the art of language creation, not to build his world, but to add depth. Jordan’s main work consists of fourteen books, fifteen including the prologue. The series spans several thousand years of conflict, and includes a dozen nations in a struggle against an evil that is trying to unravel time itself. In the world that Jordan created, which has no official name but is called Randland by fans, there is a created language. This language is not spoken by the common people but rather those who hold position and power. It serves as a means to connect to the ancient past and also to delineate social class: “Knowledge of the Old Tongue became a sign of education, and considered a necessity among the nobles of many lands, but in truth relatively few had and real knowledge of it” (*Companion* 548). The *Wheel of Time Companion*, a separate glossary of all the names, concepts and places in Randland, holds a 27 page entry on the Old Tongue. This includes a 1,000 word dictionary, grammar, and syntax that allows readers to learn the language, much like Tolkien’s Elvish languages, in order to better immerse themselves in the created world. The language serves as a means to create a past and depth to the world that makes the suspension of disbelief easier. Jordan uses his language, like Tolkien, to delineate between

the educated or among individual peoples. Tolkien's elves speak his language while Jordan's Ogier, a race of giants that live in secluded glens, speak his. This separation by language works to create a functioning world. It mirrors the real world as well in the concept of nobles and the wealthy learning Greek and Latin as a form of prestige through the ages. Similar to the real world, the Common Tongue, spoken by most people, overcame the Old Tongue as the prevalent form of speaking like vernacular languages replaced Latin. Jordan also has dialects, like Tolkien, between nations speaking the same language but with different nuances. In this way Tolkien paved a path for Jordan to use a language of his own creation in his novels. Language creation not only helps the narrative but also the development of characters.

The idea of character development is a well known concept that Tolkien took to new heights in his novels. A character can be either static or dynamic. Static characters do not change or grow; they stay the same throughout the narration. Dynamic characters, on the other hand, do the opposite, and grow throughout the narration; this growth can be to a positive or negative effect. The balance of the two types of characters is very important. There cannot be too many static characters, or else the narrative stagnates and the reader will lose interest. There cannot be too many dynamic characters, or else far too much is happening and the reader can get lost and confused amidst everything. With world building character development is crucial to the success of the novel. An entire world is being created, and the people who populate it will be the characters who enact its story. This means that there will be key characters and a myriad of supporting characters. The need for each character to be fully formed makes character development a crucial aspect of world building, especially with such a large cast of characters.

Tolkien has an extensive cast of characters that span millennia. His core cast of characters is well known from *The Lord of the Rings*. These main characters are supported by

other, lesser, known characters. These lesser known characters can be as simple as the people at The Prancing Pony in Bree when Frodo first sets out on his journey. Each character has an important role in the development of the story and world. Most characters in Tolkien's world are static and do not change very much or change little. These are usually the supporting characters like the company of dwarfs that accompany Bilbo on his quest to the Lonely Mountain. It is the main characters that play the dynamic roles. They drive the story and make the world believable. Bilbo is a prime example of this as stated by Tom Shippey³: "By the end of *The Hobbit*, though, Bilbo as burglar has progressed so far as to rub shoulders with heroes, even to be (just) considerable as one himself" (Shippey 72). Bilbo has undergone many trials and fought through much adversity, so it makes sense that he grows. His development is believable which makes it viable, as Tolkien does not make all character development positive but rather realistic, especially in the case of Frodo. At the end of his journey, Frodo is a different hobbit than when he first ventured out. He has walked the length of Middle Earth and seen war first hand. This journey takes its toll on him, and he is no longer happy and carefree, but broken and scared. Verlyn Flieger⁴ says of Frodo after his journey that "the story ends as it must, with Frodo broken but not mended, broken down but not re-made. He is wounded and sick—so much the book tells us—and he will die" (*Splintered Light* 161). This realistic approach to Frodo after his trials makes Tolkien's world believable. The dynamic characters do not always end up happy, because they get hurt and are broken. This use of dynamic characters creates a world that readers can connect with because the characters are real. Tolkien put forth this model in a way that other writers can use when building their own worlds.

³ Tom Shippey is a scholar of Medieval Literature. He has studied and written on Tolkien academically for years.

⁴ Verlyn Flieger is a well known Tolkien scholar. She has written several novels devoted to the study of Tolkien.

Jordan follows the example that Tolkien put forth as he has hundreds of supporting characters that each play a role in his novels. Many of these characters are static and do not play major parts, but there are dozens of roles that dynamic characters fill in order to support the main characters. These characters work to create an intricate and extremely in depth world that explores the relationships between individuals. Jordan also follows Tolkien's example of character development in working with his dynamic characters. Jordan uses realistic character development in which his characters grow, though not always in a positive, or linear, way. One example is of a simple peddler named Padan Fain. Fain is a darkfriend, someone who follows the evil force in the world, and undergoes massive transformations. He starts off as a peddler and is then literally torn apart and put back together which drives him insane. By the end of the series he is no longer human but "Shaisam, a consumer of souls" (*Companion* 580). His journey is fraught with pain and torture, which makes his transformation much more believable. This type of character development follows the model of Tolkien as it makes sense in the context of the world. Frodo and Fain follow very similar developments; though with different end points. These two are not the only characters that follow similar development as Tolkien has Aragorn, a disposed king finding his kingdom and self, while Jordan has Lan Al'Mandragoran, a disposed king finding his kingdom and himself. Tolkien has Gandalf, a wise wizard who guides the young heroes until he is lost and returns purer of purpose, while Jordan has Moraine, a wise magic user who guides young heroes before she too is lost, and returns with more wisdom and a purer purpose. The development of the characters in Jordan's novels follow the main model set by Tolkien in that they are not always positive but realistic. Tolkien solidified many different character models and modes of development in his writing as they pertain to the fantasy genre and world building in particular, as these character types follow specific developments that

Tolkien established in a set manner and that Jordan followed. Character development is important as it plays into the political structures of the worlds created and how they are governed and maintained.

In any world that functions properly there are countries and political structures in place. It is essential when world building that the issue of politics is addressed in order to make a viable world. When creating a world, each of these countries's needs to be fleshed out and developed, much like the characters of the story. In essence, each country is a character with needs, goals, and desires. The country as a character is a core aspect of world building because it lays the framework of the actual world in which the characters will perform, which creates the necessary background for different plots and stories based off of national goals or war. It also makes the world more like the real world in that much of what moves people, and major events, is related to the politics of nations. Tolkien saw this, and understood the ramifications that follow national politics.

Tolkien provided a detailed model of how to structure and build nations in his own world building practices. In his Middle Earth there are several nations, and peoples, that vie for their own ends and goals. The kingdoms of men, elves and dwarves do not wish the kingdom of Mordor to engulf the world so they fight against it. This simple political structure of one alliance against another provides the entire backdrop of *The Lord of the Rings*. Even between nations there are issues of politics. The elves seek to leave Middle Earth while the humans strive to fight back Sauron. Saruman the Wise fights against the other wizards in a bid for power: "In 2953 Saruman took Isengard for his own and fortified it. There he gathered Orcs and Dunlendings, who at his orders began harassing Rohan and Fangorn; he also began spying on Gandalf and keeping agents in Bree and the Shire" (Foster 437). Here there is a new political structure

between one individual of power against two sovereign powers. This political structure is not regulated to just individuals but also entire peoples and groups.

Though the peoples of Middle Earth are at odds politically they still create an alliance for political reasons. When it is discovered that Frodo has the Ring of Power the Council of Elrond is held to decide its fate. The council splits the participants between hiding the ring, using it, or destroying it. The tremendous threat of the Ring forces the races to work together and form an alliance that is beneficial to them all. The Fellowship of the Ring is thus formed:

The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil. With you and your faithful servant, Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labours. For the rest, they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarves, and Men. Legolas shall be for the Elves; and Gimli son of Gloin for the Dwarves ... For men you shall have Aragorn son of Arathorn, for the Ring of Isildur concerns him closely. (*Fellowship* 309)

This alliance is held together for purely political reasons. Each of the parties involved benefit from the outcome in one way or another. In this way Tolkien sets a model for another way in which political systems can be held in place which Jordan follows in his own alliance of peoples with the Borderlanders of Randland. The nations along the Blight, Jordan's version of Mordor and home of the main antagonist of the series, form a mutually beneficial alliance to fight back the hordes of Trollocs, half human half animal creatures bent on only killing. They work together to form a political alliance that strengthens themselves, and works towards a common goal on the national scale.

Politics, however, do not just stay on the national scale but also the personal when it comes to marriage. In regards to the kings of Gondor it is said:

For the high men of Gondor already looked askance at the Northmen among them; and it was a thing unheard of before that the heir of the crown, or any son of the king, should wed one of the lesser and alien race. (*Return of the King* 357)

The individual countries have their own political structures, not just on a national level, but on a social level. The country needs to stay strong so its nobility and kings need to follow the mandated politics of tradition and law. In Jordan's world marriage is a large part of the political process. A main character, Mat Cauthon, marries the Empress of Seanchan, an intercontinental empire, in order to garner an alliance between the free lands of Randland and the empire, so that they might fight the Dark One united. This use of marriage as a political tool is a real life adaptation that Tolkien put into his works and modeled how closely it might strengthen the created world with a clear cut example to other author's.

In this way the politics of Middle Earth are based off of its peoples each having their own goals and motives from the personal to the nation scale. The novels themselves are war novels as they play off of the varying political intrigues of created nations. This interaction made *The Lord of the Rings* relatable to the common man due to the recent wars fought in Europe, and the continuing conflict over the following decades. Tolkien understood war and its intricacies because he lived through them as: "Tolkien, a veteran of the British nightmare at the Somme in World War I, is a poet of war, and we are a nation in need of a good, clear war story" (Grossman). Tolkien was able to accurately portray the political intricacies of war because he lived through World Wars One and Two, and understood what war entailed. Jordan also lived through the horror of war in Vietnam, so understood its political nature. In this way Jordan was able to follow Tolkien's model of war in his own writing as he understand its conception and necessity.

As such, Jordan focuses on politics through the lens of an ongoing war, but, like Tolkien, on the personal level. He does focus on the conflict between nations, but focuses more on the underlying issues of politics behind it. In his novels there are a multitude of wars, monarchical changes, and political upheaval, all of which are driving forces in the series. These politics play a very important role in the way that the story develops as they are the major plot points. Like Tolkien, the main plot is one alliance of nations fighting against another alliance. As Tolkien has the alliance of the light, the Fellowship, Jordan has an alliance of the light consisting of many nations, peoples, and individuals. These alliances of the light both fight against their own respective dark alliances with Tolkien's Mordor and Jordan's Shayol Ghul, singular mountains in desolate wastelands. The two groups have differing viewpoints and goals for the future, so fight against the others machinations. Then there are many internal political power struggles within each alliance. In the alliance of the forces of light there is a major split between the denizens of the White Tower, a major political power. This split results in a protracted struggle between the two: "The rebel Aes Sedai stayed in Salidar until the decision was made to move against the White Tower," in which an intense political stalemate engulfed both parties (*Companion* 638). This split had massive ramifications to rest of the world resulting in entire regime changes in multiple countries. Also, like Tolkien, Jordan uses political structures at a personal level. This is seen in the Game of Houses or Daes Dae'mar which: "involved the use of misdirection and hidden meaning and motives, in word and deed, to gain power and status. Great value was given to subtlety ... and to achieving ends with the least visible effort" (*Companion* 193). Political power is a key part of the world in which Jordan created. Tolkien and Jordan both understood how important political structures are in world building and also in the creation of cultures and traditions of peoples.

When creating a world the characters and political structures serve to create the story, while the culture and traditions provide continuity. It is the cultures of a created world, when fully fleshed out, that make it more realistic and accessible. Culture also allows for character development as every character has their own set of values derived from their cultural background. Cultures are described in multiple ways, those being objective and impressionistic descriptions:

Objective description helps readers understand what the fantasy setting or creature looks or sounds like. Impressionistic description helps readers see and feel what the characters are seeing and feeling. Both are needed to create an interesting and suspenseful fantasy story. (*Two Ways to Create Your Fantasy World*)

The best descriptions of a people and its cultures are a blend of the two descriptions. This blend creates a world in which the reader can immerse themselves. These cultures are integral to the function and longevity of any created world.

Tolkien created many in depth cultures, from hobbits to dwarves, which use a strong blend of objective and impressionistic description. Tolkien's Hobbits are, "a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves... They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours... wear no shoes..." (*The Hobbit* 4). Tolkien first uses objective descriptions to introduce the peoples, and to show their clothing. Objective descriptions work to build what the people look like, and what their homes and cities look like. This description instills a sense of unity for the culture while making it distinctive. With a distinct look and style, there are certain ideals and beliefs that can be given to a culture; this is when impressionistic description is used. Hobbits love to eat, which is evidenced by their celebration of Bilbo's one hundred and eleventh birthday: "More promising still ... an enormous open-air kitchen was erected in the north corner of the field. A draught of cooks, from every in and

eating-house for miles around” (*Fellowship* 27). Impressionistic description provides a depth to the hobbits and lends them to be realistic. They are more tangible and concrete, because they have a recognizable culture. Tolkien does not just do this with hobbits but with all of his peoples, like the dwarves. The dwarves in Middle Earth are gruff and strong willed. They also have a unique penchant for improvised song, different from other people’s use of song, like the hobbits love of song during festivals and celebrations. This is a cultural choice that gives them their own voice and personality as a people. They sing for everyday purposes like cleaning Bilbo’s home:

Chip the glasses and crack the plates!

Blunt the knives and bend the forks!

That’s what Bilbo Baggins hates-

Smash the bottles and burn the corks! (The Hobbit 13)

They also sing for important occasions and their history:

And suddenly first one and then another began to sing as they played, deep-throated singing of the dwarves in the deep places of their ancient homes; and this is like a fragment of their song, if it can be like their song without music.

‘Far over the misty mountains cold

To dungeons deep and caverns old

We must away ere break of day

To seek the pale enchanted gold. ‘ (The Hobbit 14)

Singing is an integral part of who the dwarves are as a people and creates for them a culture that is unique to them. Within particular races, like the elves, Tolkien also gave specific groups their own cultures. The elves of Rivendell have a very different culture than the elves of the Great Wood, as Rivendell is more focused on knowledge and protecting Middle Earth while the Great Wood is focused more on protecting their personal domain. Between the different peoples of the elves there are as many distinct cultures as there are peoples, which each interact in a unique

way. They have a greater depth that makes the story more engaging. Tolkien understood the need for cultures and traditions among the people of Middle Earth. He provided a detailed example for fellow authors on how to create cultures that facilitate a functioning world.

Jordan follows this example with the creation of many distinct cultures. The cultures of Randland are extremely important to its function and viability, as in any world. Political structure plays into the cultures of many nations and their peoples. Jordan has a nation known as Andor which holds that only a queen can rule: “The most widely known tradition of Andor is that only a queen may sit upon the Lion Throne and wear the Rose Crown, never a king” (Jordan and Patterson 235). This creates a unique situation later in the novels when succession is brought into question, as a cultural issue causes problems. Randland is filled with cultural clash, as is the case with the Aiel, a secluded warlike people. In the Aiel Waste, a desert wasteland, the Aiel kill any wetlander, or stranger, that enters their lands. When the Aiel venture out of their homeland they face cultural shock from the many different peoples they encounter. This causes a splintering of the people in which a large number leave the clans and either fight against their brothers or disappear. Those that fled were overcome by ‘The Bleakness’:

A state that overcame some Aiel after they crossed the Dragonwall. The victim sat for a long time, staring at nothing in a deep depression. Some thereafter threw away their spears and fled, though none of the Aiel knew where they went.
(*Companion* 124)

Again, this cultural aspect of a certain people plays a large role in the overall story and provides several plot points. The cultures of Randland are many and diverse, making it much more relatable to the average reader. Tolkien showed that as a world builder one has to pay attention to the particular nuances that define a culture rather than the big picture aspects of it. A culture needs to have a reason that they wear their clothing a certain way, or why they do not eat a

particular animal. Jordan follows Tolkien's framework in that he focuses on these small details and teases out the minute differences that make one part of a country distinct from another part fifty miles away. Tolkien's framework works well in establishing a world, but what is needed to pull it all together is a major conflict that must be overcome.

The major conflict that must be overcome in many Epic fantasies is that of war. Often times it is between nations or alliances, but in the cases of Tolkien and Jordan it is between good and evil. The concept of good and evil is a well known issue that lends itself to effective story telling. The telling of this tale can come in many different forms, be it grandiose battles, issues of love, or religion. Good and evil juxtaposed against each other is the corner stone of many tales told from ancient times until today. Tolkien uses the real world reality of good and evil in his world building by not painting events as purely black and white. His version is more realistic in that it is ambiguous as to what is good or evil. There are no stark definitions. This is where the use of light and darkness comes in, with ever present shadows.

Tolkien portrays good and evil in the form of light against dark. Through his *Silmarillion*, Tolkien uses the concept of light against dark as the driving force of events: "The polarities of light and dark generate the perception, the language, and thus the action of his legendarium" (*Splintered light* 31). The elves are of the light and strive to get back to the light across the western sea. The orcs that they fight are the agents of Sauron, "the Dark Lord of Mordor," who represent the threat of darkness overcoming the light (Foster 441). This battle is not localized to just the War of the Ring but across the entirety of creation. At the first, the creator, Eä, began a song that created everything when it was interrupted by Melkor, the leader of the dark forces, and from that point on the forces of light and dark have been at odds in Middle Earth. This struggle provided the basis for Tolkien's entire story. It gave a fixed point, with opposing forces,

that allowed conflict to arise naturally. There are those that champion the light, the Fellowship of the Ring, and those that personify the darkness, the Nazgul, but there is also shadow, neither light nor dark. This shadow is best seen with Gollum who went into the darkness and struggles to come back to the light. His internal battle against the forces of darkness, thrust upon him by the ring of power, and his wish to aid Frodo, the beacon of light against the dark, holds him in a place of shadows where he strives to come to grips with who he really is. In the end he is both an agent of the light and the dark. For his greed and desire of the dark, the one ring, causes him to attack Frodo and take it, but this attack also serves to be his redemption in that he inadvertently destroys the ring, thus aiding the light. Tolkien provides a framework in which other authors can model their works. The light and the dark are dichotomies but they are not strictly one or the other, there is a place for shadow.

Jordan's entire series follows the same model that Tolkien laid out. The main premise is that the Dark One, the evil being sealed away at creation, is about to be set free and destroy the light and time itself. This light against evil from the moment of creation is using Tolkien's model very closely. When Jordan's Creator, Tolkien's Ea, made the world he sealed the Dark One, Tolkien's Melkor, outside of time itself. The main premise of Jordan's work is that time moves on a wheel and repeats itself, so there is a constant battle between the light and dark, as the Dark One tried to break free of his prison and destroy the wheel. Other themes first set forth by Tolkien's model are followed as well. Jordan's champions of the light are three young men and two young women from a remote farming land, much like the hobbits of the Shire. The champions of the dark are chosen agents given power and status by the Dark One, much like the Nazgul in Middle-Earth. These parallels show that the model Tolkien set forth works for other authors and is versatile in the use of another story. The concept of shadow is also explored in

Randland. In the second book of the series a soldier, Ingтар, reveals that he is a Darkfreind, one who serves the Dark One, but he repents on his journey to the light:

Humankind is being swept away everywhere. Nations fail and vanish. Darkfriends are everywhere, and none of these southlanders seem to notice or care. We fight to hold the Borderlands, to keep them safe in their houses, and every year, despite all we can do, the Blight advances. And these southlanders think Trollocs are myths, and Myrddraal a gleeman's tale." He frowned and shook his head. "It seemed the only way. We would be destroyed for nothing, defending people who do not even know, or care. It seemed logical. Why should we be destroyed for them, when we could make our own peace? Better the Shadow, I thought, than useless oblivion, like Caralain, or Hardan, or ... It seemed so logical then. (*The Great Hunt* 609)

Ingтар's remorse captures the entire battle of the light and dark. There is a loss of hope, a sense of despair, but there is always a chance to return to the light. There is no black and white between the light and dark but a shadowed middle ground.

The issue of religion is also dealt with using the concept of light and dark. In Middle Earth there is no organized religion nor is there a large adherence to any religious belief. The same is true of Randland. There are small instances of religious devotion in Tolkien's Elves in their reverence to Ea or Jordan in some of his Darkfriends reverence towards the Dark One. The 'religion', if there is one, is the adherence to either the forces of the light or the dark. Either one fights to keep the light alive or strives to extinguish it. This lack of an organized religion is shared by both authors and works to focus the issues of the novels on the conflict at hand while religion takes a back seat to the main action. By not having an overt religion both authors were able to relate their stories in the way that they saw fit.

Both Tolkien and Jordan wrote their novels as if they found documents, which they have translated into modern day English. This is a device that some, not all, authors employ when

world building. It is a way to ground a story and explain any inconsistencies that may arise. If the work is translated from times long past then the material may not be completely accurate. This type of writing is a unique way to create a story, because it makes it real. The events of the story may have actually happened thousands of years ago, but time has erased the evidence. Tolkien used this very idea to create his works by working backwards from translation to translation of his invented languages, while Jordan compiled his works from the 'lost' fragments of works previously created. The art of writing a novel from past, fictional literature is an innovation of world building that Tolkien streamlined.

Tolkien's mythos is the first major fantasy work to have been styled after a translation of self created 'lost' literature. This is due to his desire to create something real, something that he would be able to dedicate to his country:

But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendor from the vast backcloths- which I could dedicate simply to: To England; to my country. (Carpenter144)

In translating the story of Middle Earth from old tales and documents, previously translated before that, Tolkien was able to create an entire world that was fixed in the real world. In translating past documents Tolkien popularized a way for other authors to justify their writings and the magic within them, for it was a time long past. Tolkien even provides for his readers a way to translate the runes that he puts in *The Hobbit*: "If the runes on Thrór's Map are compared with the transcriptions into modern letters, (on pp. 20 and 50), the alphabet, adapted to modern English, can be discovered and the above runic title also read" (*The Hobbit* 1). Tolkien used his own device of translation to make his works more authentic. His creation of a fictional story,

using fictional histories, works to provide another diverse avenue for world building on a much larger scale than previously accomplished.

Jordan uses the model of creating fiction from previous, fictional, documents and records. His novels are written about the past, a time that may have been thousands of years ago, but can be discovered in the writings that survive: “This compilation of the world’s geography, sociology, and history uses information dating from the earliest available records of the Age of Legends through the current era. Reliable information is limited” (Jordan and Patterson 9). Jordan’s story is meant to be ambiguous as to if it is strictly talking about a world of fiction or the real world from another age. The concept of Jordan’s world is that time is cyclical; there are seven ages that repeat themselves so long as the wheel of time turns. Each book begins with the same opening:

The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again. In one Age, called the Third Age by some, an Age yet to come, an Age long past, a wind rose. (*A Memory of Light* 75)

The events relayed in his novels are of a past age, be it a single age or dozens, is something that readers are left to ponder. Jordan uses the same style as Tolkien in his world building in that the world he created may or may not have been the past of the real world and is left to the reader to find out. Tolkien and Jordan both sought to have their readers have to think about the story as it allows them to become a part of the story and to continue adding to it. Fantasy writing and world building has a large effect, not just on its fan base, but culture overall.

Tolkien’s literary impact is undeniable as his *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* have sold a combined 250 million copies alone (Statistic Brain). This success has given rise a virtual empire of fantasy. Six multimillion dollar movies have been produced using these works. There

are over 48 thousand fanfiction stories alone on a single website (LOTR Fanfiction.net).

Countless pieces of art and costumes have been made modeled after the world. Conventions from Germany to the US entice thousands a year to attend for Lord the Rings panels. A multitude of video and board games from the Lego Hobbit to Lord of the Rings Risk have hit shelves. Aside from this, Tolkien's works gave rise to one of the original role-playing games: "Tolkien inspired an American insurance salesman named Gary Gygax to quit his job and create Dungeons and Dragons, the fantasy role-playing game that launched a million junior high school wedgies" (Grossman). Tolkien's works influenced not only one, but three generations, and is still counting. The world building practices and their influences on other authors spills over into the cultural realm as well.

Jordan's works, while relatively new, have garnered a large following. Jordan has sold millions of books and has built his own following of loyal fans. Jordan has fewer fanfiction works, 538, but has a community that is still growing (WOT Fanfiction.net). Artwork and clothing based on Jordan's works are also prevalent on websites, such as Deviantart and Tavarentees, where a growing fan base is creating an increasing variety of merchandise. Every year there is also a convention dedicated solely to Jordan's works known as JordanCon. There is also a *Wheel of Time* adaptation of Dungeons and Dragons (Ryan and Long). Jordan's influence is following the course of Tolkien's own in its growth.

Before John Ronald Reuel Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, fantasy was a small, fringe genre. He began to write and legitimize fantasy as a genre, by not only making it extremely popular, but, by giving it form. His model for world building was nothing short of revolutionary. He created languages that bolster his world and cultures that make it real. His political structures and dynamic character development make a world that is rich and fleshed

out. The light and dark model of Tolkien's world mirrors that of the real world as does its intricate history. For these reasons his works have become some of the most influential works of literature since their publication. As such, Tolkien has made it possible for millions, like Robert Jordan, to express themselves in writing, to escape into a world of imagination, and to create their own worlds to further inspire others, while his world building has validated the fantasy genre, and created Epic fantasy, by making it more than fiction, but rather a part of society's cultural identity. As it is, Tolkien has guided multiple generations in creating new worlds. His world building is one of the most important aspects of his literary works, as it reaches not just across time and space but across peoples and cultures to the very imagination of society.

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