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# Resonance of the Heroic Epic:

## Investigating the Rhythm and Shape of Post-1990 American Genre Fantasy

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Declaration

This thesis is my own work written in my own words, except from quotations and diagrams from published sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such.

This thesis has not been submitted previously for the award of a degree elsewhere.

This thesis is not part of joint research.

This thesis is formatted using MLA 7th edition.

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## Abstract

While the long history of the fantastic is often critically examined, contemporary epic fantasy requires attention. This thesis will address a gap in genre scholarship and will focus on authors who have published from 1990 onwards. While this thesis will focus on close readings of a select few authors in order to delve into the complexity of these texts in greater detail, a wide sample of exemplars will be referred to, establishing the significance of this study on contemporary genre fantasy as a whole.

This thesis introduces new ways of perceiving current productions of fantasy genre. It explores how the subgenre of heroic epic fantasy fiction exhibits a conscious awareness of its own form. By examining repetitive patterns of genre fantasy, the thesis argues that, rather than being simplistic, reductive, and formulaic, these structures create a layer of complexity and depth with each iteration. In doing so, heroic epic fantasy uses a resonance similar to that of epic mythology in order to create a new world with its own rational laws, one which follows the rationale of our *own* world. Thus, the thesis investigates structural and narrative patterns of heroic epic fantasy using models from science and philosophy. In this way, although the genre is generally viewed as irrational, the structure of the narrative reveals logical devices derived from real-world principles. Fantasy fiction is not an illogical form. It is, in fact, governed by a sense of rules and structure, one that reflects our current understanding of space-time and cosmology. More importantly, these real-world models are themselves an embedded facet of the narrative and essential to the way both story and character develops. Accordingly, the thesis depicts how these models are an integral part of the structure of heroic epic fantasy itself.

## Table of Contents

## List of Illustrations

**Introduction – Defining Heroic Epic Fantasy and the Parameters of this Research**

Fantasy belongs to that wider genre of the "fantastika" – fictions that take place in a wholly imaginative place, such as in science fiction, horror, and other related genres – a term appropriated from John Clute (from Eastern European languages) in "Fantastika in the World Storm" (2007): "I will start by defining fantastika in a way that may seem obvious, but is not: Fantastika consists of that wide range of fictional works whose contents are *understood* to be fantastic" (20, original emphasis).[1] Clute advocates that the term fantastika be employed in works that are conscious of their own form: works of fiction that define themselves as belonging to a particular genre. But where do we situate fantasy within this "fantastika" umbrella term? How do we distinguish it from its sister genres? In *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Brian Attebery proposes a model of genre definition based on the concept of "fuzzy sets." This model suggests describing genres around a prototypical model, so that: "they [genres] are defined not by boundaries but by a center" (12). However this approach to genre would still then indicate the need to *define its centre*. Accordingly, in this introductory chapter, I will outline and describe the approach to fantasy that other scholars have employed, *but* this thesis will not attempt to define "fantasy" and distinguish it from its sister genres. This is an impossible task and worthy of a thesis-long investigation in itself. Instead, after identifying existing definitions of fantasy, I will outline the parameters of this thesis as one which will focus on the structures and form of a particular narrative

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[1] The term "speculative fiction" may also be used to indicate these genres, but I have decided to employ "fantastika" instead as "speculative fiction" was originally used to indicate science fiction only. While the meaning of "speculative fiction" has evolved in common usage to incorporate fantasy, I prefer to use a term that does not contain the nuances of the science fiction history.

arc, one which I term the "heroic epic," which is a combination of plot (the epic) with character (the heroic). While below I *do* identify the value of distinguishing between genre and the mode, I do so because I stress the importance of categorizing fantastika by a narrative structure as a product of a particular cultural moment.

Recent scholarship on contemporary fantasy fiction has moved little beyond the debate of definitions offered by researchers of the "fantastic" in the 1970s and '80s. These definitions evaluate fantasy as separate or comparable to "realistic" or "mimetic" fiction, and further add a commentary in how the genre compares to other "non-realistic" fictions. There have been few critical productions on the genre in its entirety since this initial demarcation of fantasy in the '70s and '80s. In recent years, John Clute, Gary K. Wolfe, and China Miéville make some attempt at "evaporating genres" when defining genre (to borrow a phrase from Wolfe), arguing that the borders between SF (science fiction) and the fantastic (by which scholars generally mean gothic and weird, but also include fantasy) are dissolving. It is, of course, understandable that an analysis of fantasy fiction must start with a definition in order to establish the parameters of research. But too often the analyses do not move beyond these definitions, and when they do, the scholarship attempts to ascertain why readers of fantasy read fantasy.[2]

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[2] There does exist a body of fantasy scholarship that focuses on particular authors. For instance, most recently: *Lois McMaster Bujold* (2015) by Edward James; *Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire* (2015) edited by JesBattis and Susan Johnston; *Philosophy and Terry Pratchett* (2014) edited by J. Held and J. South; among countless others. However, despite these in-depth looks into particular authors, scholarship on the genre as a whole is rare, and when it *does* occur, often still focuses on understanding the social significance of fantasy (for example, *Ethics and Form in Fantasy Literature: Tolkien, Rowling and Meyer* (2015) by Lykke Guanio-Uluru draws together three widely different fantastic texts to question the values of Western culture; *Fantasy and Social Movements* (2014) by James Ormrod draws on psychoanalysis to examine the social appeal of the genre).

Perhaps the need to find legitimation is why fantasy scholarship struggles. These critical productions on the genre attempt to find the rationale of fantasy for the real-world audience. The purpose of this thesis is not to examine the socio-culture or psychological explanations of fantasy fiction, but instead, will begin to address a profound gap in the field of scholarship: studying the structure of heroic epic fantasy literature itself and how common themes and motifs create a recognizable plot structure.

Research regarding fantasy often conflates the fantasy genre into the fantasy mode, which is logical, as the genre *is* one branch of the fantastic mode; however, critics need to be aware that there is a difference between the mode and the genre when they engage with this research. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970, translated 1975) is a structuralist model that focuses on the fantastic mode, and, more specifically, as Attebery indicates in "Structuralism" (2012): "The genre Todorov examines in this book is not what most English-speakers call fantasy; rather it is a rather specialized brand of eerie fiction" (89). Todorov's model, focusing on the moment of encountering the fantastic, while specific to a select range of texts, has often been used to describe both the fantasy genre *as well* as the mode. Critics such as Rosemary Jackson (*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1981), and more recently, Lucie Armitt (*Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*, 2005) and Farah Mendlesohn (*Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 2008) continue to follow this example of using the term "fantasy" to indicate the fantastic mode. I will follow in the footsteps of Attebery and "will use the term *fantasy* henceforth for the genre, letting *fantastic* designate the mode: this usage is consistent with a number of critical works on the subject" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 11, original emphasis). By the fantastic mode, I mean those elements and motifs that can be found in any literature – mimetic or non-mimetic – that is seen as "fantastical," "magical," "impossible," "supernatural"; whereas the genre is

defined consistently by a set pattern of conventions – usually to a particular time and place of production.

It is important to understand that different literary evolutions (which I will describe further below) result in different productions of the fantastic mode. For instance, Farah Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), following a Todorovian model creates a taxonomy of fantasy based on the character's interaction with the fantastic world. It is notable however that the majority of the texts she identifies for the portal-quest narrative are mainly from the English-language tradition, whereas, for instance, for immersive fantasy, she uses examples such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967, translated 1970), a text from a different literary tradition. As Paul Kincaid notes in his review of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, "Starting the Conversation" (2009): "Given her intentions [of categorizing fantasy based on rhetoric], it is perhaps unfortunate that she has not examined any English language works that have been, for whatever reasons, associated with magic realism (262)." Mendlesohn's taxonomy does not seem to take enough account of cultural differences or even that the works are being examined in translation. Thus, instead of examining the differences in cultural productions, this thesis will focus on a select range of texts to study the form common to this selection. I have limited myself to post-1990 American heroic epic fantasy in order to avoid conflating comparisons of a wide range of texts with different cultural backgrounds. The epic tradition itself not only concerns the heroic epic, but the national epic. However, this thesis, focusing as it does on form, does not examine the cultural influences of the texts and whether the heroic epic fantasy

also fulfils the function of the national epic. But a study in how the heroic epic differs in a range of English-speaking countries may be an avenue of further research.[3]

While the formalist approach to genre may be perceived as very basic, I do not believe that the existing fantasy scholarship has tackled this area adequately; as I indicated above, much of the research concerns either the reader's perception of fantasy, or the reader's entrance (via the character) into the fantasy world, rather than examining parts of the story itself. For example, *In Defense of Fantasy* (1984), Ann Swinfen explores the world-building structures of fantasy fiction from 1945-1984 in order to frame fantasy as a rational literature. While an important study, her examination focuses on the hero's movement temporally and spatially (for instance, time travel or movement into different worlds), and not on story-building structures, and further, her investigation ends at 1984, a point before which my own investigation begins. Maria Nikolajeva's *The Magic Code* (1988) is another such investigation into the world-building structures of fantasy, but again, the same limitations apply. Perhaps the most recent and widely renowned work on the genre is Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), noted above, which attempts to delineate the genre further by the method in which the text (via the character and therefore the reader) enters the world of the fantastic, but this work again focuses on understanding the reader's interaction with fantastical elements rather than analysing and exploring important elements of story.

The genre of fantasy fiction has been criticized because it is often seen as repetitive. My own formalist approach will demonstrate that these parts of the narrative

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[3] Brian Attebery sets the groundwork for this research with *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* (1980) which explores the history and influence of key authors on American folklore.

structures, motifs and narrative devices such as prophecy and the binary of good and evil, are in fact made complex *because* of the act of repetition. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) Northrop Frye asserts that:

> The regular pulsating meter that traditionally distinguishes verse from prose tends to become the organizing rhythm in *epos* or extended oratorical forms. Meter is an aspect of recurrence, and the two words for recurrence, rhythm and pattern, show that recurrence is a structural principle of all art, whether temporal or spatial in its primary impact. (251)

Repetition is thus part of the form of the epic itself, adding as it does rhythm and pattern, but a pattern that resonates with meaning. As I will argue throughout the thesis, repetitive structures and motifs add a resonance, a nuance and depth to the pattern with each act of repetition. As N. Katherine Hayles indicates in *Chaos Bound* (1990), recursive structures and repetitions add layers of understanding to texts in a meta-fictional or intertextual manner:

> Far from being ordered sets of words bounded by book covers, they [texts] are reservoirs of chaos. Derrida initiates us into this moment in *Grammatology* through his concept of iteration. Any word, he argues, acquires a slightly different meaning each time it appears in a new context. Moreover, the boundary between text and context is not fixed. Infinite contexts invade and permeate the text, regardless of chronology or authorial intention. (180-181)

Throughout this thesis, I will identify and describe recursive structures that are common to the heroic epic form, but far from simplifying the text into a reductive formula, these repetitions add complexity to the story.[4]

This thesis will examine the repetitive narrative structures of the heroic epic fantasy in order to argue that firstly, these repetitive devices add complexity and resonance to the story. Secondly, although fantasy is often defined because of its qualities of impossibility – often undervalued by a rational audience – fantasy *does* conduct *rational world-building*. By using real-world scientific and philosophical models of the world as analogies to explore narrative devices, I will demonstrate that the logic of fantasyland is codified by a real-world understanding of the world.[5] This thesis will investigate Attebery's argument that: "One difference between fantasy and the genres of realism and naturalism is that fantasy typically displays and even celebrates its structure. If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the outside" ("Structuralism" 83). By exploring the heroic epic fantasy form, I will demonstrate how the structure of the genre is revealed and celebrated through common motifs. In *Myth and Reality* (1963) Mircea Eliade outlines these same ideas, but for myth:

> The World "speaks" to man, and to understand its language he needs
>
> only to know the myths and decipher the symbols. [...] The World is no

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[4] I have not utilized Derrida's conception of iteration directly as Derrida's *differance* indicates that meaning is never reached as it is always deferred, whereas I use iteration to indicate that meaning is built upon.

[5] The term "fantasyland" is common in the critical field of fantasy research to specify the world of fantasy, as can be evidenced in the title of Diana Wynne Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996), a satirical encyclopaedia of tropes of fantasy. John Clute's and John Grant's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) also includes a lengthy passage on "fantasyland," which begins with: "FANTASYLAND. The basic venue in which much GENRE FANTASY is set" (341).

longer an opaque mass of objects arbitrarily thrown together, it is a

living Cosmos articulated and meaningful. In the last analysis, *the World*

*reveals itself as language*. It speaks to man through its own mode of

being, through its structures and its rhythms. (141, original emphasis)

As I will suggest throughout this thesis, the heroic epic fantasy novel also reveals "its

own mode of being, through its structures and its rhythms." In this way, heroic epic

fantasy operates similarly to the structures of mythology of which it has evolved from,

and nowhere is this clearer than in the depiction and unfolding of the narrative

structures of plot, character, and setting.

Before I offer my own approach to understanding fantasy literature, by its form

and structure, I will briefly outline the definitions of fantasy put forth by earlier critics.

Although these early critics are a starting point, very few critical monographs have been

produced since these initial demarcations of defining fantasy. As can be noted in the

bibliography of this thesis, many of the essays produced by these early critics have been

republished – in *slightly* different variations (Roger C. Schlobin and Gary K. Wolfe

have notably reprinted their earlier essays in collected book form) – again signifying

the slow progression of the field. Additionally, it appears that current scholarship rarely

accounts for recent literature. In "Not Your Grandmother's Epic Fantasy" (2012),

Steven Erikson's review of the *Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (edited

by Mendlesohn and Edward James, 2012), Erikson laments that:

> If I am to conclude that the work is representative of the present state of
>
> scholarship in the field of fantasy, then as a producer of fantasy fiction,
>
> I was naturally curious about my place in the genre, and not just mine,
>
> but that of a whole host of best-selling, award-winning fantasy authors
>
> who write epic fantasy (Joe Abercrombie, Scott Bakker, Glen Cook,

> David Gemmel, Robin Hobb, Tim Lebbon, Scott Lynch, Brandon
> Sanderson, and so forth). Imagine my bemused state, then, to find that
> we pretty much don't exist. Not a single wave of recognition from this
> *Companion* greeted us, and the occasional nod sent our way seemed
> more dismissal than greeting.[6] (4)

Indeed, it is notable that, in the exploding field of contemporary fantasy fiction, these recent works are rarely examined critically. As such, the novels that I will focus on in the subsequent chapters are all produced in the last twenty-seven years, as even though contemporary fantasy authors are influenced by the body of literature that has come before them, an examination of *contemporary* fantasy fiction should move past Tolkien and Tolkien's fantasy.

**Approaches to Defining Fantasy**

The divide between mimetic and non-mimetic fiction is the basis to many definitions of fantasy – particularly in how the genre relates to other similar genres such as SF and horror. For example, C. N. Manlove in "On the Nature of Fantasy" (1975) defines fantasy as: "*A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms*" (16-17, original emphasis). Manlove's definition of fantasy focuses on "supernatural or impossible worlds," one that becomes familiar to the characters and the reader but is still identifiable as different from our own. Accordingly, in *Modern*

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[6] I would like to note that, unfortunately, I too must set aside Erikson and many of authors he identifies, as the thesis will focus specifically on the subgenre of heroic epic fantasy and, as I will explain below, the authors he identifies fall on a different end of the epic fantasy axis.

*Fantasy* (1975) Manlove uses Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy as examples of SF: "possible worlds in that they are set in our universe" (3), counterposing these models to fantasies which are: "set in the empirically known world, but the world is either juxtaposed with or transfigured by the presence of the supernatural" (3). This stipulation, of SF as "possible" "in our universe" and fantasy as "transfigured by the presence of the supernatural," is an attempt made by many scholars to differentiate the two genres. But it is illogical: *Dune* for example demonstrates a "presence of the supernatural" (through the religion, prophecy, and the worms themselves) yet Manlove still describes it as a "possible" text, defining it as SF rather than fantasy.

While distinguishing fantastical genres based on the conception of impossibility is a valid and reasonable approach to defining the genre, the problem with this conception of fantasy is that critics may use fantasy's lack of "realness" as a means to establish hierarchy between fantasy and SF.[7] Clute identifies that binary thinking, a divide between valuing literature for its mimetic qualities as opposed to its story-telling qualities, developed after the post-Enlightenment period:

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[7] For example, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1970), Darko Suvin differentiates between SF and fantasy accordingly: "Anything is possible in a folktale, because a folktale is manifestly impossible. […] Even less congenial to SF is the *fantasy* (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale, a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment" (8, original emphasis). Suvin groups the other fantastic modes together as one, dismissing them as inferior to the cognitively-superior SF-genre. In a later article, "Considering the Sense of 'Fantasy' on Fantastic Fiction: An Effusion" (2000), Suvin acknowledges a difference between fantasy and gothic. Yet, even here, Suvin's essay does not suggest that he has moved beyond his disparagement of fantasy, and additionally, Suvin attempts to find the value and *use* of fantasy by evaluating its allegorical functions – a notion that I reject below.

Up until about 1700, in other words, we did not categorize works of art according to their use of (or failure to use) story elements that might be deemed unreal or impossible to realize in the world as normally perceived. After that point, in English literature – please forgive my sticking to what I know – a fault line was drawn between mimetic work, which accorded with the rational Enlightenment values then beginning to dominate, and the great cauldron of irrational myth and story, which we now claimed to have outgrown, and which was now deemed primarily suitable for children [...]. (20-21)

Clute pinpoints that the value a Western audience places on mimetic or rational literature as opposed to non-mimetic, or what is seen as "irrational *myth* and *story*" (my emphasis), is based on this dividing line of Enlightenment values. In *History of Science Fiction* (2006), Adam Roberts likewise suggests that the divide between SF and fantasy comes about through a post-Enlightenment break between Catholicism and Protestantism. It should be noted that in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (2004), David Sandner contends that: "Western literary criticism's general rejection of fantastic literature in favor of realism has its roots in the Greek philosopher Plato's discussion of rhetoric and poetry" (14), suggesting that the binary between rational and irrational literature has always been there in Western literature, but that if there is a post-Enlightenment divide devaluing irrational literature, then as Sandner asserts, the *return* to irrational ideas is due to the sensibilities of the Romantic movement. However, this return of valuing the irrational is not accepted by all literary scholars.

Thus, contemporary scholars have attempted to evaluate the fantasy genre by attempting to find value of the genre for a post-Enlightenment audience. Tools of study include psychoanalytic, archetypal, allegorical, and pedagogical readings of fantasy;

approaches that are used to defend or criticize the genre based on their own stance in regard to these methodologies. For instance, in *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (1981), using Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a model, Christine Brooke-Rose dismisses fantasy as near-allegory, as she attempts to describe SF using methods of realism and suggests that the realistic procedures in fantasy flattens the narrative: "Above all, the presence of a wholly invented and wholly unfamiliar (and magical) megatext makes a realistic narrative impossible. This invented megatext, however, combined with all the realistic techniques described, pushes the narrative into allegory, or very nearly" (254). But, unless these authors have deliberately intended an allegorical reading, one must be cautious of reading allegory in all fantasy. In "The Staring Eye" (1974), Ursula Le Guin argues against reading fantasy as allegory: "No ideologues, not even religious ones, are going to be happy with Tolkien, unless they manage it by misreading him" (175-176). Although *The Lord of the Rings* does has Christian significance, it should not be flattened or simplified to an allegorical reading. There is more to fantasy than the allegorical, psychoanalytical, or pedagogical meanings these critics attempt to uncover. This does not mean that I am disregarding such methodologies as useful tools to approaching literature. However there is a difference between using these methodologies as tools to evaluate and comprehend *text* and using these methodologies to comprehend the *reader* and the reader's experiences with the text, especially in attempting to understand what *value* the reader gains in reading fantasy fiction.

As this thesis will assert, fantasy fiction *is* logical even when it is not possible. Swinfen argues that: "What may at first sight seem to be a paradox lies in fact at the heart of the fantasy: that is, that to create an imaginative and imaginary world it is necessary to observe faithfully the rules of logic and inner consistency" (3). Fantasy

must have internally consistent laws, as a point of reference from which the reader can hope to understand the fiction. Many fantasy authors demonstrate a sense of world-building that incorporates a sense of logic. In *The Magic Code* (1988), Nikolajeva explores at length the idea that magic has to be logical, using testimonies from authors such as George MacDonald, E. Nesbit, and Jane Yolen. Nikolajeva maintains: "One of the essential rules for writing fantasy seems to be the assumption that magic cannot be omnipotent and unlimited. Both critics and authors of fantasy are aware of this" (25). "Any minor inconsistency," she continues, "may shatter the whole construction" (26), and thus, using magic in a way that is irrational to the logic of the fantasy is considered poor writing.

When fantasy fiction breaks a scientific law, it must first understand how that law works, even if the comprehension does not take place on a conscious level. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the fantasy genre, though defined by the "impossible," still follows the *logic* of our current scientific and philosophical understanding of the world. As Attebery argues: "fantasy depends on mimesis for its effectiveness. We must have some solid ground to stand on, some point of contact" (4). Attebery continues:

> The impossible in fantasy is generally codified. Magical operations are grouped into principles resembling natural law: shapeshifters must conserve mass in transforming, knowledge of names gives powers over things. [...] Magic is indeed not merely codified: it is itself a code as old as language, or older. (55)

Magic is often an underlying motif which is used to distinguish fantasy from its sister genres, and while it is not realistically possible in our world, it is still governed by a sense of logic. By labelling the operations of fantasy as "magic", there is a fallacy in

assuming that it is therefore illogical. As I will argue throughout this thesis, the "rules" of fantasyland are just as rational as scientific and philosophical principles of *our* world.

While one way to define fantasy is to focus on impossibility in relation to realism, frequently the idea of impossibility is linked – overtly or subtly – with the idea of wonder. The first part of Manlove's definition, for example, is "*A fiction evoking wonder*" (16, original emphases). Gary Wolfe argues in "The Encounter with Fantasy" (1982, 2011) that:

> In an effective fantasy work, we do not lose our sense of the wondrous or impossible even long after all the marvels have been introduced and the magic has become commonplace. To account for such works, we must move beyond the simple criterion of cognitive impossibility and examine such elements as tone and setting – elements that help to construct what we might call the affective sense of the impossible. (72)

Wolfe's definition indicates that the effect of fantasy fiction – that of wonder – is the essential part of distinguishing the genre. Note that Wolfe switches between "effect" and "affect," and I follow this model – the former suggesting *the effect on the reader* and the success of the fantasy world, with the latter indicating *feeling, bodily or emotional responses*.[8] In "Evaporating Genres" (2002, 2011), Wolfe provides several

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[8] Note that many critics also seem to confuse or interchange effect and affect. It is not my intention to resolve this discrepancy in this thesis, although I would like to note an example of the discrepancy in a recent article, "What is Fantasy?" (2008) by Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston. Here, Laetz and Johnston argue *against* defining fantasy by a sense of wonder:

> One notable omission from our definition is any mention of wonder. This is no accident. Though fantasy is frequently associated with this affect, ultimately it cannot be incorporated into an analysis of the genre itself. Consider the inadequacy of some obvious proposals, which attempt to do so. To begin, the suggestion that works of

examples of fantastic novels that do not contain "explicitly supernatural events. […] The fact that few readers seem to notice this, or be bothered by it, suggests that the overwhelming tone of the novel carries enough of the fantasy affect to override mere concerns of plot and setting" (32). Expanding on his argument, I suggest that the distinction of fantastika genres does not necessarily depend on identifying the specific textual apparatus that results in the fantasy, the "impossibility" or "novum" (to borrow a phase from Suvin); instead, fantasy and SF create different affective responses in the reader which is conveyed through language and setting.

Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) argues that: "fantasy does impose many restrictions on the powers of the imagination, but in return it offers the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness. This we call *wonder*" (17, my emphasis). The affect of fantasy, that of wonder, is conveyed through language, through the narrative structures that convey a pattern of meaningfulness. In "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" (1973, 1979, 1989) Le Guin also indicates that language of fantasy has a particular affect: "It [fantasy] is a different approach to reality, an alternate technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not anti-rational, but para-rational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic, a heightening of reality" (79). Le Guin argues that the style of writing is

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fantasy necessarily inspire wonder is hopelessly oblivious to the countless B-movies and second-rate novels within the genre that completely lack this affect. (168)

Laetz and Johnston's article demonstrates that while the idea of wonder has been part of the long tradition of the literary criticism of fantasy, it is still not established and accepted as a part of a definition of fantasy. Additionally, although Laetz and Johnston use the word "affect," their emphasis on texts that fail to inspire wonder would suggest fantasy as an effect – on the success of the text to convey fantasy.

the most important facet of defining genres, which seems to indicate the idea that the "feel" or sense of fantasy comes from the style of writing:

> [S]tyle is how you as a writer see and speak. It is how you see: your vision, your understanding of the world, your voice. […] why is style of such fundamental significance in fantasy? […] because in fantasy there is nothing but the writer's version of the world. There is no borrowed reality of history, or current events, […]. There is only a construct built in a void, with every joint and seam and nail exposed. To create what Tolkien calls "a secondary universe" is to make a new world. A world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation. The only voice that speaks there is the creator's voice. And every word counts. (91)

The fantasy writer must be able to create a world that is haptic to the reader, one which is touchable, "real" to the senses. Through the style, through the *feel* of the world, the writer is able to create a wholly new world, convincing the reader to temporarily believe in the existence of an entire fictionalized history and cosmology.

Samuel R. Delany explores a similar idea, of the importance of the language of *SF*, in his collection of essays *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (1978). Matthew Cheney summarizes the argument in the introduction to the collection:

> [Delany] focused on the text. He said that science fiction wasn't special because of its gadgets and its landscapes. It wasn't special because of its ideas about technology or progress: instead, it was special because of its language, and the assumptions and techniques readers used to interpret that language, and the ways writers' knowledge of those assumptions and techniques affected the stories they wrote. (xv)

Like Le Guin, Delany and Cheney emphasize the importance of language in affecting both the reader and the writer, but here they indicate the importance of language in SF. Adam Roberts further explores this argument in *Science Fiction* (2000, second edition 2006), stipulating that: "as we have seen, science is just as frequently represented in the SF novel by pseudo-science, by some device outside the boundaries of science that is none the less rationalized in the *style* of scientific discourse" (8, original emphasis). Roberts suggests instead that: "it is not the 'truth' of science that is important to SF; it is the scientific method, the logic working through of a particular premise" (9). China Miéville continues this argument in the afterword to *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction* (2009):

> SF relies above all not on the language of science, nor on the command of that language, but on the *appearance* of that command. The cognitive effect is a *persuasion*. […] The reader surrenders to the cognitive effect to the extent that he or she surrenders to the authority of the text and its author function. This persuasion, even though "trickery", is doubtless generally ludic on both sides (238, original emphasis)

The important part of these conceptions of SF is that *SF uses the authority of science* of our *own world,* whereas *fantasy has the language and authority of myth* of a *newly created world*, but *both* genres contain a novum that is *impossible* in the "real" world.

In *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (2014), Attebery defines myth accordingly:

> *myth* is used to designate any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief. […] The problem for literalists is not that fantasy denies Christian myths but that it rearranges, reframes, and reinterprets them. […] Modern fantasy draws on a number of traditional

narrative genres − sacred and secular legends, Märchen, epics, and ballads − and a wide-array of cultural strands including pre-Christian European, Native American, indigenous Australian, and Asian religious traditions. For my purposes, and taking a cue from Jacob Grimm, I also use *myth* as an umbrella term over these various traditional forms, […].magical tales and supernatural ballads share with hero legends and stories of creation a sense of mystery and meaning that can be exploited by modern storytellers. […] fantasy writers have treated all those oral genres as part of a single resource: different veins in the same mother lode of symbolic narrative. […] Most myths come down to us stripped of context. The voices, gestures, rituals, and social interactions that once guided interpretation are gone. Fantasy provides new contexts, and thus inevitably, new meanings, for myths. (2-3)

I use "myth" in the same sense that Attebery does. As I will discuss briefly below, fantasy draws on a whole lineage of oral storytelling narratives − myths, legends, folklore − in order to reframe a story within a new cultural context, but that one that continues to express an affect of "mystery and meaning."

Fantasy is thus not a denial of science or rational law; instead, fantasy uses the devices of myth-making in order to create a new world with its own rational laws. Attebery argues that:

If fantasy were only the denial of science, however, there would be no contest between them. But in affirming impossibility, fantasy opens the door to mythology, which is the name we give to cast-off megatexts. Gods, fairies, ancestor spirits, charms, spells: a whole host of motifs no longer convey belief and yet retain their narrative momentum [...]. They

> are emotionally and psychologically, if not scientifically, valid, and
> therefore most potent where science fiction is traditionally weakest.
> (*Strategies of Fantasy* 108-109)

Fantasy uses these mythic narrative structures and motifs to add a quality of "wonder" to the text, creating an affective experience, but one that is based on mimetic connections with the world. In this sense, fantasy is myth re-purposed (Attebery 33, Suvin *Metamorphoses* 25-27; Attebery's *Stories about Stories*), but is not itself myth. In *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997) Richard Mathews similarly argues, using William Morris as an example: "Morris's desire to 'defend the mystery' suggests an overt goal to create a sense of wonder in the reader; this amazement begins the turn toward mythic belief that occurs when reading fantasy" (40). Mathews directly connects the sense of wonder to the idea that fantasy evokes a mythic belief in the reader. This does not mean that fantasy *is* myth, but that the fantasy has an *affect similar to that of myth*. In the preface of *History of Science Fiction* (2006), Roberts concludes: "I am suggesting here a modification to the crude distinction between 'magical' Fantasy and 'scientific' SF. It is not the fact that Fantasy is magical as *such* that distinguishes it from SF. It is the fact that it is *sacramental*" (xiv, original emphasis). While SF uses the language and discourse of science, fantasy uses the language and authority of myth in order to create an affect of wonder that is similar to the reading or performance of a mythic tale.

## A Brief Discourse on the Evolution of Fantasy

As critics have identified (Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, 1997; Mendlesohn and James, *A Short History of Fantasy*, 2009, revised 2012; Attebery, *Stories about Stories: Fantasy & the Remaking of Myth*, 2014) fantasy is an

inheritor of the evolutionary line of mythology and romance. The language and affect of myth is thus embedded in the textual apparatus of fantasy fiction. Literary theorist Northrop Frye (1957) differentiates the mythology and romance genres according to the hero's power of action. He asserts: "we have moved from myth, properly so called, into legend, folk tale, märchen, and their literary affiliates and derivatives" (33). Frye defines the hero of romance as having less power than the hero of mythology in relation to other men and their environment, and accordingly, he views romance literature as a declination of mythology, as a "derivative." Frye is not the only scholar to examine the loss or decline of power through the development of the epic; in *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic* (1982), Page Dubois examines the epic poetry of Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Spenser, and concludes that "the consolations on which the epic poem depends – […] – have fragmented and lost their meaning, along with the poetic conventions used to express them" (94). Like Frye, Dubois suggests that epic poetry has lost its power and meaning, as it declines from the mythology of Homer to the romance of Spenser.

Instead of viewing the transmission of epic poetry as a declination, I propose that we follow the model of genre theory that views the development of genre as a (Darwinian) evolution, with epic fantasy forming and adapting from the tradition set by epic poetry. In this model, parent genres (in this case, mythologies and legends) transform through hybridization into a new species. In *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005) literary theorist Franco Moretti uses the analogy of the evolution of literature as a tree diagram:

> [E]volutionary trees constitute *morphological* diagrams, where history is systematically correlated with form. [...] for evolutionary thought morphology and history are truly the two dimensions of the same tree:

where the vertical axis charts, from the bottom up, the regular passage

of time (every interval, writes Darwin, "one thousand generations"),

while the horizontal one follows the formal diversification ("the little

fans of diverging dotted lines") that will eventually lead to "well-marked

varieties", or to entirely new species. (69, original emphasis)

Accordingly, the mythologies and legends of the chivalric Arthurian romances, Greco-Roman, and Judeo-Christian cultures slowly formed the modern fantasy genre as we have it today in the Western English-speaking world. But this literature is in not inevitably a dwindling down or simple synthesis of the original tales and is instead an evolution of the tales into a "new species," a hybridity that is different from what has come before it.

The problem with an evolutionary model is that it often suggests a linear development of literature and genre, from A to B. As Tolkien identifies:

We are therefore obviously confronted with a variant of the problem that

the archaeologist encounters, or the comparative philologist: with the

debate between *independent evolution* (or rather *invention*) of the

similar; *inheritance* from a common ancestry; and *diffusion* at various

times from one or more centres. Most debates depend on an attempt (by

one or both sides) at over-simplification. ("On Fairy-Stories" 40,

original emphasis)

While epic fantasy fiction is obviously influenced by the lineage of epic and heroic poetry that came before it, as Hayles indicates in *Chaos Bound* (1990), literature is a part of a feedback loop influenced by the cultural context:

The recurrent image I use to explain the complex interconnections of

theory, technology, and culture is a feedback loop. […] Thus the

feedback cycle connected theory with culture and culture with theory through the medium of technology. Literary texts and theories were also involved in this cycle, for they too were affected by technology at the same time that they were affecting it. (xiv)

Literature and the ideas that it conveys are a product of a cultural moment, which, in turn, is part of the feedback loop that influences other literatures and ideas in a continual open dialogue. Hayles' model answers the problem of the linearity of the evolutionary model, suggesting that literatures and ideas are influenced by texts that came before it (a diachronic approach) but are also part of a cultural moment, influenced and influencing texts and ideas around its moment of production (a synchronic approach).

Possibly because of this feedback loop, many critics and non-readers of fantasy may view the genre as repetitive, or crude derivations of Tolkien's epic. This thesis hopes to interrogate the "problem" of the repetitive nature of heroic epic fantasy fiction, for, while the genre may in fact be repetitive, I believe this is a *strength* of the genre. The affect of wonder, producing that quality of mythology, is created and reinforced by repetition of the structures and motifs. These repetitions give a sense of familiarity, of a mythological story that one has already experienced before. Via the evolutionary and interconnected process of fantasy, especially the conscious part of the creative process that is aware of storytelling patterns in mythology and legends, the fantasy as a genre is metafictional. In "Fantasy and the Metatext" (2009), Clute asserts that:

> [W]e can understand megatext to refer to any story which is in some sense Twice-Told (which is to say any story that we are aware of), but more particularly megatext refers to the whole body of fantastika: the whole range of the literatures of the fantastic as they evolved in the century after 1750 or so. (7)

Clute suggests that the metatext – "metatextuality governs any expression in a text of its relationship to megatext" (8) – is a conversation; one that fantasy highlights rather than hides. Metafictional motifs and devices in fantasy stress the importance of storytelling and reveal its mechanics, but uncovering its mechanics is a means by which a reader may gain further pleasure in the text. As I will demonstrate in this thesis, devices such as frame-stories and repetitive motifs add to an oral storytelling effect. These devices are necessary to fantasy fiction in order to encourage the intended effect.

It is my belief that models of world-building taken from classical philosophical and popular sciences have entered the feedback loop that N. Katherine Hayles describes, creating a set of ideas and assumptions on how the world works. Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988) and James Gleick's *Chaos* (1987) are such popular science texts that may have impacted on the way a world is built and functions in post-1990 fantasy fiction. Hayles' model does not indicate the idea "of science influencing literature but of literature and science as two mingled voices within the cacophonography that we call postmodern culture" (208). This thesis does not argue the ways in which scientific models have influenced literary output; instead, in key places, it will use these models of science as metaphors to further understand and evaluate the forms and structures of the genre. By using scientific and philosophical models as metaphors to describe narrative structures, I will demonstrate that the structure of heroic epic fantasy not only reveals logical devices derived from real-world principles, but that these models themselves are an embedded facet of the narrative and essential to the way both story and character develops.

**The Heroic Epic Fantasy Subgenre**

Instead of differentiating between SF, the fantastic, and fantasy by "possible" worlds or "impossible" worlds (that is, by setting) or by trying to identify the effect/affect of the texts, I argue that we define the genres of Fantastika by *narrative structure*, by its form. The plot-structure, in this case, the "epic" or "heroic," should be the central premise by which we define genres or subgenres, and only *secondarily* by the setting or effect/affect. Thus I identify the "heroic epic" form, and argue that this form is more important in understanding and investigating genre, rather than identifying and isolating whether it is a heroic epic fantasy or heroic epic SF or heroic epic horror. The "heroic epic" combines plot (epic) with character (heroic). This is not a wholly new idea: in *Strategies of Fantasy* Attebery argues that: "the ability of fantasy to generate wonder [...] is closely tied to both setting and story line" (128), but here I am prioritizing story over setting; the "heroic epic" part of the definition of greater importance than that of "fantasy." The reason for this, as I will conclude below, is that, by using this approach to defining subgenres, and by identifying similarities between genres by storyline, we can focus on the story rather than on setting. As I will outline throughout this thesis, the structure of the heroic epic is one where the hero achieves spiritual transcendence (the ascendance of the hero from human or superhuman to something closer to the divine) via a journey (literal or metaphorical) through which the hero(s) "saves" the world by healing or re-creating it, and thereby fulfils their destiny and the world's destiny.

This is the basic structure of the "epic" or "heroic epic" found in mythology and romance (legends), as many formalists have identified. James Frazer (1890), Otto Rank (1909), Lord Raglan (1936), and Joseph Campbell (1949), have all offered a comparative study of religion and mythology in order to identify the basic structure of

the hero's journey. Vladimir Propp's (1928 in Russian, 1958 English translation) formalist approach to folktales is also an important study, in which Propp identifies 31 formal functions of the folktale. There is an obvious problem with reducing the heroic epic to a simple pattern, and critics have been cautious of using Campbell and similar studies of mythology, as Attebery identifies in his article "Structuralism" (2012):

> The trouble with the pattern is that Campbell insists that it is the only one. Whereas Raglan looked among traditional hero tales for a common pattern that was nowhere enacted in full, Campbell seems to start with a plan and to adjust the evidence accordingly. He retells numerous traditional myths in such a way as to make them fit, fudging the descriptions of characters and actions, leaving out details that do not correspond, and avoiding the many equally important myths that do not concern heroes. (85)

Although I only focus on a few case studies to use as examples of the heroic epic fantasy pattern, I believe that this will allow me to investigate and comprehend the depth of these individual texts better than a survey approach would allow. While the texts that I have selected share common structural similarities, I will acknowledge and make reference to the differences between these texts. Additionally, I do not mean to dismiss those works that do not follow my model of the heroic epic, but this thesis is a focus on one pattern of fantasy (out of many). Those fantasy texts that "do not concern heroes" are just as important and valid to the field of fantasy literature as heroic texts, but it is the heroic epic that will be the focus of my thesis.

There are numerous and varied definitions of "hero", but as a starting point I turn to the definition provided by Thomas Carlyle in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* (1841); the hero is one (whether in fiction, mythology, or the real

world) who "know[s] for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe and his duty and destiny there" (2-3). This is a key element to the hero's identity, as I will expand on throughout this thesis. The hero is defined by the manner in which they come to identify their place in the universe and fulfil their destiny – taking on this duty of their own free will. Thus, the epic is a journey which results in fulfilling a world destiny; the heroic journey is one where the hero achieves spiritual transcendence; and the heroic epic is where the two meet.

If there is no journey – literal or metaphorical – through which the hero(s) achieve spiritual transcendence, thereby fulfilling their destiny, then the book or series is not part of the heroic epic subgenre of fantasy. The "journey" of the hero does not indicate the hero's life from birth to death, but the path through which the hero comes to save the world. This idea, along with the concept of transcendence, would also indicate that some conception of a higher power (divinity or fate or a metaphysical entity) *must* be necessary in the work in order for it to be defined as the epic fantasy genre. However, this destiny or divinity can be expressed either implicitly or explicitly.[9] The hero can only save the world through a sacrifice, usually associated with some literal or metaphorical connection to death as part of the journey. In *The Epic Hero* (2000), an analysis of mythological heroes, Dean A. Miller identifies that: "the heroic individual comes from his voluntary submission to death: the hero wills himself to accept and even to welcome the danger of death" (121). Like the mythological hero,

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[9] For the purposes of this thesis, I am only using texts that are "explicit," as they are better examples to convey my ideas in a straightforward manner. But note that I am not excluding implicit fantasy from my definition of the heroic epic; the motifs in these texts are simply more subtle and therefore more difficult to discuss succinctly.

the epic fantasy hero's power comes from his "voluntary submission to death."[10] Through this sacrifice, the hero also achieves transcendence – that is, they ascend spiritually and achieve a connection with the divine.

While nomenclature for the "heroic epic" already exists in the form of "epic fantasy," this term seems to indicate the *length* of the texts, rather than through the history of the epic, especially in regards to the tradition of the epic hero in mythologies. I also refrain from using the nomenclature "high fantasy" as both "high fantasy" and "epic fantasy" are often used to encompass both "heroic fantasy" (for example, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*) as well as "sword and sorcery" (for instance, Robert Howard's *Conan the Barbarian*). Joseph A. McCullough in "The Demarcation of Sword and Sorcery" (2011) suggests that the major distinction between "heroic fantasy" and "sword and sorcery" is one of *scale*:

> Instead the definitive aspect of the idea of scope or scale lies in the idea that something exists that is bigger and stronger than the heroes. This can be God, gods, fate, destiny, good and evil, law and chaos. But these must be more than mere concepts. *They must be tangible driving forces at work in the world*. (online, my emphasis)

Both genres match John G. Cawelti's description of the adventure formula in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976), with fantasy being a type of adventure: "that of the hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral

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[10] While the Messianic hero is important to the Judeo-Christian tradition, fantasy fiction has its roots in many Western mythological traditions. As Campbell and Frazer have ascertained, the connection to death and sacrifice can be found in many mythologies. For example, in Greco-Roman mythology, Orpheus, Odysseus, and Virgil all voluntarily travel to the underworld.

mission. Often, though not always, the hero's trials are the result of the machinations of a villain" (39-40). However, the extent or depth of Cawelti's supposition is markedly different in the two subgenres. In the heroic epic, the journey results in a world-salvation and in the transcendence of the hero into something closer to the divine. Sword and Sorcery, in contrast, while it still incorporates the idea of overcoming an obstacle or villain, is less grand in scale, and is lacking in the motifs that suggests the hero's connection to divinity.

That is the distinction, I believe, between the epic and urban fantasy, or between the epic and Sword and Sorcery, or between the epic and what I call the "localized fantasy," or perhaps more accurately, between the epic and "adventure fantasy": not so much the location, of land or of city, but of the sense of scale, a scale that includes the entire cosmos, dimensions, depths and heights of heaven and hell – a scale that indicates a *divine order to the world* which *impacts* on the plot or narrative arc. While the fantasy heroes of these "localized" fantasies may grapple with powerful creatures and villains, the epic fantasy must culminate in the hero facing an "ultimate evil" that transforms and remakes the world, and not just the city or region. Both plot and character and setting need to work together to evoke a feeling of "epic" in order to be distinguished as epic.

For example, while in Scott Lynch's *The Lies of Locke Lamora* (2006) the protagonist Locke Lamora has the markers of an epic hero, his initial departure or "call for adventure" as Joseph Campbell calls it, does not appear to lead to a transcendental event that remakes the world. This first novel in the series is a city fantasy, regionalized to a specific location. More importantly, Lamora's actions are not motivated by the sense of divine fate. There is little sense of fate or of the gods in the first book of the series (although this later changes by the third novel). While there is religion – Lamora

and his gang of thieves are in fact all priests, ones who seem to believe in their god –
the gods do not seem to impact on the events of the first book. As I indicated above and
will demonstrate throughout this thesis, all epic fantasies contain some idea of divine
or metaphysical entity or fate, either implicitly or explicitly, who intervenes in
fantasyland.
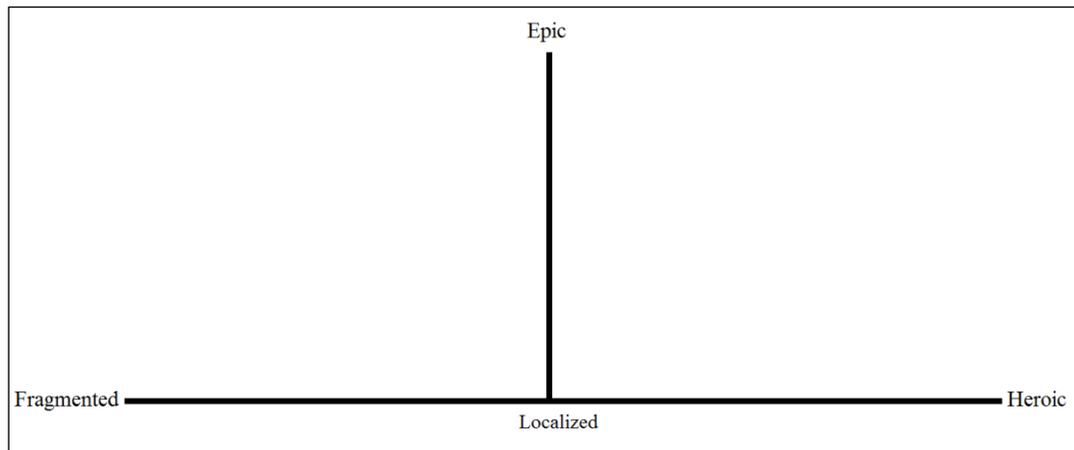


**FIGURE 0.1: THE HEROIC/EPIC GRAPH OF FANTASY.**

I identify heroic epic at one corner of a two-dimensional scale (figure 0.1). One
end of the horizontal axis – the character axis – is the Heroic. The Heroic is a unified
group who, along with the prophesized hero(s), bring about the resolution of the plot.
Even if the group is divided – as happens in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) or
Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* (1990-2013) – the divided group still helps to bring
about the resolution as a unified whole. On the other end is what I call the "Fragmented
Hero." In this end of the axis, the protagonists are so numerous and divided, not in a
unified group, but in a way that makes it difficult to determine who is the primary hero
of the novel.[11] George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1996-present) and

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[11] Note that the "protagonist" is not interchangeable for "hero." The *protagonist* is a character that is a
part of the larger group, and the story may even focalize through their point of view, but this focalization
does not indicate that they are a "hero." A *hero* is one who helps fulfil the heroic functions, which I will
describe throughout this thesis. While multiple *protagonists* may function as *heroes*, there may be a

Steven Erikson's *Malazan* series (1999-present) are such examples, where it may be initially difficult to predict which characters are the "good" characters that will save the world. Note however, that like Lynch's protagonists, there still exists the potential for the characters to develop heroic qualities as these series progress, as the authors may *suggest* some hint of destiny earlier in the narrative. The "prophesized hero" is the intersection where the hero and the epic axis meet, combining the chosen hero with the epic axis through the idea of destiny.

The vertical scale – setting – I have outlined above, with epic on one end and the local or regional on the other. The localized fantasy differs from epic in two major ways. Firstly, the plot (and resolution) of localized fantasy takes place in a central area, rather than on the world-scale. However, it is possible that characters may move from region to region on a series of adventures, as is the case with Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* series (1932-1936) or Moorcock's *Elric* series (1961-1977). (For this reason, there is perhaps a further distinction between "localized fantasy" and "adventure fantasy.") J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) may be seen as halfway between the epic and localized fantasy scale – although the Hero has a destiny to fulfil, the story is largely contained to a hidden society in Britain and rarely moves beyond those regional borders. Secondly, as I identified above, the *true* epic often contains and conveys the entire cosmic destiny – that is, the universe of the epic has some hint of metaphysical worlds and an idea of a divinity (whether a benign or malignant anthropomorphic god or a numinous fate) influencing the events of the narrative. In

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further distinction between *hero* and *Hero* (and here I used the capitalized H). The *Hero* is one where the protagonist has fulfilled and actualized their role as the hero of destiny (I will expand on this idea near the conclusion of the first chapter). Although, again, multiple Heroes may emerge if there are sequel series and multiple destinies to fulfil.

explicit fantasies, this hint of divinity is often an overt motivator of the plot, but in implicit fantasies, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the divine intervention might not be noticeable − but are still present in the background. Thus, while Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion* (2001), which I examine at great length in the first chapter, can be seen as a localized fantasy because it is contained within the country of Chalion, I view it as more epic than it is local, because of the divine impact on plot, character, and setting. A novel such as *Gardens of the Moon* (1999), the first book of Erikson's *Malazan* series, may be epic but not heroic, as gods are overtly motivating events within the novels, appearing as characters themselves, yet it is difficult to determine which protagonist (whether human or divine) the reader should identify with, that is, which character performs the heroic function.

There is also a difference between religion and spirituality, as my example with the priests of *Lies of Locke Lamora* indicates. Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008) also has many multiple religions which are localized. But the world itself has an underlying spirituality where two divine forces permeate the entire world structure. As the people are not aware of this spirit(s), they do not worship it or have not created a religion for it. It is because of these divinities that Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy is classified as epic, regardless of whether the peoples revere this divinity or not. These divinities directly impact on the plot of the fantasy narrative. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* is similar. Though the idea of religion exists in the novels, these religions are also multiple and contradictory. Prophecy, when it appears, is interpreted by each protagonist in their favour. There is no underlying feeling of destiny motivating events − at least for the moment, as *A Game of Thrones* television adaptation, which extends further than the published books, has been seen to move into the heroic axis, and it is likely to shift into the epic axis as well.
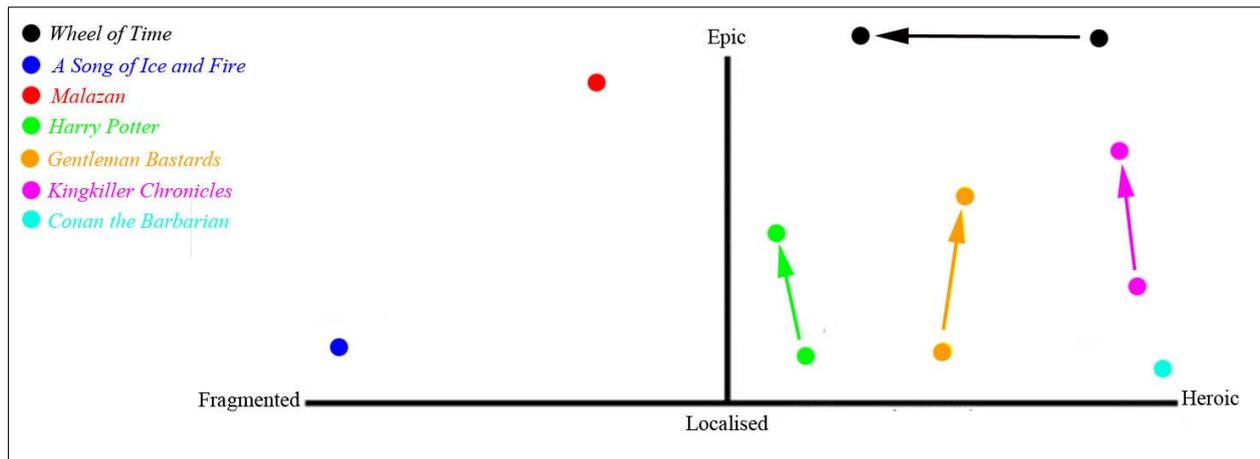
**FIGURE 0.2: TEXTUAL EXAMPLES ON THE HEROIC/EPIC GRAPH OF FANTASY.**

The scale of the fantasy axis is not always static, as indicated in figure 0.2. Scott Lynch's *Gentleman Bastard* (2006-present) moves gradually from localized to epic, as by the third book of the unfinished series a hint of destiny starts to emerge. Here the underlying markers of "hero" found in the protagonist (initially present in the first two books) begin to manifest more overtly as the protagonist Locke Lamora gradually moves from antihero to hero. Patrick Rothfuss's yet unfinished trilogy *The Kingkiller Chronicles* (2007-present) begins in the localized end of the epic scale, especially in its outer frame narrative, where the entire trilogy is being narrated by a story-teller in an isolated inn. Though the main character of the story has motifs of the hero, these have not yet *manifested* with marks of divine favour. Although there is some movement into the metaphysical boundary, this does not, at this time, seem to have impacted on the narrative structure.

The model of the fantasy graph also works for media other than book or book series (although I will be only be focusing on textual examples to avoid complexities with adaptations across different mediums). For example, in open-world video games such as *Skyrim* (2011) or *Pokemon Red/Blue* (1996), despite taking place in a vast setting, can be considered as localized rather than epic as the hero (the palmer) moves from location to location fulfilling quests. These open-world quest fantasy games are

thus "adventure fantasies" – although a more thorough survey of the ludic aspect of these worlds may be necessary to substantiate these claims, especially as both games are part of a larger series of games. As M. M. Bakhtin describes in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), the chronotope of adventure time is one that is episodic: "composed of a series of short segments that correspond to separate adventures" (91); "there is a sharp hiatus between two moments of biographical time, a hiatus that leaves no *trace* in the life of the heroes or in their personalities" (90, original emphasis). Similarly, if individual novels in a series of fantasy have no movement or growth from novel to novel, they may be seen as adventure-fantasy in its episodic structure. But if there is an overarching plot that governs the series, motivating the story with some idea of divine fate, then the series as a whole may be viewed as epic.

This structure of the heroic epic graph can be found in fantastika genres other than fantasy. Superhero alternate-universe stories (story lines that are alternate timelines or alternate versions to the central story) show elements of heroic epic fantasy (*Superman Red Son*, 2004, is a good example), although the original superhero story may be localized to a specific city (such as Batman in Gotham, for instance). Fairy tale revisions may fall into either end of the graph, depending on plot and character. For example, Mercedes Lackey's *Five Hundred Kingdom* series (2004-2012) is more epic, while her *Elemental Masters* series (1995-2015) is more localized. I would suggest that most productions from the gothic/horror fantastika branch are localized rather than epics, the story focusing on a haunting of a locale or person, rather than a world (although gothic/horror *motifs* may be included in an epic). There may be exceptions of course. The *Evil Dead 2* (1987) and *Blade* (1998) movies are good examples of the horror genres which contain epic motifs of a "prophecy" and fate. The television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) is another such example where individual

episodes may be more localized while the overarching series arc may be epic. Thus, there may be heroic epic gothic or horrors, just as there may be heroic epic SF. While critics may disagree over whether Frank Herbert's *Dune* or George Lucas's *Star Wars* are best classified as SF or fantasy, I would emphasise the need to approach definition first, in terms of narrative – the tropes and forms of the text (for instance, by features of plot, character, structure and style) and then, if necessary, via the reader's reception of the text (through affect usually characterized by setting or location). Herbert's *Dune* and Lucas's *Star Wars* are both "heroic epics" in this sense, as may be Norrington's *Blade* (1998). Whether these texts are then "heroic epic SF" or "heroic epic horror" may still be important distinctions to make, but the essential thing is that they are all defined by story first.

**Chapter Outline and the Texts**

The books I have selected demonstrate a spread of popular and influential authors as well as lesser known authors to indicate that the motifs and patterns that I identify are consistent throughout the genre in the last twenty-seven years, regardless of the status of the book or author. It should be noted that I primarily focus on American authors. I do so, not so that I may make a comment on American culture or in order to identify the American epic, but in order to avoid making conflations between productions from different countries.[12] In the following chapters I will be using a single novel as a case study for each chapter. I believe that, rather than listing examples of each motif found in a survey of works, focusing on a deep reading will allow me to

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[12] For instance, the works that I will focus on in the following chapters are published after 1990 and are therefore post-Cold War books. Thus they may reflect a movement away from binary thinking, especially in the division between "good and evil," as I will explore further in the thesis.

better develop my arguments. The texts that I utilize as case studies are all post-1990 American novels. However, as the Western fantasy genre is obviously larger than the post-1990 American boundary – the exchange of information and ideas crossing borders resulting in the creation of the fantasy genre – I will occasionally refer to other books outside of the perimeters of recent American fantasy, discussing examples that are either important pre-cursors of the heroic epic fantasy genre or utilizing instances of contemporary heroic epic fantasy that are produced in England, Canada, or Australia (works published in English in order to negate any problems that may come about due to translation). I refer to these examples because the heroic epic fantasy genre is not specific solely to the United States. But I have chosen American texts because the heroic epic fantasy genre appears to be *especially* prolific in the United States. This is probably due to commercial factors, as American has a large number of publishing houses that are receptive to fantasy fiction, especially those works that fit this formula, but it is for this reason that I have chosen post-1990s American fantasy for specific case studies: the heroic epic fantasy form particularly crystallizes and coalesces in this time and place. Instead of examining the cultural context of these works, this thesis is an investigation of the structure, pattern, and themes that are integral to heroic epic fantasy, which will be especially demonstrated by key case studies taken from American post-1990 fiction.

The first three chapters explore the intersection of character and plot in the heroic epic. Because of the necessity of prophecy in heroic epic fantasy, the first chapter concerns whether the character lives a life of free will or predetermined fate. Repetitive patterns within the novel reinforce the idea of a predetermined fate but the differences between the repetitions illustrate the hero's free choice. Using a Stoic analogy, I suggest that the hero's soul has a "shape" that is predetermined, but it is up to the hero whether

to move according to this shape. The hero is one who chooses to operate as the divine's agent and abide by the shape of their soul, following the path the gods have outlined for them. Through prophecy, the future is predictable, but using an idea similar to that of quantum mechanics, these fantasy authors demonstrate that the future is predictable only as a possibility.

The second chapter examines more overt repetition and patterns within the text, arguing that these repetitions form layers of meanings because the repetitions function as iterations of what has come before. Through these repetitive patterns and through the way the heroes and protagonists engage with the fantasy world around them, the text poses both ontological and epistemological questions, as the repetitions are distorted and disorientate the characters. Through the examination of recursive structures, I will demonstrate how heroic epic fantasy offers a meta-fictional reading, but one that is focalized through the interpretations of the hero as a strange attractor.

The next chapter breaks down the binary between "good and evil" and discusses the potential of the protagonist (the hero) and the antagonist (what I term the "u-hero") to mirror each other. Following on the conclusions of the first chapter, the u-hero soul has a similar shape to the hero's, but their choices determine their role as u-hero. The hero's choices confirm him or her in their function as hero in a messianic role. This confirmation is expressed in two ways: first, through the relationship with the community, and second, through the acceptance of their sacrifice and willing confrontation with death (depicted either metaphorically or literally).

The fourth chapter then turns to the interaction of the character and plot with the setting. The plot of fantasy is motivated by a sense of wrongness – an abnormal metaphysical entity enters or breaks into fantasyland causing a fracture in the system. The narrative arc in the heroic epic fantasy concerns the means by which the hero

removes or expels this abnormal presence from fantasyland and re-establishes or heals the broken boundaries of the world. As I will demonstrate, this expulsion and simultaneous healing is often carried out through the hero's body as a doorway between worlds.

The last chapter will demonstrate how, even though the hero has healed the world, due to an entropic system fantasyland will begin to deteriorate again. Consequently, a utopic state can never be achieved permanently, it is only fleeting. Fantasy fiction expresses a pattern of cyclicality as it moves between different states of utopia and anti-utopia. But, though events may repeat themselves, the repetitions are not exact as each cycle is a different iteration of what has come before.

**Chapter 1 – The Shape of a Hero's Soul: The Fate of Free Characters in Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion***

*[T]he gods might draw the curse back to them only through the will of a man who would lay down his life three times for the House of Chalion.*

— Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Curse of Chalion* 360-361

The idea of prophecy and the "destined hero" is a dominant motif of heroic epic fantasy fiction. Customarily an oracle or seer will predict some outcome of the future where a hero will arise who is capable of "saving the world." As the oracle's declaration of a prophecy seems to imply that a hero must live according to their destiny, does this then mean that heroes are incapable of acting of their own free will? C. N. Manlove in *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975) states that: "Kingsley, MacDonald, Lewis and Tolkien (and Charles Williams) all limit the free choice of their protagonists in order to get them where they want to go; though the degree to which they do it varies, they are all 'benign determinists' who do not allow evil or free will full scope" (260). Manlove, incorrectly in my opinion, views fate and free will as mutually exclusive terms, taking the stance that a figure of destiny is not a "free" character and that all actions made by the protagonist are determined as a result of fate. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), Farah Mendlesohn likewise suggests that the fantasy hero is not free because of the knowledge of their future through the medium of prophecies: "Prophecies allow knowledge to be imparted, so that in fact the goal is 'known' even though its meaning is not understood [...]. The hero does not have free will in a narrative driven by prophecy" (42). While prophecy may motivate a character and events in a narrative, the hero's free will in regards to their destiny is more finely nuanced. In this chapter I will demonstrate how

the genre of epic fantasy fiction effectively combines fate and free will in order to create a narrative with open possibilities and interpretations. More importantly, I argue that this paradox is an essential part of the genre itself as the author must combine the idea of the destined hero with a free character who is allowed to make choices.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on a close reading of a few passages of Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion* (2001) to demonstrate the paradox of fate and free-will as, like many fantasy novels, the narrative is self-conscious of its own structure with regards to determinism. As Brian Attebery argues:

> One difference between fantasy and the genres of realism and naturalism is that fantasy typically displays and even celebrates its structure. If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the outside. This tendency is one reason that fantasies often take on a metafictional dimension ("Structuralism" 83).

The tendency for fantasy to display its own seams is especially the case in regards to the motif of prophecy. Using *The Curse of Chalion* as a model, I will discuss the shape of the hero as one that is fluid and allows divinity to act through them. I will examine the paradoxical structure of fate and free will that is tied up with the figure of the hero and investigate the way this structure is developed.

**The Hero as a Pawn or Avatar**

The hero of a heroic epic fantasy will often act as a deity's avatar in the physical world. I will explain this statement further, but first I must emphasize that a divine presence is not always stated explicitly in fantasy. In his book on *Lois McMaster Bujold* (2015), Edward James suggests that: "The centrality of religion in Bujold's presentation of the world – the action of all three novels is directed at a crucial stage by the

intervention of a god – is refreshingly different from the bulk of modern fantasy" (54), but in fact all the works I use as examples of the epic fantasy genre throughout this thesis have some presence of divinity, either explicit or implicit, who have impacted on the narrative. In Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*, we see that the characters often interact and communicate with one of the five gods. In contrast, in Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, omnipotent forces are merely implied by the narration, but the interaction with a devil-like figure is still central to Jordan's world. David and Leigh Eddings' *Belgariad* series (1982-1984) presents a whole pantheon of tangible gods resulting in multiple religions that is central to Eddings' world; here, an idea of positive and negative dualism still emerges, as the "hero" is associated with "goodness" or "right" along with the god that they are aligned with.

The alliance of the hero to a god is a significant part of heroic epic fantasy fiction for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals the moral coding of the text. By aligning with a particular god, the hero may offer some idea as to which side the reader should take in a war between divine or near-divine forces (although the hero may switch alliance once more knowledge is revealed). It should be emphasized that though the reader may align with the hero or narrator, this does not indicate that there is no room for interpretation. Mendlesohn suggests that: "the portal-quest fantasies are structured around reward and the straight and narrow path. The epic and the traveller's tale are closed narratives. Each demands that we accept the interpretation of the narrator, and the interpretive position of the hero" (5). However, as I will argue in the next chapter, the reader may often be unsure that the hero's actions may be for the best and indeed, the hero may do as much harm as good, as the hero is capable of fulfilling the potential of villain as well – a concept I will explore in the third chapter.

Secondly, and more importantly, the hero *chooses* to align themselves to a god and *accept a responsibility as their agent*. Many epic fantasy writers create an origin story for the setting of their world that is reminiscent of origin stories in many mythologies. Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905) is one of the earliest fantasy texts which invents a new pantheon of gods, where the chief of the gods Mana-Yood-Sushai creates lesser gods who in turn create humanity. In the sequel to *The Curse of Chalion*, *The Paladin of Souls* (2003), the origin story of the world is depicted as follows:

> "The world was first and the world was flame, fluid and fearsome. As the flame cooled, matter formed and gained vast strength and endurance, a great globe with fire at its heart. From the fire at the heart of the world slowly grew the World-Soul.
>
> "But the eye cannot see itself, not even the Eye of the World-Soul. So the World-Soul split in two, that it might so perceive itself; and so the Father and the Mother came into being [...]." (Bujold, *Paladin of Souls* 41)

This creation story in Bujold's *Chalion* universe is similar to many mythologies in that the world and god(s) are created from chaos first, and then the created gods or world create humankind in turn. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell explores the relationship between the gods and the world and their interactions with the humans that inhabit the world: "The cosmogonic cycle is now to be carried forward, therefore, not by the gods, who have become invisible, but by the heroes, more or less human in character, through whom the world destiny is realized" (271). In the first stage of the world, the gods are visible and actively present. Their relationships with humankind are more direct. Gary Westfahl in his introduction to *Worlds Enough and*

*Time: Explorations of Time in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2002), describes how: "Absorbing the accumulated wisdom of distant ancestors, early human civilizations came to conceive of the past as a distant realm quite different from their mundane present – a Golden Age when humans walked with gods and magical events were part of everyday life" (1). But, due to a "fall," this Golden Age where the gods are on Earth soon passes, and the gods leave the Earthly dimension for another one. The gods are no longer allowed or *capable* of returning to Earth and must then operate through other means. In mythology, as the gods have become "invisible" (or are incapable of carrying out these actions on their own), a god must designate a hero as an agent. In heroic epic fantasy fiction, the invisible god is a formal necessity so that the hero can function as an agent of the gods.

As the gods themselves are unable to cross into the physical world from the metaphysical one, they influence the physical world through the actions of a hero:

> The gods, the learned theologians of the Holy Family assured men, worked in ways subtle, secret, and above all, parsimonious: through the world, not in it. Even for the bright, exceptional miracles of healing – or dark miracles of disaster or death – men's free will must open a channel for good or evil to enter waking life. (*Curse of Chalion* 66)

A hero acts as an agent or a "channel" that allows gods to cross borders. *The Curse of Chalion* expresses a recurrent motif of spilling, of pouring, of fluidity, which seems to indicate a transgression or a crossing of borders and boundaries. As I will expand on in a later chapter, similar motifs of crossing borders is also apparent in other works of heroic fiction. In the example above, the free will of the protagonist forms a channel that allows a god to cross the spirit world of the divine into the physical world of humans. As gods are removed from the physical material world of humans, they must

operate through a hero who has allowed either the benevolent or the malevolent force to guide their actions. In *The Epic Hero* (2002), a study of the mythological hero, Dean A. Miller also concludes that:

> Strictly speaking this hero is a representative, even a pawn, of the vast inhuman potencies, and his destiny is constrained (and may be formed) by the whim of divine cosmogonies and supernatural arbitrators. [...] The mythological epic and its archetypical thematic elevates the hero, who is made the shadow partner or the earthly avatar of divinity, to an awesome height. (31)

The epic fantasy hero fulfils the same function as the mythological hero, as a god's pawn or avatar. The hero's position as either pawn or avatar is dependent on the heroic epic fantasy text. Thus I use these words not interchangeably, but as the language of the text requires it. Bujold uses this word "avatar" in a ceremonial circumstance, where, in a spring rite, a person is chosen to fill the role of the goddess (*Curse of Chalion* 66). This person is in no way actually possessed by the spirit of a god, as the ceremony is only representational. However this symbolic event foreshadows the conclusion of the novel, when the body of the hero Cazaril *does* in fact become a temporary vessel for the spirit of a god. The use of the word "avatar" is an interesting word choice, as it would derive from the Sanskrit word. In Hindu epic mythology, such as in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the gods literally descend down to earth in mortal forms to correct the evils of the world. In *The Curse of Chalion*, the gods can only correct the mistakes in the world by possessing the body of a mortal person; since they are invisible and removed from the physical world, they must operate through the body of the hero.

The fact that the gods must use a human agent at all indicates that they are limited in some way. Because they are incapable or unable to descend to earth themselves, they are not omnipotent though they may be fiercely powerful. For this reason, the gods must operate through chosen heroes. Thus while gods may play games with the heroes, they must also abide by the rules of the universe. In *The Curse of Chalion*, the gods are "physically" unable to cross into the mortal world. And by "physically" I mean unable to due to the laws of physics or science or the laws that govern the world. It is left unclear whether it is the gods that created these laws and then agreed to abide by them, or if the laws were put in place by a greater natural Force and that the anthropomorphized gods must follow the rules of this greater power.

As the divine's representative on the physical plane, the hero may operate as a pawn in a chess match between two opposing forces. The language employed in these types of novels often alludes to an antagonistic force that is akin to the Devil. Alternatively, the hero could also function as a championed knight, which would establish a feudal hierarchy between servant and authority. Christian allusions can still arise here but are less likely to occur. As a championed knight, instead of a pawn in a chess match, the aspect of game-play is made less overt in this situation but is still notable. For example, while in *The Curse of Chalion*, the hero functions more as championed knight rather than pawn, the priest Umegat still notes that the "*the gods load the dice*" (Bujold 331).

In *The Curse of Chalion* the hero Lupe dy Cazaril must remove a curse that has affected the land of Chalion. This curse is in fact a drop of the Father's blood that was improperly spilled into the physical world of humans. Note the motif of fluidity again, with the imagery of spilling. That only a *drop* of a god's blood results in a generational curse across the whole land of Chalion seems a further indication of the gods' inability

to cross the boundary into the physical world. Additionally, the narration in the text indicates that the gods are unable to comprehend correctly the physical world. The gods are only able to retrieve this curse by entering through the soul of their chosen avatar:

> If the gods saw people's souls but not their bodies, in mirror to the way people saw bodies but not souls, it might explain why the gods were so careless of such things as appearance, or other bodily functions. Such as pain? Was pain an illusion, from the gods' point of view? Perhaps heaven was not a place, but merely an angle of view, a vantage, a perspective.
>
> *And at the moment of death, we slide through altogether. Losing our anchor in matter, gaining… what?* Death ripped a hole between the worlds. (457-458, original emphases)

The motif of crossing borders also occurs here, with very violent imagery indicated in this transgression: "Death ripped a hole between the worlds." The fantasy hero acts an agent of transgression, of fluidity, in order to cross borders where no human – and not even the gods – can cross. Miller likewise contends that: "Beneath the literary constructions persists a widely accepted common notion of the 'hero' as a mediator, a conduit between the living world and whatever nonhuman powers and zones exist" (4). Their ability to cross borders – to act as mediator between humanity and metaphysical forces is a significant role of the hero.

It would seem that the gods are able to discern the world through a different "dimension" than the human one. Once again, I use "dimension" in a mathematical or physical sense, with the fourth dimension being time (as noted by Stephen Hawking 31; I will expand on this in greater detail below). I suggest that they (the gods) are able to view different perspectives from the rest of humanity because they move at different

speeds. Their perspective of time is different from that of humanity. Elizabeth Haydon's *Rhapsody* (1999) makes this idea explicit, by creating a frame story where a character Meridion views the contents of the story (the novel) through a Time Editor – a device similar to a microfilm in which Meridion can move back and forth between viewing different historical points in time. The character of Meridion is thus presented as one outside of normal human time and outside of the narrative time of the story. If the gods are immortal (or at the very least long-lived), then their method of calculating time must also be different. Let me explain this concept by using an illustration that Stephen Hawking describes in his book *A Brief History of Time* (1988):

> The lack of an absolute standard of rest meant that one could not determine whether two events that took place at different times occurred in the same position in space. For example, suppose [a] ping-pong ball on [a] train bounces straight up and down, hitting the table twice on the same spot one second apart. To someone on the track, the two bounces would seem to take place about forty metres apart, because the train would have travelled that far down the track between the bounces. […] The positions of events and the distances between them would be different for a person on the train and one on the track, and there would be no reason to prefer one person's positions to the other's. (20)

If the gods are at a different vantage point from humanity, one where they see human life pass them by as if a train is moving pass them on the tracks, then they would view at different times, indicating why (or if) the gods are able to see forward into the future.

**Does Fate Deny Freedom?**

Do the gods then, by being able to see into the future, prompt the hero onto their adventure? Might this indicate a circular cause of events? Let me return to Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as an outline of when the mythological hero is caused to leave on a journey. The first step is the "call to adventure," where the hero encounters the supernatural world. This encounter can be met accidentally: "A blunder – apparently the merest chance – reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. As Freud has shown, blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts" (42). Campbell suggests that the call to adventure arises from internal suppressed desires. While this is certainly true, as heroic epic fantasy encodes a paradox of free will and fate, the call for adventure can be located in both internal and external sources. In *The Curse of Chalion*, the hero Cazaril attempts to identify his own call for adventure: "Cazaril opened his mouth and sat back, his mind jumping first to the day the Provincara had ambushed him with her offer of employment. But no, before that came… and before that came" (256). Cazaril here attempts to trace back his journey through a series of trivial choices, with each step leading him to where he is at the present moment.

Instead of viewing these events as choices (or internal), Umegat, the priest he is conversing with, understands Cazaril's journey as fated (or external):

> "Do you think your steps were fated from that far back? Disturbing. But the gods are parsimonious, and take their chances where they can find them."
>
> [and Cazaril responds] "If the gods are making this path for me, then where is my free will? No, it cannot be!" (256-257)

Note that heroes in heroic epic fantasy often self-reflect on their free will, or lack of it. This self-reflexivity is especially true when the hero is aware of some existence of fate. For instance, in the *Belgariad* series, the hero Garion spends much time asking "Why me?" or why is he the one who is the prophesized hero. Often it is the protagonist themselves who through this self-reflexivity must define themselves as the prophesized hero. The hero must undergo a process of self-reflexivity before they can fully understand and accept their role as the prophesized hero. The heroes of these novels eventually determine that the process of fulfilling the prophecy does not limit their free will if they choose the circumstance for themselves. Accordingly, Umegat suggests a scenario to Cazaril that allows them to combine both fate and free will: "I have had another thought on such fates, that denies neither gods nor men. Perhaps, instead of controlling every step, the gods have started a hundred or a thousand Cazarils and Umegats down this road. And only those arrive who choose to" (257). As can be seen by this exchange, the call for adventure that starts a hero on his journey is located in both internal and external sources. A god or fate might propose a path for ordinary humans, but the choice to follow a god's desires comes from within.

The debate of whether a person has any free will if their "destiny" is known has been a long philosophical discussion lasting millennia. In *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) Bertrand Russell effectively counters the idea that knowledge of the future denies free will: "Everything else is confusion of time, due to the feeling that knowledge *compels* the happening of what it knows when this is future, though it is at once obvious that knowledge has no such power in regard to the past" (191, original emphasis). He comes to this deduction by arguing:

> Since volitions are the outcome of desires, a prevision of volitions contrary to desires could not be a true one. It must be remembered that

the supposed prevision would not create the future any more than memory creates the past. We do not think we were necessarily not free in the past, merely because we can now remember our past volitions. Similarly, we might be free in the future, even if we could now see what our future volitions were going to be. (190-191)

Russell pragmatically suggests that knowledge of the future does not necessarily indicate that humans are required to follow the actions of their pre-vision. Knowledge of the future may guide actions, but does not mean that one is required to abide by them.

Russell's argument is similar to the one put forth by Stoic philosophers to counter the "Idle Argument" – the idea that, if the future were known, one would be unable to act freely. Susanne Bobziene outlines this argument in her examination of Stoic philosophy in *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (1998). The Idle Argument suggests that, if every action is fated or determined, then it is futile to take any action at all:

> (1) If it is fated that you will recover from this illness, then, regardless of whether you consult a doctor or you do not consult <a doctor> you will recover. (2) But also: if it is fated that you won't recover from this illness, then, regardless of whether you consult a doctor or you do not consult <a doctor> you won't recover. […] (4) Therefore it is futile to consult a doctor. (Origen, trans. by Susanne Bobziene 182)

The Idle Argument results in total passivity or inertia. But as Bobziene explains, the Stoic philosophers Origen and Cicero argued that this argument was a sophism:

> First, […] even though someone may have been theoretically convinced by the Idle Argument […] this does not preclude that, when it comes to acting, they cannot help but believe that their actions are relevant to the

outcomes, even if the Idle Argument proved otherwise. […] Second, the

Idle Argument allows us to infer the futility of not $\phi$-ing in the same

way as that of $\phi$-ing. (Bobziene 192)

Following the arguments outlined by the Stoics and Bertrand Russell above, I believe

that the argument that a person or character is denied free will because of the presence

of fate is not conclusive, especially as a person or character still needs to make a choice

between doing and not-doing.

It must be noted that, in its original conception, these philosophies applied to

humanity and to reality, and were not used to investigate fictions. But in recent years

we seem to have become hostile to any idea that suggests that we do not have control

of our own actions, and consequently have repressed the concept of destiny, resulting

in literary criticism that rejects the notion of determinism when it does appear in fiction.

Thus critics like Mendlesohn contend that: "The hero does not have free will in a

narrative driven by prophecy" (42). The interconnectedness of free will and fate, which

was once central to classical mythology, has been lost; fantasy fiction brings it back

into view by capturing and rearticulating the theories of "time" of the current age.

Stoic philosophy provides a conception of fate and free will that is similar to the

notions encoded within the heroic epic fantasy genre. A divine entity may determine a

"fate" for a hero, shaping their nature in the hopes that the hero will choose to act as

their avatar on Earth, but it remains up to the hero to choose to live according to this

given nature. As I outlined above, though they are thought to be omniscient, the gods

are not omnipotent:

[H]ave you really understood how powerless the gods are, when the

lowest slave may exclude them from his heart? And if from his heart,

then from the world as well, for the gods may not reach in except through

living souls. If the gods could seize passage from anyone they wished, then men would be mere puppets. Only if they borrow or are given will from a willing creature, do they have a little channel through which to act. […] sometimes, a man may open himself to them, and let them pour through him into the world. […] A saint is not a virtuous soul, but an empty one. He – or she – freely gives the gift of their will to their god. And in renouncing action, makes action possible. (*Curse of Chalion* 225)

Umegat the priest describes how the gods of Chalion are limited. His depiction of the soul incorporates the motif of pouring and fluidity again. Using a cup and a jug of wine to act out a physical demonstration, "the sermon of the cup" (225), Umegat exhibits how a hero allows himself to be made into a channel or a cup in order for the spirit of the god to pour through them and cross into the physical world.

The imagery of the cup that occurs in the text evokes a famous Stoic metaphor, where a similar conception of shape is used to illustrate the combination of determinism and free will, which is described by Marcia L. Colish in *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (1990):

The Stoics, following Chrysippus, illustrate this argument with one of their most famous metaphors: A cylinder is at rest. If it is set in motion it will move necessarily in a circular manner, in obedience to its given shape. But whether it is set in motion or not lies within the realm of possibility. So, the Stoics conclude, man is determined by his given nature, but he is free to act in terms of it. (35)

While it is difficult to determine whether Bujold consciously evokes this Stoic imagery, it is evident that the Stoic philosophy of life *is* encoded within the fantasy text. The

shape of the hero's nature is determined, he is a cup (in Bujold) or a cylinder (Chrysippus), but it remains up to the hero's free will whether to fulfil the functions of their design set by god. Author L. E. Modesitt Jr. conveys a similar analogy in *The Magic of Recluce* (1991): "A potter may use his skill for producing containers. Those containers may be used for good or evil purposes. Most are used for purposes without much real good or evil" (21). The potter may create a vase, but the potter's intent does not factor into how the vase is used. Similarly, the hero Gaborn in David Farland's *The Lair of Bones* (2003) contemplates: "What if… a man is like a vessel […]. And what if that vessel can be filled with light, or it can be filled with darkness?" (315). The motif of a hero as a vessel or container is recurrent across many heroic epic fantasy series.

Thus a god's ability to perceive the future does not indicate that they are able to control it as an omnipotent force, since the future is not fixed because in the text a person's will must be free. Although a god may be the cause behind the shape of a hero's nature, the shape of a cylinder (to use Chrysippus's metaphor) or of a cup (to use the imagery that Bujold evokes), it is up to the protagonist whether they are to remain at rest or to roll forward. Stoic philosophy proposes the doctrine of the *logoi spermatikoi*:

> [T]he seminal reasons or seeds of the *logos*. These *logoi* contain within themselves the germs of everything they are to become. […] They also account for exceptional events. In this case, the *logoi spermatikoi* are understood as individual seeds planted by the divine *logos* with a delayed reaction or time bomb effect, triggered to go off at some later date according to a divinely ordained schedule. (Colish 32)

The seeds of human nature and events are planted by a divinity, but because the concept of "free will" is essential to certain modes of Stoic philosophy, it is still up to individual humans to determine whether they will abide by the divine schedule.[13]

In *The Curse of Chalion*, Cazaril only encounters the prophecy in the latter half of the novel. Lady Ista tells him how the Mother of Summer (one of the five gods of Chalion) had come to her in a dream:

> She said that the gods sought to take the curse back, that it did not belong in this world, that it was a gift to the Golden General that he had spilt improperly. She said that the gods might draw the curse back to them only through the will of a man who would lay down his life three times for the House of Chalion. (361)

It is up to the hero of the prophecy to repair the damage that has been done through an act of transgression, of spilling into this world a "gift" or "curse" that does not belong there. It is up to the hero to return this spillage to its proper place. However, it is evident that at this time, Cazaril and Ista do not understand how to fulfil the prophecy, as it is incomprehensible how a man could literally die three times.

When Cazaril comes across the prophecy three quarters of the way through the book, he is already well on his way to fulfilling the prophecy without realizing that he has done so. Cazaril discovers that his journey to his "present" moment began even earlier than he had supposed:

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[13] Note that Stoic philosophy is not unified in thought, especially as it spans from third century BC to third century AD. But as this thesis is not meant to examine Stoic philosophy, and instead I am using the philosophy as a tool to better understand the paradoxical combination of determinism and free will in contemporary epic fantasy, I am isolating those areas of Stoic philosophy that I believe aid in illuminating the text.

> *How long have I been walking down this road?*
>
> […] Had all his pain and fear and agony there been manipulated by the
> gods to their ends? Was he nothing but a puppet on a string? Or was that,
> a mule on the rope, balky and stubborn, to be whipped along? (392,
> original emphasis)

All the hardships that Cazaril has suffered were a required part of his hero's journey in order to bring him to the time and place where he can fulfil the prophecy. His conception of life is similar to the Stoic maxim presented by Seneca in *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* (circa 65 AD; Gummere translation, 1925): "*ducunt volentem fata nolentem trahunt*" ("On Obedience to the Universal Will" 228). Fate leads the willing, and Fate drags the unwilling. The Stoic maxim depicts an imagery of a dog tied to a cart, similar to how Cazaril describes his life as a "mule on a rope," being stubbornly pulled along by the desires of the gods. And yet, at the same time, Cazaril recognizes that each event was determined through his own choice. Cazaril remembers submitting himself to the mercy of the gods, any god, and praying for deliverance for his men: "And he'd flung himself prone on the stones, as he lay now, and sworn that any other god could pick him up who willed, or none, so long as the men who had trusted him were let out of this trap" (394-395). This moment of self-recognition is a profound moment for Cazaril. It is only towards the end of the novel that Cazaril recognizes the consequences of each "trivial" action, that with every choice he had made, he had chosen and re-affirmed that he had accepted divine ordinance even if he had not fully comprehended what this act means until this moment of self-recognition. Though he did not understand the consequences at the time, it is enough that Cazaril did choose to submit. The choice itself demonstrates his free will.

Similar choices occur in other works of heroic epic fantasy that contains the motif of prophecy. In *Wizard's First Rule* (1994) and *Stone of Tears* (1995), the first two novels in Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series (1994-2013), the characters fight against achieving the prophecies, but like in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (429 BC), an attempt to avoid the prophecies results in the prophecies accidentally being fulfilled. Despite this, the protagonists' free choices still result in the completion of the prophecy, even if it was not the intended outcome, and furthermore, the character's struggle to accept and understand the prophecy and the choices they make is an essential part of these stories. In fantasy fiction, as in many literatures, the hero must always begin the journey as the quintessential Tarot Fool, completely ignorant to where the path might take him.[14] But, as the narration reveals in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995-2000), the hero "must be free to make mistakes" (*Northern Lights* 176). Thus, even though characters are given instructions through a prophecy, it is notable that prophecies in both fantasy and mythology are always stated ambiguously. They must be free to make their own decisions and mistakes, through minimal guidance, and it is through their choices that the events of the prophecy are fulfilled (or not fulfilled).

**Re-Examining the Rules of the Game: Quantum Possibilities**

Let me return to the analogy of a chess match. Customarily, a chess player is able to "see" or visualize three turns into the game based on current game play, past experiences, and expectations of the other player's abilities. In heroic epic fantasy fiction, gods (or a benevolent or malevolent force) would operate as a chess player,

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[14] The cards and characters of a tarot deck also follow a similar pattern to the journey of the hero. The first card of the major arcana starts with the Fool, the naive innocent who must realize their potential as the Hero.

manipulating their pawns on the board in order to achieve the desired outcome. Some authors, such as Robert Jordan, even make this analogy explicit: "*Stones on a board. But who is moving us? And why?*" (*The Great Hunt* 63, original emphasis). But while in chess, the chess player controls the pawns, here the gods are only able to suggest, manipulate, or perhaps coerce their chosen pawns. While they prefer a particular event to occur, they cannot force anyone in any particular direction, as Umegat clearly states in *Curse of Chalion*: "Men's will is free. The Gods may not invade it, any more than I may pour wine into this cup through its bottom" (224). While epic fantasy heroes have a "fated" path, a path that the gods' wish that they take, they must choose it through their own free wills. Robert Jordan makes this aspect of choice as related to game-play quite clear. When Rand al'Thor is poised to make a decision, he is asked:

> "[…] Do you play at dice, or cards, Rand al'Thor?"
>
> "Mat's the gambler. Why?"
>
> "[…] You must choose. As my father would have said, it's time to roll the dice." (*The Great Hunt* 443)

Like Rand al'Thor, Cazaril is also asked to make choices without any clear idea of the consequences, that is, whether or not his actions will result in him actually fulfilling the prophecy, thereby saving or destroying the world.

The game-playing motif becomes a way of presenting the connections between fate and free will for several reasons. There is the idea that fate is being manipulated by a powerful entity. This power "plays" with the fate of the protagonists. The idea of Fate playing games is also a consistent one throughout mythology, and is likely largely influenced by the personification of the three Fates in Greek mythology. Additionally, the metaphor of tossing a die is a simple way to demonstrate the way in which fate operates. When tossing a die, it is possible that a die can land completely randomly, in

a one in six chance, but in epic fiction, it is more likely that the outcome is motivated by an external (divine) factor. The influence of a divine force is more notable because the system or outcome is often too orderly or predictable to be mere chance. Their interaction with the world produces a discordant sound that resonates with each repetition, eventually creating a cacophony that is unable to be ignored. For instance, in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, one of the protagonists, Mat Cauthon, finds that he has extraordinary luck when playing with dice. But a dream sequence reveals that: "Mat was dicing with the Dark One" (Jordan, *The Dragon Reborn* 510), suggesting that the Dark One has been manipulating the odds. This motif, of Mat dicing with the Dark One, is repeated, until the very sound of dices rolling begin to trigger the idea for both reader and character that nefarious forces are in play.

Thus, this motif, of a near-divine force *manipulating* the fate of a character operates as a nod to the reader that there is an external, often hidden, force who may be influencing events. The motif is not always stated as explicitly as "the Dark One's luck." In Modesitt's *The Magic of Recluce*, the main character identifies "a pattern of force-swirls […] that] will lead [the sword's] wielder from chaos into depravity… or worse" (88). As the fantasy genre itself is self-reflexive and self-referential, an aspect of "play" embedded in its very construction along with a small reference to the manipulation of fate, using words such as "the Dark One's luck," may operate to excite the reader when they grasp the connection. There is also reference to the fact that as Mat has "the Dark One's luck," the reader may wonder at whether the heroes are being influenced by benevolent or malevolent forces. Note that sometimes an antagonist force may be trying to manipulate the hero, and consequently, fulfilling a destiny may lead to harm rather than salvation, which is why a hero must interpret their path for themselves and make choices accordingly. Traditionally, heroes of epic poetry would

have the luck of the gods. Aeneas and Odysseus, for example, would have the favour of certain gods, and it is this preference towards the hero that would indicate that the protagonist has a "destiny" to fulfil. There is a circular relationship from hero to god. As the god must choose a hero as an agent, and their preference toward a hero indicates that the hero has a destiny to fulfil, but the hero must in turn agree to function as a divine's agent. But this relationship in no way indicates that the character is a blindly obedient pawn of the gods, devoid of free will, as the hero continues to make choices at every part of the journey.

As I stated above, through its paradoxical structure of fate and free will, fantasy fiction captures and rearticulates the theories of "time" of the current age. In fantasy, science fiction, and other fictions which consider time, there have been two ways of conceiving time: as tensed or tenseless. In tenseless time, all time – past, present, future – are "real" and are conceptualized in relation to each other. The future is just as actualized and unchangeable as the past. These events are simply viewed in relation to each other, like events on a map. C. D. Broad in *Scientific Thought* (1923) describes that: "the obvious analogy to *Now* in Time is *Here* in Space" (58). However, he notes that this conception of "Here" and "Now" is difficult to pinpoint: "It not only has a different meaning as used by you and by me at the same time, it also has a different meaning as used by either of us at different times" (58). Thus, while all points of time are real, they must be described in relation to one's own perspective. An alternate view to tenseless time is tensed time. In this conception of time, time "flows" from the past to the future with the present as the mediator. In *A Future for Presentism* (2006), Craig Bourne describes several different variations of the tensed theory of time. The first, which Bourne calls branching-futurism, is where "time's flow amounts to the dropping out of existence of the many real possibilities" (12), and the branches of future times

become actualized. In the no-futurism theory, "only the past and present exist" (13), as the future is unreal. Bourne explains that, "[n]o-futurism conceives of reality growing, whereas branching-futurism conceives of reality shedding, but both conceive of time's flow as a change in what exists" (13). Note that in either analogy, Bourne uses the metaphor of a tree branching, with time – indicated by "reality" – shedding or growing as the possible becomes actualized. The last theory of time which Bourne has introduced recently to the tensed versus tenseless debate is presentism, where time flows as well, but "only the present exists, the future is that which will come to exist, and the past is that which did exist" (13). As I will argue, heroic epic fantasy fiction articulates a theory of time that may be represented by branching-futurism – when a hero makes a choice in their journey the branches of the other possibilities drop out of existence – *but* the hero must operate under presentism, choosing and acting in the moment.

In *A Brief History of Time* (1988), Hawking visually represents a tensed conception of time in the following way: "It will be like the ripples that spread out on the surface of a pond when a stone is thrown in. The ripples spread out as a circle that gets bigger as time goes on. […] the expanding circle of ripples will mark out a cone whose tip is at the place and time at which the stone hit the water" (29). Hawking uses this analogy to demonstrate the conception of a "future light cone" in space-time. Just as the ripples made by a stone in a pond spread out in bigger and bigger circles, so do events in space-time:

> Similarly, the light spreading out from an event forms a three-dimensional cone in the four-dimensional space-time. This cone is called the future light cone of the event. In the same way we can draw

another cone, called the past light cone, which is the set of events from

which a pulse of light is able to reach the given event (Fig. 2.4). (29-31)

Hawking visually represents this idea with the diagram Fig 2.4, which I have replicated

myself so that it can be shown clearly in figure 1.1.
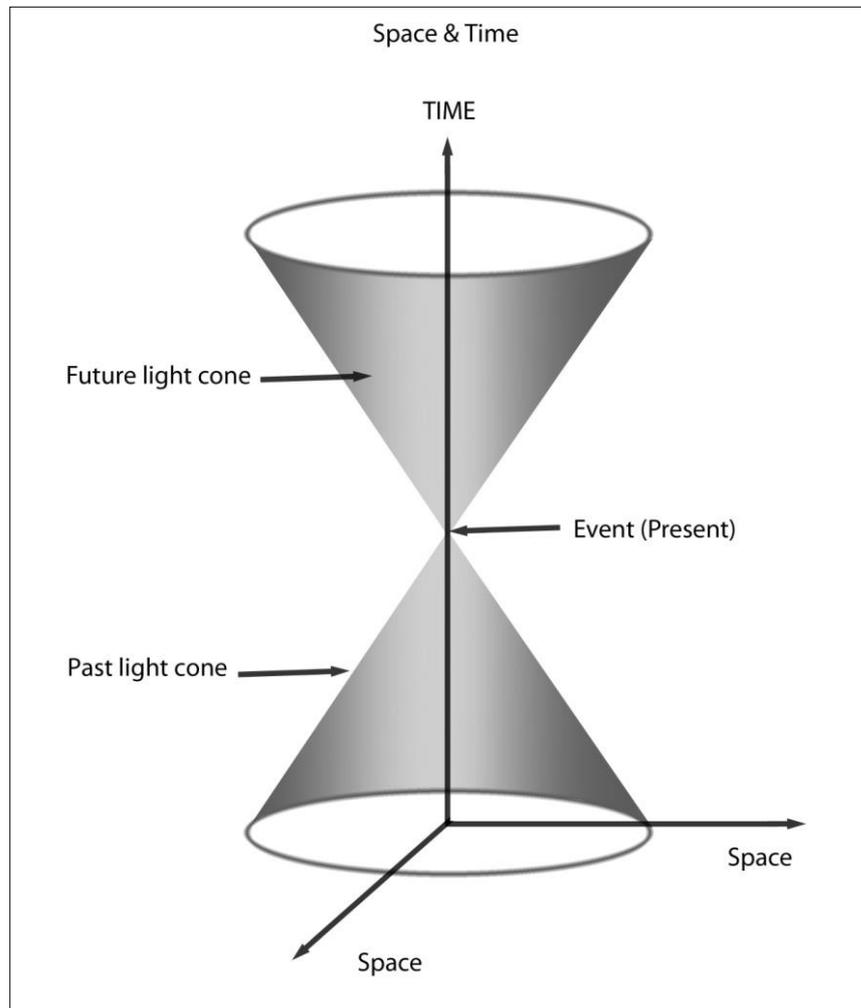


**FIGURE 1.1: HAWKING'S LIGHT CONES.**

Hawking continues, with an explanation of how past and future light cones demonstrate

that only events inside the light cone can affect or be affected by events that happen at

point P (the tip of the cone):

> The absolute future of the event is the region inside the future light cone
>
> of *P*. It is the set of all events that can possibly be affected by what
>
> happens at *P*. Events outside the light cone of *P* cannot be reached by
>
> signals from *P* because nothing can travel faster than light. They cannot

therefore be influenced by what happens at *P*. […] If one knows what is happening at some particular time everywhere in the region of space that lies within the past light cone of *P* one can predict what will happen at *P*. (31)

From this pattern, it is possible to determine a quantum state ("a combination of position and velocity" (64)), and from there hypothesize several paths: "quantum mechanics does not predict a single definite result for an observation. Instead, it predicts a number of different possible outcomes and tells us how likely each of these is" (64). Thus, while the future may be visible, these future events can only be seen as a series of possible outcomes.

To extrapolate this visual onto heroic epic fantasy fiction, I suggest that the hero functions much like the stone or rock thrown into a pond which creates ripples on the surface: it is possible to predict the coming of the hero and the possibility of the hero fulfilling a prophecy, but only as a possible outcome. To use the model of branching-futurism, it is as if the hero is walking down a literal path until they come to a branch in the road, event P (figure 1.2). By making a choice through their free will, the hero's future is assured (visible) until the next branch in the road, the next event *P* (figure 1.3). At this next branch, the protagonist's journey is undetermined or open, and left up to the hero's choice.
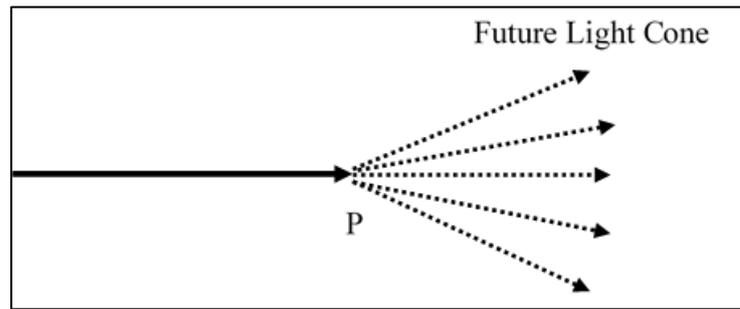
**FIGURE 1.2: THE HERO'S PATH, BEFORE CHOICE.**
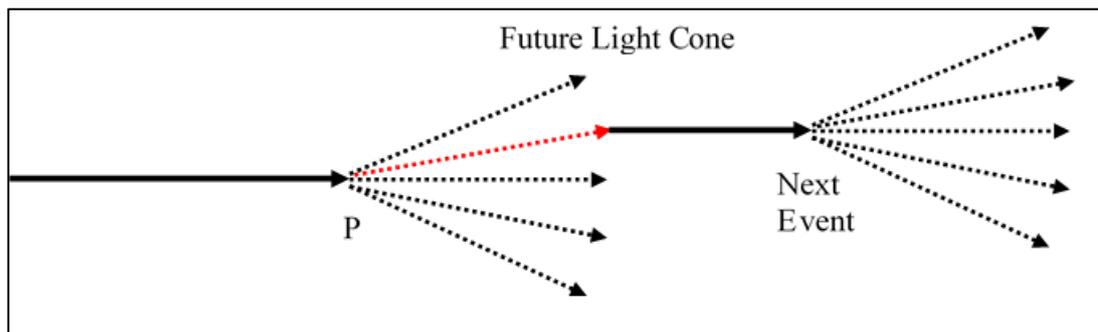


**FIGURE 1.3: THE HERO'S PATH, AFTER CHOICE.**

This idea can be seen in *Dragonflight* (1968), the first book of the *Pern* series by Anne McCaffrey. After F'lar and Lessa make a decision to send F'nor through time, their action is confirmed immediately by the appearance of F'nor returning from the future. The appearance of F'nor affirms the decision they had just made, even though they still have not informed "present" F'nor of their decision to send him into the future. The affirmation of their decision only takes place once they had considered the idea themselves. That is, once the hero makes a choice, the future at that moment becomes closed until the next branch in the road.[15] This is the way choice is represented in *The Curse of Chalion*: "So, in choosing to share one's will with the gods, was it enough to

---

[15] Different authors may represent the number of possible outcomes differently. In Eddings' *Belgariad* and *Malloreon* series, they depict only two possible outcomes, or potential futures. Bujold depicts many. But it should also be noted that the Eddings' series were published before Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Bujold post-Hawking, and it may be that Hawking's conception of the future as different possibilities has become part of the cultural capital by the time Bujold wrote and published her novel.

choose once, like signing up to a military company with an oath? Or did one have to choose and choose and choose again, every day? Or was it both?" (394). At every choice or stage of the hero's journey, the hero is poised at a crossroads at event P, contemplating the possibilities of a future light cone. The future is predictable only as a possibility, not as determined fate. In *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997), Richard Mathews argues through an examination of *The Lord of The Rings* that: "Tolkien's reiteration of the choice motif suggests that he sees life as continuous choosing. Every minute of time represents a choice and thus a potential downfall or salvation" (72). By making the correct choice, the protagonists reaffirm that they are still demonstrating the potential to be the hero.

The idea of fate being an absolute determined future may have come about because of its association with divinity and the gods. In Thomas Carlyle's evaluation of different types of Heroes, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (a collection of lectures from 1835; published in print form 1904), Carlyle suggests that the first phase of hero is where the Hero *is* the divine. An example would be Heracles and Ramayana in mythology, where Heracles has divine blood and Ramayana is a God reborn in mortal form. The next phase is Hero as prophet: "The Hero is not now regarded as a God among his fellowmen; but as one God-inspired, as a Prophet" (42). The Hero as prophet is one who is inspired by the words of god and acts or speaks accordingly. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) Northrop Frye likewise describes how the poet is god-touched:

> [I]t is clear that the poet who sings about gods is often considered to be singing as one, or an instrument of one. His social function is that of an inspired oracle; […] The poet's visionary function, his proper work as a poet, is on this plane to reveal the god for whom he speaks. This usually

means that he reveals the god's will in connection with a specific occasion, when he is consulted as an oracle in a state of "enthusiasm" or divine possession. (55)

Frye describes a process where the prophet and poet are one, speaking out loud the words of the gods.

The word "fate" itself may be connected to the "word of god." In *Religion in Virgil* (1935), Cyril Bailey argues that the word fate (fatum):

> is connected with the verb fari, "to speak", and that it is in fact its passive participle, meaning "the spoken word". […] To Virgil himself it seems to have implied primarily the notion of the "spoken word" of divine beings and in particular of Iuppiter, which was the expression of his will and so of the destiny of mankind. (205)

Thus, accepting fate means accepting the spoken words of the gods. The hero, Virgil in Bailey's examination or Cazaril in our example of heroic epic fantasy, agrees to become a pawn of the gods and follow the "spoken word" of these divine beings. However, because they are following the words of divinity, there is a further confusion between "fate" and "free will." The nuances of "fate" indicated by Bailey conveys the idea that the action is not something that one wants to do, but it is the best possible action to do, especially at the time. But the hero's will can only be free if they operate according to the theory of Presentism. That is, they cannot consider whether the future is fixed when making decisions.

I propose that there is perhaps some ambiguity with the word "fate." In mythology and heroic epic fantasy the word does not indicate a deterministic future. Instead, the word seems to imply that a person has a *purpose* in life, and choosing this path will make one happier in life. Accordingly, Cazaril's acts by making choices that

are the best possible action at the time, without any idea that he is fulfilling a prophecy: "The gods do not grant miracles for our purposes, but for theirs. If you are become their tool, it is for a greater reason, an urgent reason. But you are the tool. You are not the work. Expect to be valued accordingly" (*Curse of Chalion* 232). Cazaril reveals himself to be a hero, as he functions as an avatar or channel for the gods, but he also willingly makes these decisions regardless of the personal consequences in being ill-treated as a tool. And yet although he suffers horribly (and physically dies three times), each decision leads him down a path where he can fulfil the prophecy and save the House of Chalion and the kingdom. Cazaril accepts and embraces death in a Stoic fashion, as described by Colish:

> [T]he Stoic faces death without fear for the same reason that he faces life with an attitude of philosophical optimism. Since the entire universe is governed by the divine *logos*, since, indeed, the universe is identical with the divine *logos*, then the universe, by definition, must be reasonable. The *logos* organizes all things according to the rational laws of nature, in which all events are bound by strict rules of cause and effect. […] fate, in turn, is rationalized and identified with the good will of the deity. (31-32)

Cazaril has nothing to fear from welcoming death, as he realizes that it will result in a favourable outcome, in salvation for the royal family and the realm of Chalion.

## Are Destined Heroes Flat Characters?

Does following and embracing the dictates of prophecy indicate that Cazaril and other prophesized heroes are "flat" characters? E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) suggests that the difference between flat and round characters is that:

> Flat characters […] are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. (73);
>
> They [flat characters] remain in [the reader's] mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances. (74)

Adding psychological motivation to the character would give the character depth, making it "round." Certainly characters in fantasy fiction may be viewed as "types," as the hero-figure type, for example. But as Roger C. Schlobin suggests in "Character, the Fantastic, and the Failure of Contemporary Literary Theory" (2003): "while many primary and secondary characters in fantasy fail to invigorate or inspire that does not mean that there aren't a significant number who do and whose vitality cannot be reduced to type. This may be true of literature in general" (265). Many fantasy writers demonstrate the "growth" of a character, as the hero and their companions are initially characterized by innocence and naivety and, through the process of the journey, develop self-awareness and knowledge of the world which profoundly changes the characters.

While the choices that the hero makes are based on their own innate "heroic" characteristics along with the events they have experienced, more importantly, the deliberation of these choices reveals to the reader the extent to which the protagonist develops throughout the novel. For example, in David and Leigh Eddings' *Belgariad* (1982-1984) and *Malloreon* (1987-1991) series, the characters *do* in fact use prophecy as a set of instructions, but the character Garion struggles *constantly* with the *choice* to make this decision and fulfilling the circumstances of the prophecy. The hero Garion realizes that:

He had finally found the answer to the plaintive "Why me?" which he had voiced so often in the past. He was inevitably chosen for those dreadful, frightening tasks because he was perfectly suited for them.

"It's what I do," he muttered to himself. "Any time there's something so ridiculously dangerous that no rational human being would ever consider trying, they send for me." (Eddings and Eddings, *King of the Murgos* 45)

Garion determines that his "heroic" nature is why fate has chosen him for the job he is to fulfil, but as the dual series continues, he realizes that he also chooses *himself* to accomplish these deeds: "Can you possibly think of anyone else you'd trust to deal with these matters, Garion?" (*Sorceress of Darshiva* 157). Through accepting his nature through his free will, Garion demonstrates a blend of fate and free will that is a central part of the heroic epic fantasy genre.

While the hero may not necessarily be flat, due to psychological depth through self-reflexivity, inquiring whether the hero is flat may be the wrong question to ask. Certainly round characters may add to the reader's pleasure. The self-reflexivity of the fantasy genre and the reader's pleasure as a consequent result is one I will discuss at greater length in the next chapter. While there is a defence to be made of character, that defence stands on a different ground to structure. *Whether the hero is flat or round does not matter when considering the structural necessity of the hero to the plot.* In *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Vladimir Propp sets a model where characters are functions of the plot: "Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (21). The character fulfils a functional necessity, but this function, the "hero-type" does not indicate that the character is necessarily "flat."

Character function is different from character depth (or lack thereof), but it may be easy to interpret "character type" as flat, because of the usages of the word. This is the manner in which Mendlesohn interprets heroic epic fantasy (what she calls portal-quest fantasies):

> [H]istory or analysis is often provided by the storyteller who is drawn in the role of sage, magician, or guide. While this casting apparently opens up the text, in fact it seeks to close it down further by denying not only reader interpretation, but also that of the hero/protagonist. This may be one reason why the hero in the quest fantasy is more often an actant rather than an actor, provided with attributes rather than character precisely to compensate for the static nature of his role. (7)

Mendlesohn here indicates that actants, characters with "attributes rather than character," are static, and the text is equally closed and fixed, as both static characters and the text are a result of imparted knowledge (although in this context of her analysis of *Lord of the Rings*, this imparted knowledge is that of the past rather than the future). However, in his examination of *Lord of the Rings*, Mathews connects the act of Recognition through the freedom of choice to the Christian story of The Fall from The Garden of Eden:

> Free will is of great importance in Tolkien's moral scheme, and here again his literary attitudes are consistent with his Catholic beliefs. The connection between knowledge and free will is one of the profound relationships defined the Christian story [...] Freedom of choice is only possible through knowledge and it is partly for this reason that Gandalf relates the Ring's *history* to Frodo. (66, my emphasis)

According to Mendlesohn, knowledge in the guise of history, provided by a storyteller, magician, or guide, closes down the meaning of text, denying the hero and reader the opportunity to interpret the story for themselves. But Mathews here seems to suggest that this knowledge, in this case Gandalf relating history to Frodo, *opens up* the text so that the hero is enabled to make free choices by interpreting their destiny in an informed manner. By providing knowledge, heroes are able to choose for themselves the way in which to act.

Though she does not refer directly by his name, Mendlesohn is referring to terminology of the actor and actant introduced by A. J. Greimas, but Greimas' terminology is less weighted than the value judgment implied by flat and round characters or by "static" characters. Attebery summarizes the difference in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992):

> Modern fantasy thus draws on two traditions of characterization. To avoid confusion with psychological theories or value judgments, I will not call these character formulations *realistic* or *archetypal*. A. J. Greimas has provided a less loaded terminology: as an element in the construction of a story, a character may be called an *actant* – the French participial ending conveying the sense of *doing* that is essential to such characters. A character who is more interesting for his individual qualities than for his place in a shaped narrative is an *acteur* (Scholes, *Structuralism* 103), or, substituting the English form, an *actor*. Fantasy, then, makes use of the narrative and semiotic code we call magic to examine the relationship between character as imitated person and character as story function, between actor and actant. (73, original emphasis)

Attebery concludes that the fantasy hero is neither actor nor actant, but something in between, both "character as imitated person and character as story function." His deliberate use of Greimas' terminology indicates that the "actant" character is not inferior to the "acteur." The actant has an important structural function. It is not that character comes first, and the structural paradoxes of fate and free will are stitched onto the character. As Frye asserts in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957): "the sentimental notion of an antithesis between the lifelike character and the stock type is a vulgar error. [...] That stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it" (172). The structure of the paradox of free will and fate acts as a skeleton frame, and the way in which the hero engages with this paradox adds depth to their character. A character who demonstrates a lack of the self-deliberation process of contemplating whether their free will may be limited by fate would result in a hero "character" that *is* flat. But that structural paradox – of choice when confronted with their destiny – must come first.

**Actualizing the Role of Hero (with a Capital H)**

The hero does not achieve the status and identity of Hero until they recognize and respond to their destiny. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975) M. M. Bakhtin argues that:

> In essence, all the character's actions in Greek romance [the adventure hero] are reduced to *enforced movement through space* (escape, persecution, quests); that is, to a change in spatial location. […] While it is true that his life may be completely passive – "Fate" runs the game – he nevertheless *endures* the game fate plays. And he not only endures – he *keeps on being the same person* and emerges from this game, from

all these turns of fate and chance, with his *identity* absolutely unchanged.

(105, original emphasis)

Bakhtin makes a distinction between the adventure novel that contains fate (and thereby nothing the hero does makes a difference), and the "adventure novel of everyday life" (one without fate).[16] Here, in the adventure novel of everyday life, Bakhtin sees the possibility for the hero to change because "[t]his entire sequence is grounded in *individual responsibility*" (119, original emphasis). However, as I have demonstrated, this description of "individual responsibility" is also compatible with the contemporary heroic epic fantasy, especially in regards to fantasy. In *The Curse of Chalion*, Cazaril is not simply enduring his fate (to die three times), but actively acknowledges his responsibility and embraces it. It is pertinent that the epic fantasy hero does not simply *endure* "the game fate plays" but must respond, react, or act; be an "*actant* – the French participial ending conveying the sense of *doing* that is essential to such characters" (Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* 73), even if the response to the demands of fate is

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[16] Bakhtin also discusses this idea of either affirming or constructing a new identity in several other "types" of novels, but I have limited myself to the discussion of these two types as they encapsulate my arguments on determinism in contemporary epic fantasy. Bakhtin makes these distinctions of genres in different historical periods in order to produce a commentary on the cultures that creates these different chronotopes. As the works that I have selected for close reading in these chapters are all contained within a specific time and place, I hope to make an observation about the encoded understanding of the subjectivity of time within this particular moment. Pertinent to this chapter, the paradox of fate and free will seems a part of the cultural fabric of the post-'90 American culture, indicating that while the contemporary culture believes in individual agency and self-sufficiency, this agency is still combined with an idea of destiny; that one has a destiny or *purpose* in life, and that by taking individual responsibility for these actions will lead to a higher purpose, (which is perhaps an extension of the American expression of manifest destiny).

simply to recognize their purpose in life and choose to act or react accordingly. It is the recognition of their position and the subsequent response that is an essential factor in the hero's function.

Bakhtin indicates that the only thing that changes in a story of fate is a reaffirmation of character: "people and things have gone through something, something that did not, indeed, change them but that did (in a manner of speaking) […] verify and establish their identity" (106-107). However, for the epic fantasy hero, the acceptance of his role as hero does not indicate a simple reaffirmation of character, of an "identity absolutely unchanged" (105), but instead the repeated acceptance of the heroic function moves the hero as *potential* hero into *actualized* hero. In *Scientific Thought* (1923), C. D. Broad discusses how the "change" when the present meets the future should be termed "Becoming":

> We are too liable to treat change from future to present as if it were analogous to change from present to past or from the less to the more remote past. This is, I believe, a profound mistake. I think that we must recognize that the word "change" is used in three distinct senses, of which the third is the most fundamental. [...] Let us call the third kind of change *Becoming*. (67, original emphasis)

Indeed, the act of embracing death results in Cazaril being changed to the point that he may have become something else: "The Lady of Spring [one of the five gods of Chalion] let me look through Her eyes, and though my second sight is taken back – I think – my eyes do not seem to work quite the same as they did…" (*Curse of Chalion* 477). The act of dying grants Cazaril a reward in that he is temporarily made one with the divine spirit of a god, an indescribable euphoric experience. This sublime

experience is only possible at the moment of death, and thus, only temporary; Cazaril's movement from potential hero to actualized Hero was only fleeting.

And yet, moving past the moment where he "*becomes*" the hero, to use Broad's conception of becoming: "the sum total of the existent is continually augmented by becoming" (69). The continual re-affirmation of their position as hero leads to a moment where the identity of hero resonates through the character's being. Cazaril has been profoundly affected by his moment as Hero. But Cazaril's time as hero has passed, as he finds himself unable to express the divine experience that he had:

> "[…T]he demon bore the pair of them, but somehow my soul was attached, and followed… what I saw then… the goddess…" his voice faltered. "I don't know how to open my mouth and push out the universe in words. It won't fit. If I had all the words in all the languages in the world that ever were or will be, and spoke till the end of time, it still couldn't…" He was shivering, suddenly, his eyes blurred with tears.
>
> (*Curse of Chalion* 476)

Though Cazaril is unable to recapture the moment of connection with the divine, this does not mean that Cazaril is not fundamentally changed. The passage above illustrates that Cazaril is deeply affected by his experiences, and though his moment as Hero may be over, he is no longer the man that he once was. All the novels that I will examine for close reading in the rest of the thesis depict a hero that *becomes* something more, the *Hero*, but this moment is temporary, and the hero diminishes into something less than a Hero but greater than hero. Consider for example the discussion between Frodo and Sam at the end of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as Frodo departs Middle Earth:

> "Where are you going, Master?" cried Sam, [...]
>
> "To the Havens, Sam," said Frodo.

"And I can't come."

"No, Sam. Not yet anyway, not further than the Havens. Though you too were a Ring-bearer, if only for a little while. Your time may come." (*The Return of the King* 375)

Frodo's status as Hero, a fulfilled and actualized Hero that has carried through his destiny, indicates that he is something different from the rest of the Fellowship (protagonists) and Ring-bearers (heroes). Moreover, though his position as Hero was only fleeting, like the Hero of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, David Farland's *Runelords*, and Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* (texts that will be the focus of my subsequent chapters), Frodo indicates that he is unable to return and re-join the rest of humanity. While he is no longer Hero, he is also no longer what he once was.

In *The Curse of Chalion*, as the divine experience is only fleeting, Cazaril attempts to recapture the moment through poetry: "Oh, it is a great infection of poetry, a contagion of hymns. The gods delight in poets, you know. Songs and poetry, being of the same stuff as souls, can cross into their world almost unimpeded" (480). Just as Frye describes prophet and poet as one in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, the Hero as Poet is Carlyle's third phase of the hero. He argues:

Poet and Prophet differ greatly in our loose modern notions of them. In some old languages, again, the titles are synonymous; *Vates* means both Prophet and Poet: and indeed at all times, Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning. Fundamentally indeed they are still the same; in this most important respect especially, that they have penetrated both of them into the sacred myself of the universe [...] That divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, "The Divine Idea of the World." (Carlyle 80)

Like the Prophet, the Hero as Poet is god-inspired, as the Hero desires to cross back into the boundary of the gods. The god-touched Hero is momentarily able to see the world from the god's perspective, briefly being able to view Hawking's light cones and understanding the workings of the universe for an ephemeral moment. This knowledge leaves a mark on the Hero, even as they return to their own vantage point.

The epic hero, then, is similar to Bakhtin's description of the adventure hero of everyday life instead of the adventure hero of fate: "It becomes more active, it changes the hero himself and his fate. The series of adventures that the hero undergoes does not result in a simple affirmation of his identity, but rather in the construction of a new image of the hero, a man who is purified and reborn" (Bakhtin 117). Similar to the adventure hero of the everyday life, Cazaril is quite literally "purified and reborn." Cazaril can only glimpse the spirit world as he is dying. The path to fulfilling his destiny results in much pain and suffering to the hero, but this sacrifice leads the hero to a higher purpose that grants happiness. Like the mythological hero or the Tarot Hanged Man, this is the function of the epic fantasy hero: to sacrifice himself for a greater good.[17] There is an obvious Christian metaphor at work here, especially within the context of a hero sacrificing himself in death only to emerge purified and reborn. However, Attebery reminds us that:

> Tolkien himself believed that such an upward movement is inextricably
>
> connected with the fantastic; every complete fairy story, he said, that is,
>
> every fantasy with an intact structure, must have a final turn toward

---

[17] The Hanged Man card in the major arcana of the tarot depicts a man or woman hanging upside, suspended from a cross, wooden beam, tree, or gallows. The character is often only tied to the cross or tree with one foot, signifying that they are able to escape if they so desire. The character is not suffering, but is sacrificing or surrendering.

deliverance, for which he proposed the term "eucatastrophe" ("On Fairy
Stories" 68). For Tolkien, this term has religious implications, but non-
Christian writers such as Le Guin have made effective use of the same
structural principle. (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15)

Though the eucatastrophe may have Christian undertones, and while a Christian
interpretation may certainly be true of Bujold's text (the idea of the soul as vessel seems
to indicate that this is so), understanding the religious implications of fantasy does not
change the structure of the paradox of fate and free will in fantasy fictions, although it
may offer different nuances to the readings of variations between these structures across
the heroic epic fantasy genre.[18]

The hero of epic fantasy must make a choice when confronted by their fate: they
can accept it, reject it, or redefine the prophecy; this decision can be made actively or
passively, but the crucial thing is that they have an element of choice in how they react
to fate. Umegat had suggested that a saint (a hero) must be as an empty cup: "A saint is
not a virtuous soul, but an empty one. He – or she – freely gives the gift of their will to
their God. And in renouncing action, makes action possible" (*Curse of Chalion* 225).
Cazaril, in the final pages of the novel, echoes this sentiment:

---

[18] Again, like the political and cultural implications of the paradox of free will and fate embedded in
post-1990 American fantasy fiction, the religious implications and motivations of these texts/authors are
outside of the scope of this thesis. But the metaphor of the sword and chalice in the excerpt below evokes
several motifs: (1) the sword and the chalice may be symbols of Christianity, along with the Christian
fish; (2) they also all have connections to the Fisher King story; (3) the description of the shape of the
soul as a cup or a sword also brings to mind the tarot minor arcana, where the cups signify emotions and
feelings, and the suit of swords would represent action and change.

It has to do with the shape of your soul, not its worthiness. You have to make a cup of yourself, to receive that pouring out. You are a sword. You were always a sword. Like your mother and your daughter, too – steel spines run in the women of your family. I realize now why I never saw saints, before. The world does not crash upon their wills like waves upon a rock, or part around them like the wake of a ship. Instead they are supple, and swim through the world as silent as fishes. (500-501)

Though the hero of *The Curse of Chalion* has a shape of the cup, this does not signify that *all* heroes must be cups or containers. Indeed, Ista, whom Cazaril here describes as a "sword," is the main protagonist of the sequel, *Paladin of Souls*. In this book, Ista acts a porter for a god, carrying spirits across a doorway between the worlds through her own body as a portal: "*We are all, every living one of us, doorways between the two realms, that of matter that gives us birth, and that of spirit into which we are born in death*" (*Paladin of Souls* 397, original emphases). Unlike a cup, which contains and retains the (divine) spirit by being passive, Ista enables the fluidity and transmission of spirits from one border to the other by actively "cutting" through from one world to the other. Thus, just as tarot suggests, the swords are the shapes of active heroes, and in cups, passive ones. This idea of the hero "cutting" between worlds is one that I will return to again, as I will expand on the hero's function on a crosser between boundaries. Both *Curse of Chalion* and its sequel *Paladin of Souls* evoke the motif of fluidity again, Cazaril with the above metaphor of swimming and fishes, and Ista's imagery of the doorway, of a hero flowing through different borders. I will contrast this model of the hero in the next chapter with Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series, where, instead of allowing the workings of fate to flow *through* the hero as in Bujold's *Curse of*

*Chalion*, the heroes stand firm as a boulder in a stream, causing ripples in events *around*

them as they negotiate the demands of fate.

**Chapter 2 – The Hero as Reader: Heroes Shaping the World around them in**

**Robert Jordan's *The Great Hunt***

In the previous chapter I described how fate can be depicted as a path, with a hero following the road of a journey down possible forking paths or branches. But fate can also be described as a pattern, such as a repetitive cycle or a tapestry of interwoven events. Like the motif of fluidity, a motif of weaving patterns demonstrates an idea of "shapes," of the idea that the hero's "given nature" is determined by their shape in the tapestry of time. The idea of weaving can additionally convey the idea of perpetual weaving, that the tapestry is constantly being created around the shapes of these heroes. The tapestry and threads evokes the three Fates in Greek mythology, the Moirai. Clotho would spin the thread, Lachesis would measure the thread of the mortal's life, and Atropos would cut the thread at the moment of death. Together, they would impartially control the span of a mortal's life, but note that the Fates did not represent "destiny" in terms of actions or deeds in one's life. Instead the three would limit the threads of life from birth to death, distributing only enough life to a mortal that was allotted to them. While the moment of death may be pre-determined, the deeds of one's life are free, and thus a mortal is able to weave the tapestry of their life as they choose.

In this chapter, I will argue how the hero mediates the events around themselves and how this act of mediation is an important part of the structure of heroic epic fantasy. By making sense of the world around them, the hero comes to understand their part in destiny, and also, through the process of deciphering their prophecy for themselves, heroes can then determine how to act according to their own interpretation of events. Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series (1990-2012) is a good example of this process as the Hero, along with the greater cast of heroes and protagonists, struggles constantly with interpreting the world around them and acting accordingly. Although the series as

a whole demonstrate these ideas, for the purposes of close reading, I will mostly be utilizing *The Great Hunt* (1990), the second of Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, with wider reference to his entire series, as the second book presents multiple many-worlds conceptions of the universe as well depicting lives as cyclical (being reborn over and over again). In the novel, Rand al'Thor is described as the Hero of Destiny, the Dragon Reborn, but his companions, notably Perrin Aybara and Matrim Cauthon (Mat), are also described as heroes (in this case, the lower case hero). As the Dragon Reborn, Rand al'Thor is also the reincarnation of another hero, Lews Therin. In an attempt to defeat the Forsaken (the group of antagonists), Lews Therin accidentally corrupted the male half of magical power, so that all men who use the power turn mad:

> And the backblast of that sealing had tainted the male half of the True Source; and all the male Aes Sedai, those cursed wielders of the Power, went mad and broke the world, tore it apart like a pottery bowl smashed on rocks, ending the Age of Legends before they died, rotting while they still lived. (*The Great Hunt* xxi)

This corruption triggers the end of the Age of Legends, a time situated in a paradise-past, and while most information from this age is lost, prophecies of the coming of a saviour, the Dragon Reborn, arise instead. *The Wheel of Time* series follows the journey of Rand al'Thor as he comes to recognize himself as the hero of prophecy and determines the ways in which to interpret and confront his destiny.

These processes of interpretation are repeated throughout the fourteen book series, as not only Rand but all of the heroes and protagonists in the books struggle to determine how to make sense of their position in these destinies and in choosing which path to follow. I will examine these processes of interpretation in greater detail below, illustrating how layers of reading are built up in a heroic epic fantasy text. This chapter

will take three parts: first, the outline of the hero as a strange attractor, an element that attracts and mediates turbulence; next, the bulk of this chapter will be dedicated to examining how the hero functions as a reader, mediating the narrative to the external reader; last, I will conclude with an illustration of how the hero's identity is built up and constructed through a variety of confrontations with recursive structures in the text. All three sections should demonstrate how the hero is constructed by the text, and, reciprocally, how the hero constructs the text.

**The Hero as Strange Attractor**

Repetition and pattern is important and made overt in Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series – the series, after all, *is* entitled *The* Wheel *of Time*. Events are repeated again and again, and people might be reincarnated and live their life over and over. In the series, time is described as a tapestry with threads of individual lives weaved into it, in a pattern. Three of the main protagonists of the novel are *ta'veren*, which means that they are "centerpoints of the weaving" (*Great Hunt* 35):

> For a time, the Wheel will bend the Pattern around you three, whatever you do. And whatever you do is more likely to be chosen by the Wheel than by you. *Ta'veren* pull history along behind them and shape the Pattern just by being, but the Wheel weaves *ta'veren* on a tighter line than other men. Wherever you go and whatever you do, until the Wheel chooses otherwise. (35)

The character Loial's description of the Wheel of Time seems to reiterate Bakhtin's assertion from the previous chapter that: "character's actions in Greek romance are reduced to *enforced movement through space* […] his life may be completely passive – 'Fate' runs the game – he nevertheless *endures* the game fate plays" (Bakhtin 105,

original emphasis). However, Loial's conception that the heroes must endure the game that fate plays is simultaneously counterbalanced by the idea that ta'veren also "*shape the Pattern [of the Wheel of Time] just by being*" (*Great Hunt* 35, my emphasis). These ta'veren characters are able to draw people to them and trigger events simply through their passage through a space, not by any conscious choice or act. For instance, in the third novel, Rand's journey through a series of villages prompts a whole host of positive or negative events, such as everyone in one village getting married within a span of two days. This conception of ta'veren weaving events around them speaks to an idea introduced by Chrysippus, a Stoic philosopher:

> Chrysippus named the way the things are connected as "interweaving" or "interconnection" (ἐπιπλοκή). This interweaving is explained by him as "things following upon other things and being involved with other things (from eternity)." The idea of interconnection is found also in his etymological exegesis of "fate" (εἱμαρμένη) as "connecting cause of the things" […], which is reported also as a Stoic definition of fate. (Bobziene 70)

The movements of all things are connected or interwoven together. In Jordan's *The Great Hunt*, characters that are ta'veren seem to be the centerpoints of these connections.

Let us return to the idea I introduced in the previous chapter, that protagonists or heroes have certain shapes to them (like the cup in Bujold, or the cylinder in Stoic philosophy), and while they must abide by the shape of their design, they can determine of their own free will whether or not they want to move accordingly. As centerpoints of the wheel, ta'veren must move according to their circular shape, and are often pulled

along by the Wheel of Time, but, like spokes on the wheel, they also pull people and events around them as they move, as they connect or interweave these things together:

> "How many times have you said that *ta'veren* pull those around them like twigs in a whirlpool? Perhaps I was pulled, too." […]
>
> "*Ta'veren*," Moiraine sighed. "Perhaps it was that. Rather than guiding a chip floating down a stream, I am trying to guide a log through rapids. Every time I push at it, it pushes at me, and the log grows larger the farther we go. (*Great Hunt* 325, original emphasis)

Whereas in Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*, the novel privileged flux and fluidity in the hero, it appears that in Jordan's *The Great Hunt*, the hero must stand firm and rigid against the workings of fate and events in the world. What is more, the rigidity of the protagonist pulls along people and events around themselves.

This idea that *ta'veren* are figures that draw people and events to them is remarkably similar to the description of strange attractors in chaos theory. In *In the Wake of Chaos* (1993), Stephen H. Kellert specifies that chaos theory "is *the qualitative study of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic nonlinear dynamical systems*" (2, original emphasis). Chaos theory offers a study of *patterned* behaviour that is *not predictable*. This model is one that I will return to again, especially in the last chapter, as it is a perfect model to read epic fantasy fiction – while epic fantasy has patterns and is repetitive, that does not necessarily indicate that it is predictable.[19] A common example of this repetitive pattern is the Butterfly Effect, which is, as James Gleick describes in *Chaos* (1987): "systems that almost repeated themselves but never quite

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[19] Here, I specific "epic fantasy" rather than "heroic epic fantasy" as a chaos governed by a sense of order would indicate that there may be a divine order to the world, and a divinity (or a metaphysical presence) which *orders* the world is necessary to my definition of the epic.

succeeded" (22). The same idea applies to turbulence (figure 2.1 taken from Kellert 6) – you have a flow in a stream, but something causes turbulence in this flow which creates eddies.
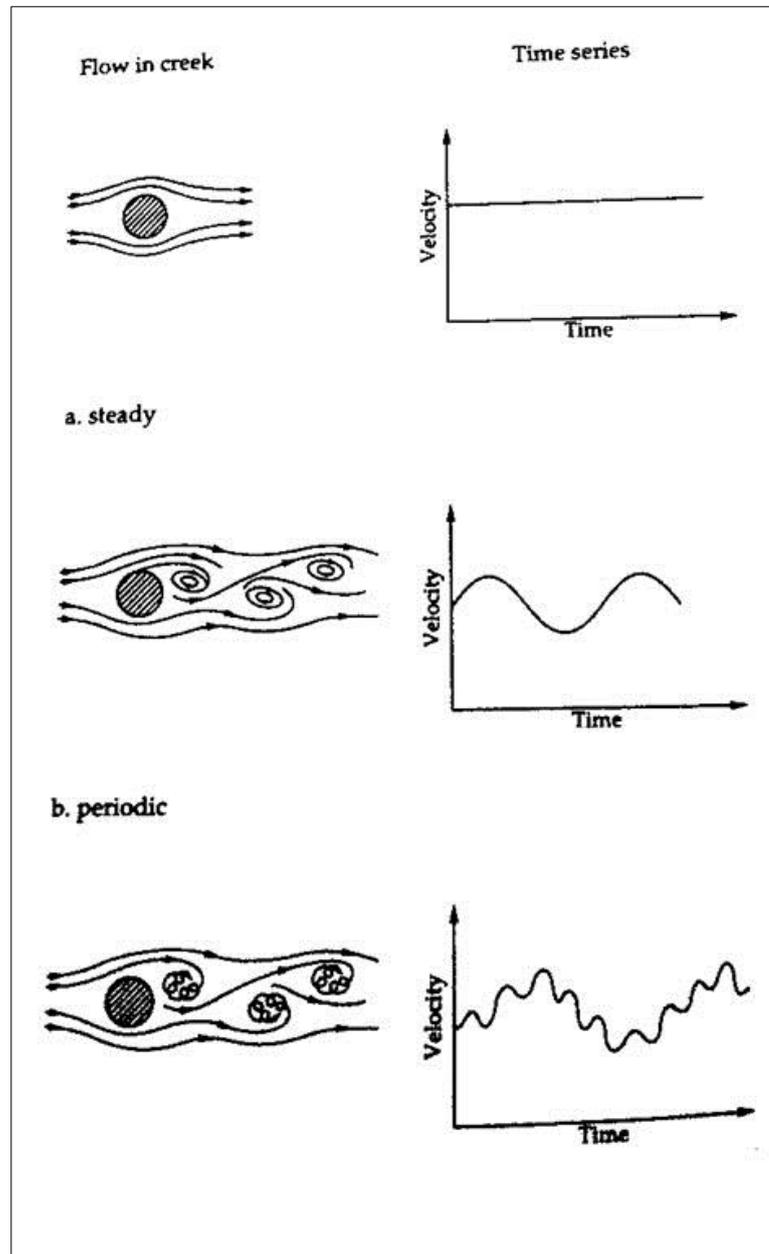


**FIGURE 2.1: FROM FLOW TO TURBULENCE DUE TO STRANGE ATTRACTORS.**

Gleick describes turbulence as such: "It is a mess of disorder at all scales, small eddies within large ones. It is unstable. It is highly dissipative, meaning that turbulence drains energy and creates drag. It is motion toward random. But how does flow change from smooth to turbulent?" (122). What is it that causes turbulence, that changes a calm flow

to a chaotic one? The scientists who study turbulence answered this question with a "strange attractor," which is something that "attracts" eddies towards its centre. Gleick describes this process with a simple example of a magnet:

> This central fixed point "attracts" the orbits. Instead of looping around forever, they spiral inward. The friction dissipates the system's energy, and in phase space, the dissipation shows itself as a pull toward the center, from the outer regions of high energy to the inner regions of low energy. The attractor – the simplest kind possible – is like a pinpoint magnet embedded in a rubber sheet. (134)

Compare this definition of strange attractors to the description of ta'veren in *The Great Hunt*: "*ta'veren* pull those around them like twigs in a whirlpool" (273) – the simile evokes the idea that ta'veren are strange attractors in a turbulent flow. As Gleick describes, "Flow was shape plus change, motion plus form" (195). This is also the model of the hero, flowing through boundaries through the shape of the hero, causing change through form.

What is the significance and implications of the ta'veren, especially in its connection to strange attractors? As Ilya Prigogine and Isabella Stengers describe in *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (1984): "it has long been known that once a certain flow rate of flux has been reached, turbulence may occur in a fluid" (141). As flow rate increases, reaching a certain point of flux, turbulence occurs. Prigogine and Stengers express how: "For a long time turbulence was identified with disorder or noise. Today we know that this is not the case. Indeed, while turbulent motion appears as irregular or chaotic on the macroscopic scale, it is, on the contrary, highly organized on the microscopic scale" (141). Turbulent motion, while appearing chaotic, is highly organized. What does that mean in a work of fantasy fiction? In John

Clute's four iterations of fantasy, which I will describe further in the fourth chapter, the second iteration is that of thinning: "the diminution of the old ways; amnesia of the hero and of the king; failure of the harvest; a literal drying up of the Land; and *cacophony*: the diversion of story into useless noise, dynastic quarrels, battle after battle, trilogies in twelve parts" ("Fantastika in the World Storm" 26, original emphasis). While Clute uses "cacophony" (a metaphor of sound) it suggests a disorder, or a different kind of turbulence.

Due to this "thinning," of the increase of turbulence and cacophony in fantasyland, the strange attractor takes on the property of adding stability to the system. The shape of the ta'veren, as I suggested, is the shape of the centre of the spokes of a wheel, "centerpoints of weaving" (*Great Hunt* 35). While the wheel of time influences heroes such as Rand, Rand also influences the movement of the wheel. Although Rand is determined by his nature and shape of a strange attractor, he is free to act and move as he wishes. His role as hero, as a strange attractor, is to draw motion and events to him. Gleick describes the properties of a strange attractor as follows: "By definition, attractors had the important property of stability – in a real system, where moving parts are subjects to bumps and jiggles from real-world noise, motion tends to return to the attractor" (138). This is the way in which the ta'veren heroes in *The Great Hunt* operates, attracting turbulence, while simultaneously weaving a pattern of order around them as motion returns to the attractor.

While I have chosen Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series to exemplify the hero as strange attractor, as Jordan's conception of ta'veren is exceptionally similar to the model of the strange attractor, this does not exclude other heroic texts from demonstrating the same model, although the comparison may be more implicit in many cases. The model of hero as strange attractor explains why the hero is constantly drawn

to action and danger – or vice versa. For instance, why *is* J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter the one who stumbles across a nefarious plot year after year? Of course, the obvious practical answer to this is that, as the hero of the story, the writer will create events around the hero instead of a background character. But, as my thesis argues that scientific models are not only embedded in the structure of heroic epic fantasy but have a structural function in the text, there is a greater significance to examining the construction of a hero as a strange attractor. The strange attractor helps to model the idea that the hero *mediates, attracts, and induces events around themselves*. I will expand on this premise in the following chapters, describing how, as Prigogine and Stengers argue: "Particles separated by macroscopic distances become linked. Local events have repercussions throughout the whole system" (180). In the following chapters, I will discuss how the actions of the hero, the strange attractor, has repercussions on the whole fabric of the universe.

But first, I will describe and argue that the hero becomes a focalization through which the events of the narrative are filtered, and that this focalization is apparent through the metafictional structures and recursive patterns of the text. I will outline the more apparent recursive structures as they occur in *The Great Hunt*, and evaluate in what way the repetitive pattern adds to the layers of meaning built in the text. In *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (1990), a critical examination of the comparison between chaos theory and literary developments, N. Katherine Hayles describes that:

> An essential component of this approach [chaos theory] is a shift in focus from the individual unit to *recursive symmetries between scale levels*. For example, turbulent flow can be modeled as small swirls within larger swirls, nested in turn within still larger swirls. Rather than

trying to follow an individual molecule, as one might for laminar flows,

this approach models turbulence through symmetries that are replicated

over many scale levels. (13, original emphasis)

Throughout this chapter, I will describe and identify several examples of "symmetries that are replicated over many scale levels." There is a recursive structure in *The Great Hunt*, demonstrated by a presentation of mirror worlds, the repetition of cycles of lives, and interactions with a dreamscape (all of which I will expand and clarify below). There are also levels of symmetries between layers of readings which occur in meta-fictional reading, with characters recognizing themselves as both reader and character. As chaos theory expresses an idea of "recursive symmetries between scale levels" through turbulence, if we are to take the metaphor of the hero function as strange attractor further, we can make a connection between the hero's interaction with other characters and within the text itself, as "modeled as small swirls within larger swirls, nested in turn within still larger swirls." The hero as strange attractor attracts, and is representative, of the larger patterns of turmoil in the narrative of fantasyland.

As I discussed in the introductory chapter, Hayles makes a connection between recursive structures and repetitions to the idea of deconstructing a text in a meta-fictional or intertextual manner:

Far from being ordered sets of words bounded by book covers, they are reservoirs of chaos. Derrida initiates us into this moment in *Grammatology* through his concept of iteration. Any word, he argues, acquires a slightly different meaning each time it appears in a new context. Moreover, the boundary between text and context is not fixed. Infinite contexts invade and permeate the text, regardless of chronology or authorial intention. (180-181)

Each repetitive pattern is an iteration that "acquires a slightly different meaning" with each repetition. Attebery asserts something similar in *Strategies of Fantasy*: "Each parallel movement effectively rewrites those that went before. Each prepares the way for those yet to come" (59). This is the model in which I will examine recursive structures in *The Great Hunt*, as an iteration that builds on the layers of meaning that has come before it, creating a resonance by adding to the construction of identity and interpretation of the text.

**Negotiating the Hero as Reader**

The layers of meaning built from iterations also incorporate metafictional readings, developing the genre with what has come before it. As I specified in the introductory chapter, I indicated that this thesis will reveal and investigate Brian Attebery's argument that: "One difference between fantasy and the genres of realism and naturalism is that fantasy typically displays and even celebrates its structure. If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the outside. This tendency is one reason that fantasies often take on a metafictional dimension" ("Structuralism" 83). Previously, I have not focused on that final sentence, that by overtly depicting structures, fantasy fiction encourages metafictional readings. I will now explore this idea, the metafictionality of fantasy, in this chapter. In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), Patricia Waugh explains that: "*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact" (2, original emphasis); "Metafiction may concern itself, then, with particular conventions of the novel to display the process of their construction" (4). Although Waugh indicates that a deliberate style of metafictional writing gives way to a new form of the fantastic (that of magic realism), the qualities of "metafiction" can

also be applied to any text that is in some way conscious of its structure. This is especially true for the epic fantasy form, for the reason that, as Attebery indicates in *Stories about Stories: Fantasy & the Remaking of Myth* (2014): "the fantasist [the author of fantasy fiction] appropriates from, engages with, travesties, and reconstitutes the myth" (3). The heroic epic fantasy – consciously or unconsciously – engages with the body of work that has come before it, taking part in an intertextual mode of creation, so that the effect of mythic storytelling resonates with each repetition. The "intertextual space," as defined by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), is: "constituted whenever we recognize the relations among two or more texts, or between specific texts and larger categories such as genre, school, period" (56-57). For example, in the previous chapter, I described how the creation of the *Chalion* universe is narrated as follows: "But the eye cannot see itself, not even the Eye of the World-Soul. So the World-Soul split in two, that it might so perceive itself; and so the Father and the Mother came into being" (Bujold, *Paladin of Souls* 41). Interestingly, *The Eye of the World* is also the title of Jordan's first novel in the *Wheel of Time* series. The motifs of these creation myths appear to repeat themselves between authors and novels.

Previously, I briefly suggested that the self-recognition of the hero is especially pertinent; the self-recognition of the hero *as* a hero figure and their subsequent response to their purpose in life is the important thing in the makeup of the hero's character. Even if the response to the demands of fate is simply to recognize their purpose in life and choose to act or react accordingly, it is the recognition of their position and the subsequent response that is the crucial factor in the hero's function. This Recognition is also an essential feature of plot according to Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BC, Heath translation 1996). Aristotle indicates that plots are either Simple or Complex – Simple plots are where the resolution is achieved without a Reversal or Recognition, whereas

Complex Plots incorporate, at the very least, Recognition: "*Recognition*, as in fact the term indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge" (18, original emphasis). In those epic fantasies that contain overt prophecies, Recognition occurs through the process of the hero deciphering and comprehending the prophecy, as they unravel the mystery of their own destiny. This Recognition becomes an important part in how the hero may fulfil their potential as the Hero of the journey.

When Recognition occurs for the protagonist when they decode and deconstruct the narrative (or their purpose in the story), the reader also engages in a similar process. In *S/Z* (1970, translated 1975), Roland Barthes presents five codes to reading, writing, and interpreting text; the first code is the hermeneutic code: "by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed (these terms will not always occur, they will often be repeated; they will not appear in any fixed order)" (19). In the heroic epic fantasy, the hermeneutic code is most apparent via the structure of prophecy – how the hero(s) come to identify a prophecy, and the process through which they interpret and re-interpret the words, until a meaning is finally generated. Conversely, in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) Mendlesohn proposes that: "perseverance is defined in part by the ability to stay on the straight and narrow path, to follow the words of prophecy and the delivered interpretation – in effect, for the hero to maintain his own position-as-reader" (15). As I have argued in chapter one, the hero does not need to "stay on the straight and narrow [and] follow the words of prophecy and the delivered interpretation," but the hero *does* operate as reader, generating their own interpretation of the prophecy, rather than abiding by the authoritative delivered interpretation of it. As I will expand at greater detail below, often the hero themselves is the one who correctly interprets the prophecy, identifying themselves as the hero of prophecy and determining what is entailed in that identification. While this process of

introspection and self-recognition might occur through the aid of several figures, another recurring motif in fantasy fiction with prophecy is that the hero must declare themselves as the prophesized hero before the prophecy could be fulfilled, but that many protagonists may have the potential to becoming the hero themselves. For example, in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008), three different people wrongly pronounce themselves as the hero of prophecy, before the fourth true hero deciphers the prophecy correctly and fulfils his role as Hero. In Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the prophecy originally allows for two heroes, Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom, to be the possible hero, before Voldemort marks Potter as the chosen hero.[20] In Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series, multiple heroes, "false dragons," arise and attempt to usurp the kingdom, before the true dragon declares himself.

While the process of self-recognition and declaration of the hero is an essential moment for the epic fantasy hero, Mendlesohn contends that the interpretative processes of the hero limit the reader's own interpretation of the narrative:

> [R]everie and self-contemplation, far from creating depth, break the sense of immersion in a society, and are fundamentally antithetical to either character development or an immersive structure. It is a false

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[20] Interestingly, in this case, it is the antagonist and not the protagonist that marks the hero as the child of prophecy, but Harry still must accept his role through a process of self-reflexivity. However, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the antagonist and protagonist are often shadows of each other, and this dualism is especially true in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. As can be seen in this example, many of the structures depicted in the "heroic epic" form are also true for the "localized hero" form, although they may be articulated in different ways.

mimesis that reminds us that we are in a narrated text and that *the protagonist's version must be true*. (10, original emphasis)

The protagonist (and here, I mean the point-of-view character) often presents their version of the narrative for the reader; however, as almost all of the heroic epic fantasy novels I examine in this thesis have multiple point-of-view characters, the "truth" is dissected from a multiplicity of story-telling. In Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, starting with the third book of the series, the Hero Rand al'Thor is less frequently a point-of-view character. Instead the narration is developed from numerous viewpoints from protagonists, heroes, and even antagonists. Usually the central Hero is the one that the reader relates to and trusts as authority, as, since the heroic epic fantasy follows *their* journey, it is their story – their understanding of events – that is privileged over others. But their narration of events is not "antithetical to [...] character development" (as I suggested in my first chapter, and will discuss further in the next), and as I will explain below, while the fantasy epic hero may "remind [...] us that we are in a narrated text," this is done so deliberately.

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn sets out to understand the construction of fantasy through the relationship between author and reader:

> I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief. [...] Intrinsic to my argument is that a fantasy succeeds when the literary techniques employed are most appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy. Understanding the broad brushstrokes of plot or the decoration of device is less fundamental to comprehending the genre; all of these may be tweaked

or subverted while still remaining firmly within the reader's expectation of the text. (xii)

Mendlesohn correctly asserts that the reader's expectation of the story is important to the construction and engagement with the fantasy text. As readers engage with a metafictional awareness of the development of the genre, the way in which the text adds to or subverts the expectations of the genre is an essential process of presenting the fantasy novel. However, Mendlesohn focuses her examination of "the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder," or on the rhetoric of the text that enables the reader to *accept* an impossible world. Mendlesohn identifies four methods in which the reader is made to accept the impossibility of fantasy fiction. It is the portal-quest fantasy – "a fantastic world entered through a portal" (xix) – that is of importance to this thesis, as it would be analogous to the heroic epic fantasy, and as *Rhetorics of Fantasy* is one of the most dominant texts in recent fantasy criticism, I will spend some time responding to it. Mendlesohn identifies that the rhetorics of the portal-quest fantasy: "require that we learn from a point of entry [...], the need to describe and explain remains a driving force behind the narrative and the language used. Most significant, the portal fantasy allows and relies upon both protagonist and reader gaining experience" (xix). Mendlesohn rightly suggests that the portal fantasy depends on the protagonist gaining experience, as the hero's journey towards growth and spiritual transcendence is an essential process of the heroic epic fantasy.

However, in the excerpt above from *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn indicates that "*the protagonist's version must be true*" (10, original emphasis), thereby *denying* the reader room for interpretation. This allegation, that the narrative technique of the text asserts such an authority on the reader that the reader must accept the narration as true, is made repeatedly:

The position of the reader in the quest and portal fantasy is one of companion-audience, tied to the protagonist, and dependent upon the protagonist for explanation and decoding […]. Although I hesitate to describe the position constructed in the portal-quest fantasy as infantilizing – some of the novels I shall discuss demand significant intellectual commitment – it is perhaps not coincidental that the classic portal tale is more common in children's fantasy than in that ostensibly written for the adult market. (1);

The portal fantasy […] denies the taken for granted and positions both protagonist and reader as naive. (2);

[T]he portal-quest fantasies are structured around reward and the straight and narrow path. The epic and the traveler's tale are closed narratives. Each demands that we accept the interpretation of the narrator, and the interpretive position of the hero. (5)

Mendlesohn's emphasis and reiteration that the portal-quest fantasy denies the reader any room for interpretation is problematic, especially on the assumption that this positions the reader as naïve or childish. As a counter, I will demonstrate that, while it is certainly true that the protagonist or hero fulfils an interpretive position in decoding the text, this is part of the structure of heroic epic fantasy for several significant reasons and, more importantly, the protagonist's mediation of the text does not necessitate the naivety of the external reader.

In fairness to Mendlesohn's work, the texts that she focuses on for her examination of "portal quest' fantasies may well present naïve narrative techniques.[21] I will use Terry Brook's *The Sword of Shannara* (1977) as an example of such techniques as Mendlesohn specifies:

> What she sees, we see, so that the world is unrolled to us in front of her eyes, and through her analysis of the scene. […] Terry Brooks's *The Sword of Shannara* (1977), a text to which I shall be referring frequently in this chapter because of the degree to which it is *the* generic quest fantasy, illustrates this point neatly. (8, original emphasis)

This is a curious statement, as Brooks's *Sword of Shanna* is a near mimicry of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and one would posit that it would be Tolkien not Brooks who is representative of *the* generic quest fantasy – and certainly Tolkien demonstrates more

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[21] The choice of texts Mendlesohn uses in *Rhetorics*, though extensive, especially in its scope, is not necessarily indicative of the state of contemporary fantasy fiction. In the introductory chapter of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn indicates that:

> This outside selection is particularly evident in chapter 1 (portal-quest fantasy) and chapter 3 (intrusion fantasy) where all the texts chosen came recommended by friends and members of the International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts online discussion list. A consequence is that some writers central to the field do not appear in this book: in each case the omission is entirely because my personal taste does not extend in their direction. (xvii)

Mendlesohn admits that she does not find the portal-quest fantasy appealing and that many of the texts have come recommended to her rather than being chosen due to familiarity with the genre. This may be why, as Paul Kincaid notes in his review of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, "Starting the Conversation" (2009), Mendlesohn: "includes many books published for children, perhaps fifty percent or more of the books that received extended attention" (266). As many of the texts Mendlesohn identifies *are* written for children, the claim that the genre is "infantilizing" may depend on her choice of texts.

"artistry" than Brooks. *The Sword of Shannara* is the first publication by Brooks, and although the novel and resultant series has been immensely popular, Brooks presents his narration in a style that many critics may caution against; in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) Wayne C. Booth affirms that:

> Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that "objective" or "impersonal" or "dramatic" modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. Sometimes, […] the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between "showing," which is artistic, and "telling," which is inartistic. (8)

This is the manner in which Brooks delivers his narrative style, in *describing* events rather than letting action and dialogue speak for itself. From this style of narration, it may be easy to see why Mendlesohn views both protagonist and reader as naïve. However, as Booth suggests, this narrative style of "showing" rather than "telling" comes about due to a changing attitude towards narrative techniques – at one point, "telling" was greatly preferred, and can still be employed in fruitful ways.

In any case, there are better-written and more recent examples that may illustrate the relationship between reader and narrator as less naïve. For instance, the first words of James Clemen's *Banned and Banished* series (1998-2002) stipulates: "First of all, the author is a liar" (*Wit'ch Fire* ix). These opening lines of Clemen's series are framed in a forward, "by Jir'rob Sordun, D.F.S., M. of A., directory of University Studies – U.D.B." (ix). This forward establishes a frame-narrative that is presented with an air of authority – the university and the letters following the author's name is indicative of that authority. While the reader may accept the authority of Jir'Rob Sordun as true, the

story can also be read and interpreted as a challenge to authority and hierarchy. Although Mendlesohn argues that excerpts from "the presentation of these extracts [from a fictional historian] is rarely placed against other, disputatious sources" (14), this is often not the case in the narratives of the post-1990 time period that I am focusing on. Additionally, frequently these frame-narratives, rather than closing the text, open up the text to multiple interpretations as the reader may not be sure whether to trust the authority of these excerpts. For example, *The Great Hunt* begins with the following excerpt, set outside of the narrative:

> *Yet one shall be born to face the Shadow, born once more as he was born before and shall be born again, time without end. The Dragon shall be Reborn, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth at his rebirth.* […]
>
> *- from The Karaethon Cycle:*
>
> *The Prophecies of the Dragon*
>
> as translated by Ellaine Marise'idin Alshinn,
>
> Chief Librarian at the Court of Arafel (*The Great Hunt* xi, original emphasis)

In this excerpt, the text accentuates that these prophecies are presented as a *translated* version, which would indicate some level of interpretation would have been involved with the translation process.

In *Stories about Stories* (2014), Attebery, who often demonstrates the belief of the importance of oral storytelling, proposes the exact opposite claim to Mendlesohn: "fantasy claims no authority nor exerts hegemony. It denies its own validity; the one characteristic shared by all fantasy narratives is their nonfactuality. [...] In that literal untruth is freedom to tell many symbolic truths without forcing a choice among them"

(4). In asserting that fantasy denies its own validity, Attebery's thesis in *Stories about Stories* is that fantasy fiction, like myth, builds up layers of meaning. In his earlier work, *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Attebery asserts that: "the postmodern fantastic, by adopting a playful stance toward narrative conventions, forces the reader to take an *active* part in establishing any coherence and closure within the text" (53, my emphasis). The reader must take on an active role of engaging with the text, as the metafictional narrative conventions (which are also present in the oral storytelling tradition of mythology) would undermine surface readings.

Conversely, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Mendlesohn argues that: "history or analysis is often provided by the storyteller who is drawn in the role of sage, magician, or guide. While this casting apparently opens up the text, in fact it seeks to close it down further by denying not only reader interpretation, but also that of the hero/protagonist" (7). Mendlesohn maintains that the figure of a storyteller – a character or device which presents the protagonist with information – is presented as irrefutable, for both reader and protagonist. However, this storyteller figure comes from the oral storytelling device, and consequently, a conscious oral storytelling form is embedded in the structure of the fantasy narrative itself. In oral storytelling, as Attebery suggests, in the creation process: "the storyteller gives up all rights to the shape and meaning of the stories, which thereby become timeless and anonymous, rather than personal and purposeful. They can become whatever the interpreter wants them to be" (*Stories about Stories* 16). This is the manner in which Clemens in the example above builds his narrative, presenting the authority of a frame narrative which cautions that the author is a liar, and then a *second* frame narrative which presents the story as an account by a character in the story who observes the events, but one who indicates his own biases towards the events of the story. As Clemens delivers an ambiguous unhappy ending to

the series, it is *up to the reader to judge for themselves* whether the protagonist fulfils her role as Hero properly, and whether the narrative is presented as "true."

Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008) provides another example of the ambiguity of fantasy texts. Throughout the trilogy, the protagonists discover that: "*the words of the prophecies are changing. The alterations are slight. Clever, even. A word here, a slight twist there. But the words on the pages are different from the ones in my memory*" (*The Well of Ascension*, 760, original emphases to indicate lines from a journal). While the protagonists discover that they cannot trust the printed word, the same message is made to the reader. In an account of an earlier (mis-)interpretation of the prophecies, the fictional author writes, "*It felt almost as if we constructed a hero to fit our prophecies, rather than allowing one to arise naturally*" (478, original emphasis). Again this caution, of an early interpreter of the prophecies to its implied reader (the character in the novel) to beware *constructing* a hero to fit the prophecy, is also made to the external reader. The careful, meticulous reader may be able to catch the discrepancies in the text, identifying the correct hero before the hero comes to their own self-revelation and delight in the knowledge that they caught the author at their own game. This deciphering may be aided if the external reader already has some familiarity with the structures of heroic epic fantasy, and thereby engages with a metatextual understanding of the work themselves. In contrast, the enthusiastic, heedless reader (as I am reluctant to use that word "naïve," let us use "the enthusiastic reader" in its place), while they may have been misled by the deliberate manipulations of the author, may still find an appeal in being caught out by the expected rules of the story. As Sanderson uses the expectations of formula to mislead both reader and character in deciphering the identity of the hero, once again, the reader still engages with a metatextual awareness of how the structures of heroic epic fantasy are developed.

As Cawelti in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976) argues:

> Audience find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience's past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work. (9)

The expectations provided by the reader's familiarity with prophecies and an author's manipulation of them not only provide satisfaction and enjoyment for the reader, but adds to the development and understanding of the form, so that the conventions of the form resonates with a reader who is already familiar with the heroic epic structure due to previous engagements with similar forms. Waugh identifies how this familiarity is also an essential process of metafiction: "There has be some level of familiarity. In metafiction it is precisely the *fulfilment* as well as the *non-fulfilment* of generic expectations that provides both familiarity and the starting point for innovation" (64, original emphasis). Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975, translated 1976) and Attebery in *Stories about Stories* suggests something similar: "The pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense. [...] the entire excitation takes refuge in the *hope* of seeing" (Barthes 10, original emphasis). If the fantasy author delivers the story as if it were a game, then they must do so artfully – satisfying the demands of the audience's expectations of their hope of seeing the expected ending, while simultaneously playing with the structure enough to surprise the reader, "taking indirect paths to the inevitable outcome" (*Stories about Stories* 97).

Heroic epic fantasy straddles that line between familiarity – articulated through patterns and motifs that one comes to expect with the genre – and distance – a character or narrator must mediate and interpret the fantastical world to the external reader. In

*History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic* (1982), Page Dubois argues that in the epic tradition, from Homer to Spenser:

> The hero mediates the audience's relationship to these histories. The trajectory of his individual life brings these representations into existence. It is his presence before them – as legends recounted, as dreams or visions, as works of art – that bring them to his audience. His consciousness awakens these versions of history, and therefore his understanding of them tempers, qualifies, and enriches his audience's understanding of their own history. (3-4)

While Mendlesohn is critical toward the notion of the protagonist mediating the narration to the reader, Dubois here emphasizes the importance of the epic hero mediating the story to the listener or reader. As Bakhtin proposes in *The Dialogic Imagination*: "the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance" (14). As Bakhtin establishes, the epic, like the fantastic mode, is a world distant from the reader's own. Accordingly, the mediation of the hero is a long standing tradition arising from the epic, the hero needs to function as reader in order to translate the world to its audience. This process is similar to the narrator-reader interaction in a metafictional reading. In the introduction to *Metafiction* (1995), Currie uses the example of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a marginal metafictional case, where "Marlow is a dramatised narrator, a kind of surrogate reader trying, as protagonist of the narrated journey to make sense of events and to interpret its significance in a manner analogous to that of external reader" (4). The protagonist does not exert their interpretation on the external reader, but the protagonist still functions as reader by trying to make sense of the events around them. Regardless of whether the reader accepts the narration as true or questions the authority

of it, the reader must at least, to some degree, depend on a narrator or protagonist to mediate a version of events that can be trusted.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy may have been released too late to feature heavily in Mendlesohn's 2008 publication (especially as many American fantasy novels are published much later in England). And of course it is possible that these works I am identifying are the marginal, exceptional cases of heroic epic fantasy, and that most works *do* in fact posit the reader as naïve. However Mendlesohn also includes Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series in her examples of portal-quest fantasies.[22] The appealing and fascinating part of *The Wheel of Time* is as the series continues it becomes harder to identify which character can be trusted: not only is there a fragmented narration resulting from focalizations from numerous multiple characters relating their version of an event according to their own agenda, but even the Hero (*especially* the Hero), becomes unreliable, as those male Aes Sedai (magic users) are doomed to become mad through using their magical powers. Indeed, in the fourth book, Rand starts hearing voices in his head. This voice is suspected to be an earlier incarnation of himself, Lews Therin, who, despite being an earlier incarnation, is presented as a separate entity from Rand. Accordingly, Rand starts engaging this voice in conversation. These dialogues are often paired with the

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[22] It is pertinent to note that aside from the long-running *Wheel of Time* series and a brief mention of Peter David's *Sir Apropos of Nothing* (2001) later in the chapter, no recent texts (that is, in the last decade of her publication) are included for examination in the chapter on portal-quest. Although it must be observed that the final three novels of the fourteen-book series (written by Brandon Sanderson after the death of Jordan using extensive notes left by the author) had not yet been produced at the time of Mendlesohn's publication, the unreliable protagonist begins to emerge in the fourth book and is well established before the release of these final books.

questioning of whether the voice is real or whether Rand is mad: "*You* are *real, aren't you?* he wondered. There was no answer. *Lews Therin*? [...] He was not mad; the voice was real, not imagination. Not madness. A sudden desire to laugh did not help" (*A Crown of Swords* 365, original emphasis). At times this incarnation takes over and subsumes Rand's personality, so that the reader is never sure whether it is Rand acting or Lews Therin![23]

From these three brief examples I hope to encourage the idea that there are multiple and various dialogics between reader and author and that the heroic epic narrative does not present a single rhetorical style. As the genre *is* a "heroic epic," the focalization of the hero on their journey is the heart of the narrative. But the hero's mediation of the text does not posit the naivety of the external reader. In Clemens' *Banned and the Banishes* series, the reader must negotiate several layers of frame narratives, all of which contradict each other. In Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy, the reader is warned that the words of written text is suspect and fallible, as they are open to manipulation by other characters. In Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, the focalization is split through various characters; the narration *rarely* follows the central Hero, and when it does, his authority is questioned due to madness. These examples should make clear that while Mendlesohn's portal-quest fantasy must be mediated, through the very fact that we (the external reader alongside the characters in the story) are entering an unfamiliar world, this does not indicate that there is only one style of rhetoric to mediate this world to both character and reader. Through repetition of these structural devices,

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[23] Although I must admit that these moments are presented with such repetitive language that occasionally the question of identity may become tedious for the reader, rather than disconcerting. But perhaps repetitive language is to be expected in a fourteen-book series, functioning in a manner similar to Homer's epithets.

when the meaning of the narrative is finally delivered, the uncovered meaning resonates to both reader and character. Such is the moment when the True Hero is revealed in Sanderson's moment, after a series of failed misidentifications. Such is the moment when the final page of Clemen's *Banned and the Banished* series reveals *why* the author is deemed a liar. And, as I will demonstrate through the repetitive structures of Jordan's *The Great Hunt*, each individual novel in a series will also build layers of repetitions so that the revelation of the final climatic moment resonates with both reader and character.

### *The Process of Constructing the Hero*

While Rand's madness brings into question his position as authority, as Hero, his madness is that point where Clute's second iteration of fantasy, that of thinning, reaches its peak. Rand's degeneration results in cacophony and chaos, his authoritative role is progressively questioned (both by the characters in the book and also by the external reader) until Rand reaches a point of unpredictability and instability. And yet, Rand as strange attractor, also has the property of stability: "By definition, attractors had the important property of stability – in a real system, where moving parts are subjects to bumps and jiggles from real-world noise, motion tends to return to the attractor" (Gleick 138). If Rand attracts and spins out turmoil and chaos, he also mediates these events through himself, in order to create something new. It is at the point that meaning collapses that he is able to construct a new interpretation of events, mediating an elucidation of fantasyland that was previously unclear or hidden.

This mediation is most apparent when the hero must interpret and decipher the words of prophecy. As I suggested above, the protagonist's interpretation of their own future is when the hero-as-reader becomes essential to the resolution of the story. For

instance, in Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series (1994-2013) the hero Richard Cypher names himself the "bringer of death" (*Stone of Tears* 280) and it is only later that he encounters a prophecy that is concerned with a man that names himself the "bringer of death." The original prophecy is written in a language that few people understand, and thus, translation problems occur with the text: "'But that doesn't take into account possible different meanings,' Richard said. 'So when they translate it, they give it only one version. They can't translate its ambiguity'" (768). It is significant that the hero is the one that uncovers the multiple meaning of the prophecy due to a translation error or problems with the interpretive process. Note the hero's last name, Cypher, embodies this idea of a code that needs to be decrypted. Another example can be taken from Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*, which presents a second protagonist, Lord dy Lutez, who attempts to fulfil the prophecy by having himself drowned and revived three times. But on the second attempt, he refuses to try again, and his accomplices accidentally murder him. "It had to be a willing sacrifice, you see; no struggling murder would have done it, but only a man stepping forth of his own volition, with eyes wide-open" (363). This incident indicates firstly, that Lutez's interpretation of the prophecy was wrong, and only the correct interpretation will lead to the path of fulfilling. Secondly, another facet to the hero-as-reader is that they have to "choose and choose and choose again, every day" (*Curse of Chalion* 395) to interpret their destiny in the manner that best fits him or her, whether this means to continue accepting the words of prophecy or not. As I argued in the previous chapter, the protagonist is faced with the decision to accept or reject their destiny of their own free will, but the decision they make, thereby recognizing themselves as a Hero and accepting or rejecting this destiny, is an essential process of the hero's journey.

A similar process of self-declaration occurs in Jordan's *Wheel of Time*:

> "Never more than one false Dragon in a generation since the Breaking, and now three loose in the world at one time, and three more in the past two years. The Pattern demands a Dragon because the Pattern weaves toward Tarmon Gai'don. [...]"
>
> "Neither of them is the one, Siuan. The Pattern does not demand *a* Dragon, but the one true Dragon. Until he proclaims himself, the Pattern will continue to throw up false Dragons, but after that there will be no others. If Logain or the other were the one, there would be no others."
>
> (*Great Hunt* 66, original emphasis)

Rand al'Thor is later revealed to be "the one true Dragon," but until he recognizes and declares this identity, the Pattern demands false Dragons to try to fill the position. False Dragons are those that declare themselves as the hero of prophecy. But, just as with Lutez in *Curse of Chalion*, only the correct interpretation of prophecy will lead to the path of satisfying it.

Once Rand accepts and declares himself as the Dragon Reborn, the process of introspection does not stop there. Rand must then determine how best to interpret the variety of prophecies available to him so as to make educated choices in order to fulfil his role as Hero:

> Rand had studied the Karaethon Prophecy. Unfortunately, teasing out its meaning was like trying to unite a hundred yards of tangle rope. [...] Taking the Sword That Cannot Be Touched was one of the first major prophecies that he has fulfilled. But was his taking of *Callandor* a meaningless sign, or was it a step? Everyone knew the prophecy, but few asked the question that should have been inevitable. Why? *Why* did

Rand have to take up the sword? Was it to be used in the Last Battle?

(*The Gathering Storm*, 730-731, original emphasis)

Rand's questioning and examination of the prophecies demonstrates two important things. Firstly, probing these texts positions Rand, the hero, as reader. He interprets the ambiguous words of prophecy just as an external reader would. Yet, due to Rand's madness the external reader does not need to accept the authority of his interpretation. As I indicated above, the Karaethon Prophecies are themselves a translation, which would indicate another layer of interpretation. Multiple characters throughout the fourteen book series also pose different interpretations of the prophecies. Each interpretation is slightly different from the other. Therefore, through repetition of this interpretative process, when the final meaning of prophecy is finally delivered, the uncovered meaning resonates to both reader and character.

Secondly, Rand's interpretation and questioning of his prophecies also suggests that he recognizes his place as a character or a figure in these prophetic texts: "'That's what I am,' Rand said. 'A Story. A legend. To be told to children years from now, spoken of in whispers'" (*The Gathering Storm*, 519). By reading and interpreting texts where they themselves are the focus of the material, the hero almost shows a meta-fictional awareness of themselves as character. In essence, *by interpreting the material written about themselves, the hero is attempting to construct their own identity by forming a narrative about a predicted future.* This process of identity construction is drawn out in multiple ways, and is an idea that I will return to again in the remainder of this chapter. Currie in *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998) contemplates that personal identity is a construction created outside of us, first, as a relational construct: "in the relations between a person and others" (25), and second, "because it exists only as a narrative. [...] the only way to explain who we are is to tell our own story, to select

key events which characterise us and organise them according to the formal principles of narrative" (25). It is this latter process of identity construction which I will be focusing on for the remainder of the chapter, as the heroes, and especially the Hero Rand al'Thor, come to understand and construct their own identity through the process of repeated confrontations with divergent narratives. This examination of emerging multiple narrative identities will fuse with Currie's argument that, "Above all, metafiction is committed to the idea of constructed meanings rather than representable essences" (15). As I will demonstrate with Jordan's *The Great Hunt*, these constructed meanings are brought about through repetitions.

**Reading Epic Fantasy as Ontological or Epistemological Fiction**

Three types of recursive structures of time occur in *The Great Hunt*. The first recursive structure occurs early in the novel, when Rand al'Thor along with two companions, Loial and Hurin, find themselves in an alternate world to their own. Loial, as a scholar and bibliophile, identifies the world as a "world that might be":

> "Worlds that might be? I don't understand, Loial."
>
> The Ogier shrugged massively, and uneasily. "Neither do I, Rand. Most of it sounded like this. 'If a woman goes left, or right, does Time's flow divide? Does the Wheel then weave two Patterns? A thousand, for each of her turnings? As many as the stars? Is one real, the others merely shadows and reflections?' (*The Great Hunt* 217)

The text explores the "many-worlds" theory and the idea of whether or not time divides or branches based on the choices any one person makes in life. As this thesis will demonstrate, Jordan is not the only epic fantasy writer to employ this technique. In James Clemen's *The Godslayer Chronicles* (2005-2006), the world was once one,

whole world, but then was Sundered or split into lower and higher dimensions: "All that was dark went down to the naether, while all that was light went up to the aether, forming the naethryn and aethryn" (*Shadowfall* 345). Similarly, in David Farland's *Runelords* series (1998-present), in the beginning of time there was one world, one true world, which then broke. But in Farland's series:

> *Our world is but a shadow of the One True World. You are but an imitation of the Bright Ones.*
>
> - *Excerpt from the* Creation Saga (*Wizardborn* 323, original emphasis)

Where the parallel worlds in Jordan's novels are shadows of the "real" world which the characters inhabit, in Farland's novels, the characters inhabit the "shadow" worlds.

The wording employed by the novels evokes Plato's Shadows on a Cave. In *The Republic* (380 BC; Lindsay translation, 1906) Plato describes a world where men kept prisoners in a cave see only the shadows thrown on the cave wall by the light of a fire and assume these shadows to be real objects:

> 'Then if they were able to talk with one another, do you not think that they would suppose what they saw to be the real things?' [...] 'Then most assuredly,' I said, 'the only truth that such men would conceive would be the shadows of those manufactured articles?' [...] 'What do you think he would say if he were told by someone that before he had been seeing mere foolish phantoms, [...]? And further, if each of the several figures passing by were pointed out to him, and he were asked to say what each was, do you not think that he would be perplexed, and would imagine that the things he had seen before were truer than those now pointed out to him?' (207-208)

Plato's conception of shadows on a cave indicates the impossibility of knowing what is real and what are shadows on the wall. The shadow worlds in Jordan's *Great Hunt* are initially presented similarly, with the characters questioning the reality of the world in which they find themselves:

> I've been thinking on it, and I believe I know what "the worlds that might be" are. Maybe I do. Worlds our world might have been if things had happened differently. Maybe that's why it is all so . . . washed-out looking. Because it's an "if," a "maybe." Just a shadow of the real world. (*Great Hunt* 249)

These worlds are not actualized, as they are shadows of the real one, and thus places and objects lack corporeality: "The water was cool and wet, but that was the best that could be said for it. It tasted flat, as if it had been boiled. Loial made a face, and the horses did not like it either, shaking their heads and drinking reluctantly" (235). The real world, then, is similar to Plato's Theory of Forms. That is, the world the characters inhabit hold the "real" object, the essence of that object's being, and the objects in the alternate worlds are merely shadows cast by that object:

> Those worlds truly are mirrors in a way, especially the ones where there are no people. Some of them reflect only great events in the true world, but some have a shadow of that reflection even before the event occurs. The passage of the Horn of Valere would certainly be a great event. Reflections of what will be are fainter than reflections of what is or what was. (*Great Hunt* 269)

These mirror worlds are not only created by events dividing time, but also cast reflections based on possible events that are yet to occur. These "future" events are

fainter than the "past" ones, suggesting that these future events are not as "real" as past ones, as their possibilities have not yet manifested.

However, though the alternate worlds are mere shadow worlds, it is still possible for "real" things to occur in them, for actions to have physical effects on objects and people:

> It seems real in memory, and some have come out bearing the actual wounds of hurts taken inside. Others have been cut to the bone inside, and come back without a mark. It is all of it different every time for every woman who goes in. The ancients said there were many worlds. Perhaps this *ter'angreal* takes you to them. […] But remember, whether what happens is real or not, the danger is as real as a knife plunging into your heart.[24] (342-343, original emphasis)

The mirror worlds, while shadow and less substantial than the "real" world, can still impose tangible effects. This phenomenon is similar to cyberworlds. Though dream worlds or alternate realities create a simulation where one experiences a feeling of realness in an unreal world, the continuation of experiencing a physical sensation when one "awakens" continues to blur the line between the real and unreal. There are *degrees* of reality to these mirror worlds. But the degree to which these mirror worlds are real seem to be connected to the likelihood of events in the time-space continuum:

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[24] While Rand and his companions travel through the mirror worlds at the beginning and end of the novel, another protagonist is entering an alternate world through a magical object called a *ter'angreal*. At this point in the text, the narration simply implies that the strange plane of reality that she is entering is akin to the "mirror word" through the similarities between the worlds, but it is not established whether these worlds are the same.

> Those worlds – this one, all the others – are reflections of the real world,
> she says. This one seems pale to us because it is a weak reflection, a
> world that had little chance of ever being. Others are almost as likely as
> ours. Those are as solid as our world, and have people. The same people,
> she says, Rand. Imagine it! You could go to one of them and meet
> yourself. The Pattern has infinite variation, she says, and every variation
> that can be, will be. (258)

Thus, Jordan presents time as mirrors or reflections of the "real world", as branching paths in space-time, that are less "real", but are still accessible.

In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale notes that: "Science fiction, by staging 'close encounters' between different worlds, placing them in confrontation, foregrounds their respective structures and the disparities between them" (60). Like in SF, the shadow or mirror worlds in Jordan's *Great Hunt* can be seen as an example of this, of foregrounding structures and disparities through encountering different worlds. But here, instead of different planets (as would occur in SF), Jordan presents alternate real worlds. McHale suggests that: "Among the oldest of the classic ontological themes in poetics is that of the *otherness* of the fictional world, its separation from the real world of experience" (27, original emphasis). *The Great Hunt* also poses this ontological theme, drawing attention to the artificiality of the worlds, by making it uncanny, making it both strange and familiar, an idea which I will return to in the next chapter. McHale first postulates that the difference between modernist fiction and postmodernist fiction is that the former foregrounds epistemological questions, and the latter, ontological: "That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions […]: 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?'" (9). In contrast, postmodernist fictions foreground ontological

questions: "What is a world?; What kind of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10).

In *The Great Hunt*, these are the questions that the characters are faced with when they enter the mirror worlds. The mirror worlds with their fractured timelines pose these ontological questions of "what kind of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" (10). But the ontological questions that the genre poses are often paired with epistemological questions, as the question of the landscape and the world evokes epistemological questions of identity and meaning. Are the choices they make in the mirror world "real," in that, if the worlds are created by branching due to choices, do the worlds accurately represent an individual's identity? "How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?" (9). McHale notes that most critical approaches to the fantastic have been epistemological approaches, the most influential study being Todorov's (74), but this does not impede ontological critical approaches to fantasy. It should be briefly noted here that I am not identifying and categorizing contemporary heroic epic fantasy fiction as either modernist or postmodernist. Although the works I am examining in this thesis are post-1990, as Linda Hutcheon notes in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988): "postmodernism cannot simply be used as a synonym for the contemporary" (4). Conversely, those novels that may share some of the elements of postmodernism in earlier texts cannot be identified as such if they are not produced consciously as postmodern. Consequently, instead of identifying epic fantasy fiction as either postmodernist or modernist, I instead explore its nature as "ontological fiction" and "epistemological fiction." McHale notes that any text can have both epistemological and ontological questions: "push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. [...and vice versa...]

– the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible" (11). Heroic epic fantasy fiction demonstrates both epistemological and ontological questions, the decision to foreground one over the other dependent on the inclination of the author. The hero's evaluation of themselves and interpretation of their destinies highlights epistemological questions, whereas their understanding and comprehension of the world itself – an essential interrogation if they are to then "save the world" – emphasizes ontological questions.

*Threads in the Tapestry of Time: Repetitions Shaping Narrative*

While the mirror worlds in *The Great Hunt* lead to ontological questions, a second recursive structure provokes epistemological questions. When Rand attempts to travel to these shadow worlds again, he loses control of the spell and he and the group he is travelling with instead experience countless variations of their lives. They (re)-live their lives over and over again, but these lives are all different based on choices they have made. Yet the lives Rand experiences all share common elements. In one life, when Rand and his father Tam are murdered by Trollocs at the beginning of the first novel, at the end of his life, Rand hears "a voice whispered inside his head, *I have won again, Lews Therin. Flicker*" (*The Great Hunt* 528, original emphasis).[25] The "flicker" is a signal representing the move into the next world or life. McHale also uses the word "flicker" when discussing the oscillation between different ontological worlds:

> This is not a matter, in other words, of *choosing* between alternative
> states of affairs, but rather an ontological oscillation, a flickering effect,
> or, to use Ingarden's own metaphor, an effect of "iridescence" or

---

[25] Trollocs are creatures of the Shadow, that is, agents of the Dark Lord or Forsaken (the antagonists).

"opalescence." And "opalescence" is not restricted to single objects; entire *worlds* may flicker. (McHale 32, original emphasis)

These flickers become audible signals between the oscillating worlds, signifying "'close encounters' between different worlds, placing them in confrontation" (60).

McHale identifies how this recursive structure functions in ontological fiction:

Here recursive structure serves as a tool for exploring issues of narrative authority, reliability and unreliability, the circulation of knowledge, and so forth. [...] One such strategy, the simplest of all, involves *frequency*: interrupting the primary diegesis not once or twice but *often* with secondary, hypodiegetic worlds, representations within the representation. (113, original emphasis)

Jordan utilizes this technique throughout his novels, and especially from book to book within the series, as events often repeat themselves. McHale maintains that these recursive structures: "have the effect of interrupting and complicating the ontological 'horizon' of the fiction, multiplying its worlds, and *laying bare the process of world construction*" (112, my emphasis). This narrative style, with the frequent, *infinite* repetitions, brings attention to the deliberate fractured structuring of the world.

But, like the mirror worlds, the ontological questioning of these worlds is placed alongside epistemological questions of identity. Through these repetitive patterns, Rand re-lives different variations of his life. In one life, Rand is happily married to his childhood sweetheart and knows nothing of the outside world, but is ultimately still killed at the end of a happy life by Trollocs again:

It was one of those Trollocs that ran him through, before it loped howling for blood deeper into the Two Rivers. And as he lay on the bank

> of the Taren, watching the sky seem to grow dark at noon, breath coming
>
> ever slower, he heard a voice say, *I have won again, Lews Therin.*
>
> *Flicker.* (*Great Hunt* 529, original emphasis)

Again, the same pattern is repeated, with a voice whispering in Rand's head, "I have won again, Lews Therin," followed by a flicker. The repetitions of his life *resonate*, allowing the hero to confront a part of his own identity. As I identified above, identity "exists only as a narrative" (Currie, *Postmodernism* 25). As Currie continues in the introduction to *Metafiction* (1995), if "metafiction is committed to the idea of constructed meanings rather than representable essences" (Currie, "Introduction" 15), then these constructed meanings are brought about through constant repetitive confrontation with the self. Bertrand Russell similarly contends in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914): "What is apparently the same cause, if repeated, is modified by the mere fact of repetition, and cannot produce the same effect" (185). Witnessing these repetitions allows Rand to construct a narrative of his own life by confronting alternate narratives.

As the variation in lives are due to the choices an individual makes, witnessing these multiple lives leads the protagonists to question their identity, and ask themselves "How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" (McHale 9). How can the choices they make result in a creation of a different world? Through every mirror world he visits, Rand is forced to re-live his life over and over:

> He was a solider. He was a shepherd. He was a beggar, and a king. He
>
> was farmer, gleeman, sailor, carpenter. He was born, lived, and died an
>
> Aiel. He died mad, he died rotting, he died of sickness, accident, age.
>
> He was executed, and multitudes cheered his death. He proclaimed
>
> himself the Dragon Reborn and flung his banner across the sky; he ran

> from the Power and hid; he lived and died never knowing. […] And at
> the end of every life, as he lay dying, as he drew his final breath, a voice
> whispered in his ear. *I have won again, Lews Therin. Flicker flicker
> flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker
> flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker flicker
> flicker flicker flicker flicker.* (*Great Hunt* 531-532, original emphasis)

The constant repetition of the phrase "I have won again, Lews Therin" followed by the flicker – an almost audible and visible signal of transmitting between worlds – operates to disrupt the text. The narration is broken as it switches to the next time stream, and the reader might be disoriented, but this is done so deliberately. The hybridization of ontological and epistemological questions posed by the text through the repetitive structures demands a constant interpretation on behalf of the protagonist: "Does it surprise you that your life might go differently if you made different choices, or different things happened to you?" (*The Great Hunt* 533). Each life is different in a number of ways due to the choices made. By stacking these lives next to each other, so that differences and similarities between them become overt, Rand is able to re-affirm his own identity. Multiple lives become a process of textual comparison – a hermeneutics of identity.

Rand's identity – constructed through the choices he makes – resonates with each consequent repetition. By repeated confrontation with different worlds, the characters must self-reflect on their identity, as they must, first, question whether the events that occur in these different lives are possible as a function of their own actions, and then next, construct and declare their identity out of these narratives. The self-reflection of the central hero is always a moral dilemma, where the protagonist must struggle with the consequences of their actions. This battle is especially apparent when

the hero has some sort of magical ability that gives them a strength greater than humankind, leading to a moral dilemma in how best to utilize these powers. The element of fate offers a complexity to these ethical questions. Though Rand lives vastly different lives in all of these realities, they all end the same. Whenever he dies, he hears the voice of the antagonist, whispering in his ear, "I have won again, Lews Therin" (528).[26] Thus, the ways in which Rand al'Thor's lives end can presumably be read bleakly. At the end of each life, the antagonist whispers in his ear "I have won again, Lews Therin," but there is another interpretation of events, which Rand comprehends at the end of the novel. All lives must end. All people must die. Hence, sadness should not come from the fact that Rand lies dying at the end of each life path, because it is the *end* of that life, and there is no other possible way it could end *except* for dying. *What matters is the journey*, or how the characters lead each life, and that in each life, whether a beggar or a king, Rand stays true to the "Light," to the Creator and the spirit of goodness. Rand tells the antagonist: "I will never serve you, Father of Lies. In a thousand lives, I never have. I know that. I'm sure of it" (666). At the end of the novel, Rand denies The Dark Lord's words "I have won again," and proclaims that they are a lie. He realizes that in each repetition of his life, he chooses to never surrender to the antagonist, by *choosing death* instead. As I will explore in the next chapter, this act, of choosing death, is essential to the heroic function. Though the characters are free to interpret their destinies in any way they choose, the successful hero is one who willingly embraces their heroic function of death and sacrifice.

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[26] The forces of the antagonists, the Forsaken, identify Rand al'Thor as a reincarnation of Lews Therin, the man who was able to seal the Dark Lord and his Forsaken (his disciples) away from the world, but this act resulted in the corruption of power in male magic-casters, leading to their madness and death for those men who attempt to use the power.

Both the use of the mirror world and repeated lives results in a distortion that forces both character and reader to question the text. There is a third recursive structural pattern of distortion, the dreamscape, one which is important as it undermines the boundaries between the physical and metaphysical world and becomes more prominent as the series develops. Tolkien indicates in "On Fairy-Stories" (1947) that: "it is true that Dream is not unconnected with Faërie. In dreams strange powers of the mind may be unlocked" (14). Dreamscapes also offer a confusion and breakdown of reality, again similar to Plato's Shadows on the Cave. The distortion and consequent interpretation of events in the dreamscape is paired alongside a Todorovian hesitation as the characters then question the "realness" of the events. The character Egwene, for example, is able to foresee events in the future that warn of danger, but on her first few encounters with these premonitions she does not recognize them as premonitions, but only as dreams: "It sounded silly when she said it, but it had seemed so real. A nightmare for true, but real" (*Great Hunt* 180). Although the dream seems real to Egwene, her narration conveys the idea that she is trying to convince herself that is only a dream, rather than acknowledging the reality of the event. Like in many heroic epic fantasies, in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series a variety of recursive structures serve to both distort and re-affirm each character's sense of identity and *purpose* – clarifying for the character the choices they will make on their hero's journey.

## Chapter 3 – The Messianic Function of the Hero: The Fulcrum between the Hero and U-hero in David Farland's *Runelords*

Rhythm and recurrence is an important structural feature of not only heroic epic fiction, but the epic itself. Recall Northrop Frye's assertion in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957):

> The regular pulsating meter that traditionally distinguishes verse from prose tends to become the organizing rhythm in *epos* or extended oratorical forms. Meter is an aspect of recurrence, and the two words for recurrence, rhythm and pattern, show that recurrence is a structural principle of all art, whether temporal or spatial in its primary impact. (251)

Previously I have explored the importance of the rhythms and repetitions in the heroic pattern, indicating how the repetitions in the pattern function as iterations that build the structure of the story and lead the hero into fulfilling their role as hero. In this chapter I will explore how the heroic pattern can be found in another character, the antagonist or what I will refer to as the "u-hero," and also reciprocally, I will uncover patterns and rhythms of the u-hero in the hero character, demonstrating how both characters resonate with each other. Although "villain" is the traditional nomenclature used to refer to the fantasy hero's opposite, I have declined to use it in order to avoid the melodramatic tone conveyed by the term. The established terminology "anti-hero" is also inadequate for my purposes as the anti-hero usually indicates a *protagonist* with undesirable (unheroic) qualities, and *not* an antagonist who is revealed to be a *failed* hero. Thus I have decided to establish the terminology u-hero – the οὐ-hero or not-hero – to indicate the villain who demonstrates the potential to be hero. I will argue that, while the u-hero exhibits the failed potential to be hero, the hero in turn reveals the possibility of turning

into a u-hero themselves. Throughout this chapter I will assert firstly, that the similarities between hero and u-hero indicate the potential and possibility of the one to become the other; secondly, that the success of the hero or u-hero to fulfil this heroic function depends on their messianic status, which in turn is contingent on their position in the community and their association with death.

I will demonstrate this argument using David Farland's *Runelords*, particularly the third book in the series, *Wizardborn* (2001), and the third book of the sequel series, *The Wyrmling Horde* (2008), in order to demonstrate and dissolve the binary of good and evil. Farland in his incomplete *Runelords* series (eight books produced so far from 1998-2009, published in a two-part series) depicts an interesting relationship between antagonist and protagonist figures.[27] The central hero of the first series, Gaborn Val Orden, is identified early in the first book, *The Sum of All Men* (1998), as the man who will become the Earth King – a man crowned by the Earth itself to be its protector in a time of need.[28] Throughout the remainder of the first four book series Gaborn loses the powers bestowed to him by the Earth and his title as Earth King is called into question. Several antagonist characters challenge Gaborn's identity as Earth King: former ally King Anders declares himself to be the "real" Earth King and Gaborn's enemy Raj Ahten also has the potential to be a hero figure, as Raj Ahten is often greeted as a saviour rather than a conqueror as his army sweeps through Gaborn's kingdom. But Raj Ahten's potential as a hero is limited in the first series due to his association with the power of fire. Farland originally sets up a dichotomy between the wizardry powers of

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[27] The series is currently incomplete and a ninth book is expected to be published in the summer of 2016.

[28] Note that the first book is printed under various titles including *The Runelords*, and a combination of the two names – *The Runelords: The Sum of All Men*. In order to differentiate between the series title and the book title, I will be referring to the first book as *The Sum of All Men*.

earth, water, fire, and air (with wizards gaining magical abilities through service to one element), with the former two being associated with "goodness" and the latter two with "evil." Yet, in the sequel series (books five to nine), which begins with the story of Gaborn's son Fallion, Fallion becomes a wizard of fire magic, problematizing Farland's earlier conception that fire is associated with evil. As I will expand on through my examination of *Wizardborn* and *The Wyrmling Horde*, identifying the protagonist and antagonist in their respective roles is convoluted. This complication, however, reinforces the idea that I referred to in previous chapters, that the choices characters make following a period of introspection reaffirms and clarifies their identity as hero or u-hero. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I will examine the similarities between the journeys of the hero and the u-hero, demonstrating the potential for the one to be the other; in the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the reasons by which the hero and u-hero are differentiated in the way they react to the messianic function of hero.

**Parallel Journeys of the Hero and U-hero**

*Maintaining the Balance of Good and Evil*

Heroic epic fantasy fiction is often viewed in terms of binary relations, the plot motivated by the struggle between the forces of good and evil. In "Considering the Sense of 'Fantasy' or 'Fantastic Fiction': An Effusion" (2000), Darko Suvin identifies the basic premise of fantasy is that: "in the doctrinal Master Plot the forces of Good and Evil, working through natural as well as supernatural existents, must battle it out between a Fall and the Happy Ending" (223). While this binary is certainly present in heroic epic fantasy, defining the protagonist in terms of goodness is more complicated than the simple binary implies. In "Structuralism" (2012) Brian Attebery indicates that

binaries, particularly that of good versus evil or light versus dark, often function at different levels in mythology:

> Fantasy is often criticized for being too obvious in its oppositions. Light versus dark, good versus evil: such pairings seem glaringly evident, even simple-minded, [...] But Lévi-Strauss says, not so fast. There are different sorts of complexity. A myth is complex vertically, as it were, it lays out its pairings again and again, piling opposition upon opposition. (86-87)

Attebery here depicts the layers of binaries as a verticality – a verticality that transcends the binaries and builds the complexity of it. This idea, of "piling opposition upon opposition" is similar to his idea in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) where he discusses repetitions: "Each parallel movement effectively rewrites those that went before. Each prepares the way for those yet to come" (59). Here, the repetitions are built horizontally, as parallel movements, but the horizontal movement rewrites and changes the first iteration that has come before. In both cases, the repetition adds complexity to the original structure.

As such, the "binary" of good and evil is constantly evolving. In the essay "The Child and the Shadow" (1974; in revised edition of *The Language of the Night*, 1989), novelist Ursula K Le Guin emphasizes that:

> In the fairy tale, though there is no "right" and "wrong," there is a different standard, which is perhaps best called "appropriateness." Under no conditions can we say that it is morally right and ethically virtuous to push an old lady into a baking oven. But, under the conditions of fairy tale, in the language of the archetypes, we can say with perfect conviction that it may be *appropriate* to do so. (62, original emphasis)

Previously I discussed how the pious character is not one who does the ethically right thing or one who fulfils their own desires, but one who chooses the best possible action to do at the time. This can be seen as doing the *appropriate* action for the particular moment, just as Le Guin indicates that the fairy tale hero does not choose between what is right and wrong, but what is appropriate. Le Guin continues:

> Evil, then, appears in the fairy tale not as something diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol. Neither is greater than the other, nor can human reason and virtue separate one from the other and choose between them. The hero or heroine is the one who sees what is appropriate to be done, because he or she sees the *whole*, which is greater than either evil or good. (62, original emphasis)

As Le Guin reveals, the binary between good and evil is one which is not *opposite* to each other but is involved in a complicated relationship. This is not a relationship of good *versus* evil, but a relationship that sees the whole of good *and* evil and finds a balance between the two. Viewing the binary of good and evil as a *whole* is an important facet in describing the relationship and it is especially important for the hero to understand this view. Thus, in the *Runelords* series, the legendary Earth King Erden Geboren leaves a message to his successor in a private journal: "*No tree or plant can grow in daylight alone. Given only light, a seed will not germinate, roots will not take hold. It takes a balance of sunlight and shadow. Men, too, grow their deepest roots in the darkness*" (*Lair of Bones* 406, original emphasis indicating written text from a journal). The hero Erden Geboren, a hero that is treated as a legendary or mythological

figure within the text, cautions Gaborn that the hero must understand both light and darkness in order for progress to be made and creation to occur.
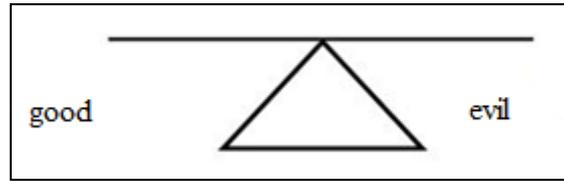


**FIGURE 3.1: THE BALANCE OF THE HERO AND THE WORLD.**

In essence, the hero must maintain a balance of good and evil, light and darkness, similar to a see-saw balanced upon a fulcrum (figure 3.1). Both the hero and u-hero can be described in this manner: as they attempt to maintain an equilibrium where they struggle to interpret themselves and their community, they journey toward a path that leads to greater good or greater evil. Prigogine and Stengers argue that: "Particles separated by macroscopic distances become linked. Local events have repercussions throughout the whole system" (180). The balance of figure 3.1 is not only representative of the balance within a single character, the protagonist or antagonist, but their actions and their effect on this balance is *also representative of the larger community as a whole*, describing the world that leans towards the side of goodness or evil. As Richard Mathews asserts in *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997): "Every minute of time represents a choice and thus a potential downfall or salvation that will affect not only the individual moral agent but also the delicate balance of good and evil in the world at large" (72). As a messiah figure, the choices that the hero makes in their journey not only determine their own path, but also influence the world at large.

This premise is articulated in *The Magic of Recluce* (1991) by L. E. Modesitt, Jr., where, instead of "good and evil," the language used is that of order and chaos. One of the theoretical or theological texts embedded in the book reads: "Order and chaos must balance, but as on a see-saw. The power of chaos is for great destruction in a confined area, for order by nature must be diffused over vaster realms" (378). As I will

expand further in the next chapter, many fantasy texts, like *The Magic of Recluce*, make explicit that fantasyland is governed by the need for balance. Throughout his journey outside of his home of Recluce, the hero Lerris comes to recognize that the power of order magic has become so focalized on the country of Recluce that it has created an unbalance in the rest of the world, increasing the powers of chaos magic throughout. Lerris can only bring balance to the system by literally holding a mirror up against the spells:

> The reflection of chaos as order would either order it or destroy it […] So I summoned up my own strength and began to create a sort of mirror around the fountain, a pattern like what I could sense, but ordered. I struggled to reflect the odd twists, turning them into a deeper harmony, substituting order for chaos, in equal shape and force. (383-384)

Although there is no clearly defined antagonist or u-hero in the novel, the hero must still bring a sense of balance into the world. He does so by creating a mirror – a process that involves understanding the pattern of chaos and then reflecting this pattern in order to destroy it. Just as I indicated in the previous chapter, the recursive pattern of mirroring is made explicit here. Accordingly, some sense of the good/evil balance (or, to use the language embedded in many fantasy narratives, chaos/order balance) must be present in the heroic epic fantasy structure, even if the balance is not articulated through a u-hero or antagonist. While the balance is most often represented through the hero's interaction with the u-hero, this relationship is not a formal requirement for the heroic epic fantasy structure.

When the balance *is* represented through a u-hero character, often, the identity of the u-hero is repeatedly deferred. Such is the case with the *Runelords* series, with the identity of the antagonist shifting into greater and greater entities as the fulcrum of

balance in the world becomes increasingly unstable. In the first book, Raj Ahten is presented as the antagonist but there is an underlying suggestion that a greater evil exists. After a conversation with the Earth, the hero Gaborn reconsiders the identity of the antagonist and mistakenly thinks that the Earth wishes him to destroy the reavers – an intelligent but monstrous animal race that often hunt and are hunted by the human race. This misconception continues until the third book, when a hero, Averan, discovers that she is an earth wizard, one who is meant to be the protector of the reavers. Thus, the identity of the antagonist is deferred once again when Averan informs the other heroes that the reaver army that marched on the people are mostly made up of peasants, and "only did it because their master told them" (*Wizardborn* 238) to do so. As Gaborn is a protector of the earth, that protection extends to all life on it, as the wizard Binnesman constantly reminds him that: "all life is precious. All must be revered" (381); this includes the lives of both his enemy Raj Ahten as well as the monstrous reavers. Consequently, if all life is precious to earth, then a "greater" enemy than either Raj Ahten or the reavers must exist, one that is *abnormal* to earth. While I will explore this idea, of an enemy abnormal to fantasyland, in great detail in the next chapter, it is important to note the constant deferment of identifying the antagonist indicating the constant teetering for balance. Note that Farland is not the only author who may defer the identity of the antagonist; many long series may set up multiple antagonists, building greater and greater ones as each is defeated, or, alternatively, revealing that a trusted companion is the antagonist or u-hero. In Farland's *Runelords* series, as is the case with many heroic epic fantasy series, the powers of the hero in the primary series are depicted as being so great that an even greater threat – a larger evil – must be created in order to unbalance the world again in the sequel. Just as the scale in figure 3.1 tips towards one possibility through the interaction of the hero and antagonist on the

environment, the balance of the hero and antagonist reflects the balance of the world at large.

*The Shape of the U-hero's Soul*

Through the struggle to maintain the equilibrium of good and evil within themselves and in the world, the hero and u-hero demonstrate the potential to be the other. As I suggested in previous chapters, there are other characters who demonstrate the possibility of becoming Heroes, but this heroic function is never fulfilled. In Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*, the character Lord dy Lutez attempts to fulfil the prophecy, but fails and dies in the attempt. A failed hero may come first, being a forerunner for the fulfilled Hero. In heroic epic fantasy a failed hero may emerge as the antagonist, as is the case with Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (Lord Ruler), James Clemens' *Shadowfall* (Chrism), David and Leigh Eddings' *Belgariad* series (Torak), Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series (Mazrim Taim), and of course, David Farland's *Runelords* series (Raj Ahten), to just name a few. As I will describe below, particular to the failed hero who becomes an antagonist or u-hero, these characters are unable to take part in the wider community – either because of transgressions made against the society, or as an attempt to set themselves up as greater than the community.

The identification of characters as good or evil in *Runelords* is complex due to the structuring of the universe. The worlds are fractured into numerous parts when the One True World divided, and so too are the souls of all the inhabitants fractured into a million selves. The creation saga embedded in the series tells of a time where:

> Once there was only one world, and one star, and beneath it grew the
> One True Tree.

"And One Rune bound them all together. But an enemy sought to change it, to take control. The enemy smashed the rune, and the pieces flew apart. […]

"Now there are a billion, billion worlds or more, each one spinning around its own sun. Each a broken piece of the One True World, each one more or less true in its own way." (*Wizardborn* 347)

The passage indicates the need to heal the fractured worlds together into one whole totality in order to regain an Edenic utopia, a utopia before a Fall – or breaking in this case. The theme of a One World breaking into a million shadow worlds is also echoed in other fantasy texts such as in Clemens' *Shadowfall* and Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series. This theme and the passage above suggest the importance of the unity of the world network.

This universe structure presented in the first series is expanded on and complicated in the second series as Gaborn's son Fallion heals the rift between two of the mirror worlds and joins them together. Accordingly, those people who are alive in both worlds have their spirits or souls joined, transforming into a hybrid being with memories of both of their lives. But a person who is dead on one world does not combine with its missing half and can only recollect the one life. Such is the case with Tuul Ra, who was Raj Ahten – an antagonist – on Gaborn's world. In the shadow world he is presented as a protagonist. But when the worlds combine the people realize what his shadow Raj Ahten had done on the world of the first series and decry his deeds:

"That was not the emir," Daylan argued […]. "It was but a shadow, a creature that this emir could have become."

"And yet," Thull-turock countered, "it seems that there is a pattern to things. In Indhopal, Raj Ahten was the most powerful lord of his time.

> In this world, the emir is much the same – a man with an unnatural talent
>
> for war."
>
> "And so you fear that he will become another Raj Ahten?"
>
> "I cannot help but see the potential," Thull-turock said. (*Wyrmling*
>
> *Horde* 147-148)

Note the emphasis on "pattern" and on this idea of repetition. The characters themselves identify the resonance between the two characters. Recall that heroes – and here I include u-heroes as potential heroes in the definition – have a shape that dictates some manner of destiny, but, to use the language of Stoic philosophy, it is up to their free will whether to move "in obedience to its given shape" (Colish 35). Like heroes, u-heroes also have some sort of destiny to their actions, "a pattern to things" (*Wyrmling Horde* 148), but we can see with the characters of Tuul Ra and Raj Ahten how they have moved in different ways and could have had the potential to be either protagonist or antagonist. Areth Sul Urstone, who was Gaborn in the first world, is also presented as a failed hero, as he never fully awakens to his Earth powers because his body is possessed by a demonic figure, Lord Despair, who manipulates the power for his own purposes.

These examples demonstrate that the antagonist has the potential to be a hero and vice versa; presented with the same choices as the hero, *they choose a different path*. In the first chapter I argued that by making the correct choice, the protagonist reaffirms that they are still demonstrating the potential to be the hero. In Stoic philosophy, this aspect of choice making – or free will – "is the sole source of evil" (Colish 35). Evil, then, is a human construct fuelled by free choice, instead of an ethically ingrained human nature. With Farland's *Runelords* series we can see how the world would have changed had the hero taken a different path, how the possibility of

the world's fulcrum of ethics (figure 3.1) could tip towards either the good or evil pole due to the choices made by the characters as they realize their heroic potential. Either antagonist or protagonist has the capability of being the hero as they both demonstrate similar abilities or markers (the "shape" of the hero), but this position as hero is reaffirmed through their choices, specifically, as I will assert below, in the choices they make towards or on behalf of their community and in their messianic function.

As both the hero and u-hero mirror each other, they must at some point take different trajectories from each other in order to arrive at different and opposing paths, a narrative fork in the road. In essence, they both traverse what can be termed a bifurcation point: "By stressing the methods of nonlinear dynamics, [...] a small change in one parameter – perhaps a change in timing or electric conductivity – could push an otherwise healthy system across a bifurcation point into a qualitatively new behavior" (Gleick 291). In narrative terms, stresses (events in a character's journey) can push a character across a bifurcation point where they emerge as either the hero or u-hero, depending on how that character responds to the stress (the choice they make in reaction to the event). This path can be depicted using a diagram from *Order out of Chaos* by Prigogine and Stengers (reprinted in figure 3.2 from 162) who suggest that: "at the bifurcation point *two* new stable solutions emerge. Thus a new question: Where will the system go when we reach the bifurcation point? We have here a "choice" between two possibilities" (161-162, original emphasis).[29] Similar to Prigogine and Stengers' graph to demonstrate bifurcation of chemical X, the hero and u-hero also mirror each other and demonstrate similarities in their shape, but the choices they make lead them

---

[29] Prigogine and Stengers link this bifurcation point to the emergence of a self-organizing system, but I will discuss this further in the last chapter.

to a bifurcation point where there is a "'choice' between two possibilities" which sets
them on different paths.
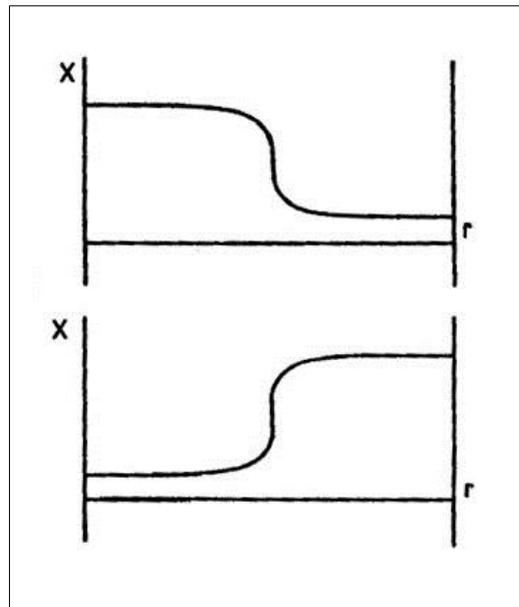


**FIGURE 3.2: BIFURCATION BETWEEN TWO POSSIBILITIES.**

Farland depicts this bifurcation through the binary character of Raj Ahten and
Tuul Ra. Tuul Ra's and Raj Ahten's initial sense of destiny comes about due to their
abilities as flameweavers or wizards of fire – this is the shape of their soul. But they
react to this innate skill in different ways:

> "Not all flameweavers are evil," Daylan said. "There are men who have
> mastered their passions to such a degree that Fire could not control them.
> In ancient times, some of these men were more than monsters. They
> became vessels of light, pure and radiant, filled with wisdom and
> intelligence and compassion. (*Wyrmling Horde* 150)

Daylan concludes the passage by identifying Fallion, the hero of the sequel series, as a
powerful flameweaver. Although the scope of Fallion's potential as hero is outside of
the scope of this thesis (largely because, at this time, the sequel series is incomplete and
it is not yet determined whether Fallion fails or succeeds in his role as hero), it is striking
that the hero of the sequel series has the same powers and abilities as the u-hero of the

previous series, indicating again that *possibility of reversal*, of either character having the capability to fulfil the role of hero or u-hero, but with the possibility only realized through the choices made. While the first *Runelords* series depicts flameweavers as evil, the hero of the sequel series also has the nature (the shape) of a flameweaver. Instead of embracing the path of destruction, a choice that may fulfil the "shape" of the flameweaver, Fallion's adopts the other aspect of fire's nature, of warmth, which will hopefully lead him down the path of fulfilling the role of hero and saving not only his world, but all the broken worlds of the *Runelords* universe.

*Identifying the U-hero through the Uncanny Other*

While either protagonist or antagonist has the potential to become a hero, past this bifurcation point there still exists the possibility of reversal, of the hero to become a failed hero, a u-hero. This is because, as I discussed in the first chapter, there are many branches along the hero's path where the hero must make a choice, whether they either reaffirm or reject their role as hero (figure 1.3). As the hero must confront this choice (bifurcation points) many times in order to constantly reaffirm their position as hero, the idea of temptation, of making the "wrong" choice and failing as hero, is important. Additionally, as the balance between good and evil must be maintained, the hero is not wholly "good" – they must also have aspects of the "evil" side within themselves, and thus a potential for failure exists. In his analysis of mythological heroes, Miller concludes that "evil" is inextricably tied to the hero figure:

> [E]vil is, as it were, "in the family": it must be conceived as the shadowy realm of the antagonist, who is himself heroic. There is, of course, the definition of evil as absolutely something else: an utterly alien, malign, or antihuman force or personification, some "thing" purely opposite and

Other to the human. But in fact the theme of most epics is heroic

opposition not to forces outside the human frame but, ideally, to *other*

superhuman images and forces, forces defined as heroic in their interior

nature. The hero fights his own – even himself, in a sense. The hero's

opponent may near or declare some *differentia* identified with the Other,

or even of evil, but usually he is simply the hero's mirror image. (322-

323, original emphasis)

While evil is presented to the hero as an Other in the form of the antagonist, the hero

may recognize this Other as a resonant form of themselves, a part of the hero's shadow

or mirror self.[30]

In the previous chapter I explored mirror worlds. Mirror worlds, by the very

nature of being *mirrors*, would also suggest the idea of doubling. As David Langford

notes in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), mirrors are often seen as magical devices

in fantasy and folklore:

A mirrored face is uncannily lifelike and can easily be imagined as

speaking autonomously; hence the talking magic mirror best known

from the Snow White tale […]. Mirrors can also work against magic.

They may reflect spells, […and] offer images *truer* than human

---

[30] A discussion on the many nuances of Other would further break down the binary of the good and evil

in the heroic epic fantasy. Fredric Jameson's critical analysis of Frye's description of romance in

"Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism" (1981) in which he comments on the

discourse on binaries by Derrida and Nietzsche is a good starting point. But as this discussion would

need to include a wider consideration of politics and power, it is outside the scope of this thesis. Instead

I will examine the Other as an uncanny doppelganger figure.

perception, and do not show unrealities like vampires or ghosts.

("Mirror" 651, my emphasis)

Mirrors blue the line between the real and unreal because, as Langford suggests, mirrors can, on one hand, reflect true events, and on the other, distort events as well. This, again, reflects Plato's shadows on the wall, where the shadows can reflect true events, but distort them simultaneously.

This reflective and simultaneous distortion process also occurs when the hero and u-hero confront each other. These mirror motifs demonstrate the potential for the hero to recognize the Self within the Other, an effect that creates an uncanny doubling as the hero is reluctant to acknowledge the similarities between their self and the u-hero. The uncanny, as Freud describes (1919, Mclintock translation 2003), is "something familiar ['homely', 'homey'] that has been repressed and then reappears" ("The Uncanny" 152, translator's annotations). This is the process that the hero undergoes when they come into contact with the u-hero. The hero and u-hero often embody doubles of each other, as they have the potential to be the other: "a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged" (142). The hero recognizes the u-hero as something familiar, but then this association is repressed.

A popular example occurs in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), where both Harry Potter and Voldemort have the ability to communicate with snakes. It is only later that the reader discovers that the reason the two characters share this ability is because Voldemort had inadvertently embedded fragments of his own soul within Potter. Similarly, in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1977), a heroic epic SF novel, the hero comes to understand that: "In the moment when I truly understand my enemy,

understand him well enough to defeat him, then in that very moment I also love him"
(238). The hero must come to comprehend and embrace his enemy. In the first
*Runelords* novel, Gaborn is made to take an oath to the Earth (the divine entity who the
hero will be in service to), who comes to him wearing the face of Raj Ahten. Earth tells
him:

> "You say you love the land. But would you honour your vows to me,
> even if I wore the face of an enemy?"
>
> […] "Someday you shall comprehend me, when your body mingles with
> mine. Do you fear that day?"
>
> Death. Earth wanted to know if he feared death. […] Raj Ahten. The
> thing looked so much like Raj Ahten. Gaborn knew what Earth desired
> of him. Something more than embracing life. Something more than
> serving man. To embrace death and decay and the totality that was Earth.
> (*The Sum of All Men* 153-154)

The scene is significant, as the Earth wishes for Gaborn to submit to it while wearing
the face of Gaborn's enemy, indicating the need for Gaborn to yield to his shadow
aspects in order to maintain the balance of Earth. This exchange also suggests first, a
foreshadowing in which Gaborn will have to embrace his enemy, and second, a
foreshadowing where the hero will have to confront a literal or metaphorical death.
When Gaborn is unable to embrace his enemies at the end of the second book
(*Brotherhood of the Wolf*, 1999), the Earth withdraws the power they had granted to
Gaborn, leading to his identity as Earth King being questioned throughout the following
book (*Wizardborn*).

By fully comprehending and embracing their enemy, the hero acknowledges the
u-hero as a shadow of themselves. For instance, in Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of*

*Earthsea* (1968), the hero Ged releases an unnamed shade from the underworld, and spends the rest of the novel pursuing this shade.[31] He ultimately defeats the shade, by recognizing the shadow as part of himself:

> And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark. (*Wizard of Earthsea* 199)

There are multiple usages of the word "shadow" within heroic epic fantasy, as there are many and various ways in which fantasy depicts the shadow as temptation for the hero. In the *Runelords* series, as the world is fractured into a million pieces, fractured worlds (including the one where the narrative takes place) are referred to as "shadow worlds" because they are mere shadows of the "One True World": "*Our world is but a shadow of the One True World. You are but an intimation of the Bright Ones*" (*Wizardborn* 323, original emphasis to indicate excerpt from the *Creation Saga*, a text within the text). Like the shadow worlds that I described in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, the imagery of shadows evokes the idea of Plato's shadows on the cave wall. There are people on these worlds that might be a reflection of themselves but they differ slightly: "We are all distorted reflections of something greater, of what we once were. […] We all yearn to return to the One True World. Some say that our spirits, our wights, are pieces of our true self, longing to return home" (*Wizardborn* 348). As in the example of *Wizard of Earthsea* above, there is a further play on words, where shadows suggest spirits of the

---

[31] I see Le Guin's *Earthsea* series as a nodal point between the epic and adventure genre. While each individual novel may be an adventure-fantasy, books one to three as a whole can be seen as an epic.

dead as well as the world of the dead, but also the shadow beings of a projected world. In *Runelords*, "shade" can also refer to the ghosts of men and women, the word suggesting that the spirit left on earth is simply a portion or part of the original human being. Like the mirror motifs, shadow expresses various qualities of distortion and fracturing.

Many of the texts in the post-1990 period that I examine are explicit in challenging the binary of good and evil, but this is not to say that the binary is dissolved in all fantasy texts or that it was not complicated in earlier examples of fantasy. Tolkien's foundational *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) sets a precedent where the group of heroes break apart because of the selfishness of the individual characters and their desire for power motivated through the ring. Furthermore, the sole character charged with the destruction of the ring, Frodo Baggins, progressively begins to take on the characteristics of a u-hero Gollum/Sméagol. The schism between Gollum and Sméagol itself also demonstrates the anxieties of labelling a character as wholly good or evil. While the examples I have chosen in this chapter depict the u-hero as an uncanny doppelganger to the hero, in some examples of heroic epic fantasy, the antagonist does not indicate any potential to be a hero, and the binary of good and evil is more rigid. Here, a doppelganger figure may still exist, but in the appearance of a *hero*. For instance, in Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory's *The Outstretched Shadow* (2003), the demon antagonist appears to the hero Kellen with the hero's own face and shape. This Other-Kellen tempts the hero with false promises, seducing him with ideas of glory. When the doppelganger is presented with the hero's face instead of in the form of a u-hero, refuting the doppelganger holds up the binary of good and evil rather than breaking it down.

The motif of tempting towards the shadow side is an important feature of the Hero's journey as the hero must have the potential to be tempted from their path. In *The Writer's Journey* (1992), a guide to writing fantasy fiction, Christopher Vogler describes the dramatic function of the Shadow as such:

> The function of the Shadow in drama is to challenge the hero and give her a worthy opponent in the struggle. [...] The challenging energy of the Shadow archetype can be expressed in a single character, but it may also be a mask worn at different times by any of the characters. Heroes themselves can manifest a Shadow side. When the protagonist is crippled by doubts or guilt, acts in self-destructive ways, [...] or becomes selfish rather than self-sacrificing, the Shadow has overtaken him. (84)

The hero's evaluation of himself as a hero is an essential process to the journey of the hero. There are moments where the hero may falter, tempted by the Shadow side and by the sense of selfishness brought on by extreme power, but the re-assertion of the hero's selflessness, through the motif of sacrifice, reasserts their positioning.

**The Horizontal and Vertical Hero: The Function of the Hero as Messiah**

The hero is identified through their function in a messianic role, first conveyed through their positioning in a community, and second realized through the moment of sacrifice by a willing confrontation with death or the space of death. Both qualities are contained in the description of the hero as a horizontal or vertical hero, which I have borrowed and expanded on from Richard Mathews. Mathews in *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997) depicts the hero as either a vertical hero or horizontal hero, using the hero's placement in the community (as evidenced through spiritual transcendence) to differentiate between the two:

The vertical hero seeks resolution by departing the world for heaven or hell. The horizontal hero struggles to know himself and to share himself in love with another, to affirm his tribe's rights, land, and values against encroachments of an enemy, and to assume, and later responsibly discard, the mantle of the supernatural, instead taking on a godlike prerogative for moral continuity. [...] He rejects the contrived supernatural force that would preserve his life, for it would at the same time separate him from his tribe and from his very identity as a man (90);

[The] "vertical" hero [is one] whose actions move upward or downward as he is propelled toward or away from absolute good or evil. (92)

The horizontal hero is one who has an identity as part of a community, and while the hero may take on a supernatural mantle, they later discard it in order to remain with the community. The vertical hero in contrast is one who traverses to the very upper and lower regions of the universe, towards absolute evil or good (and note here, that Mathews indicates the hero as one who may equally be guided toward absolute evil as well as good).

As I briefly discussed above with Attebery's commentary on binaries, the depiction of the vertical and horizontal hero in epic fantasy has a tradition in mythology. Miller indicates a bifurcation of the epic hero of mythology that is also dependent on their place in the community:

Our investigations into this hero cult seem to show what will become a familiar bifurcation in a central idea. One line expresses the heroic idea as we find it in Homer; the powerful image of the physically perfect young hero dying for fame and escaping maturation (and thus the "bad

death" of an impotent and ugly old age) [...]. Everything in this line is concentrated on the *agôn* of the essentially asocial individual. The second line integrates the cult of the dead hero into the new sociopolitical entity of the Greek city-state, or *polis*: he becomes guarantor and defender of that vital social unity. (4-5)

Miller indicates two types of heroes, one who is an asocial individual who dies young, the second who, after death, becomes part of the society and politics of the community through a cult or martyr image. Although Miller does not at this point use the language of horizontal and vertical heroes, it is evident that the idea of a narrative bifurcation resulting in a hero who is part of the community or out of it is well established in its antecedent of mythology before it reaches the fantasy genre. Later in *The Epic Hero*, Miller indicates that the horizontal hero originates from the dominion of the king with a hero as vassal ("The ideal zone for the *hero* extends outward and horizontally from that 'civilized' royal control point" (133, original emphasis)) and that the vertical hero comes about as an *assault* to the upper and lower regions (134). Like Mathews horizontal and vertical fantasy hero, the horizontal mythological hero is linked to community while the vertical hero is associated with metaphysical spaces (heaven and hell).

In *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, Mathews suggests that the horizontal hero and vertical hero are incompatible because the vertical hero departs the world while the horizontal hero rejects transcendence in order to stay with their community. Mathews connects the departure from the primary world, a movement through metaphysical space, with the vertical hero: "The one seeks a wholeness or synthesis of relationships in terms of *this world*, a *horizontal* continuity of community and history. The vertical hero seeks resolution by departing the world for heaven or

hell" (90, original emphasis). Using these parameters, Mathews identifies a fantasy hero as *either* horizontal *or* vertical, stating that the two are "radically different" (94). He presents the example of Tolkien's hero Frodo as one that is "essentially alone" (93) and thus a vertical hero. Yet he earlier contradicts himself:

> Tolkien understands the paradox of unity in division. Through the action of his tale, he characterizes the nature of any spiritual struggle as involving countless individual decisions and choices. Each isolated choice made by a member of the fellowship, because it is made for a principle larger than the self, can contribute ultimately to the triumph of a common cause. (73)

Mathews here identifies that, while Tolkien's characters are isolated, they function together as part of a larger whole. Tolkien's heroes, like many epic heroes, demonstrate markers of both horizontal and vertical heroes.

Accordingly, instead of identifying the hero as *either* horizontal or vertical, I argue that throughout the journey, the epic fantasy hero *continuously* struggles with balancing their horizontal components with the vertical. In most cases, the hero is one who is *first* the horizontal hero and then *becomes* the vertical hero, as the hero must function as part of a community, working together as a whole, before leaving the community behind at some point in their journey in order to fulfil their status as messianic hero. Depending on the text and degree of transcendence, the vertical hero may return to their community once their heroic function is complete. The epic fantasy hero is at once a vertical hero as well as a horizontal hero at the moment when they become a messianic figure and willingly undergo a literal or metaphorical death. The departure then does not need to be a physical one, that is, the hero does not need to literally die (or death does not need to be permanent) so long as the hero shows a

willingness to meet their death and that this act achieves some sort of transcendence –

a spiritual or social advancement where the hero transcends beyond the community, but

may still be a part of it. Just as the conception of good and evil indicates the need to see

the two as a whole rather than opposite binaries, so too is it important to see the

horizontal and vertical hero as part of a *whole*, rather than incompatible opposites. The

intersection of horizontal and vertical heroes indicates that the potential for the hero

and u-hero to function as each other is realized in two central ways: first, through their

interaction with their community (the horizontal), and second with their association

with death or the space of death (vertical), but both combining together to create a

messianic figure. I will first explore the hero and u-hero's relationship to the community

and how this relationship is an important facet in distinguishing the two characters into

their roles, before investigating the hero's association with death below.

*The Horizontal Hero: Balancing the Hero/U-hero as Inside/Outside Figures*

The hero is differentiated from the u-hero through their position as the

"horizontal hero." As Mathews' stipulates that: "The horizontal hero struggles to know

himself and to share himself in love with another, to affirm his tribe's rights, land, and

values against encroachments of an enemy" (92), the hero must be able to put the needs

of the community first, usually by acting in an ethical way and by making moral

choices. A recurring motif throughout the first *Runelords* series is a diagram which

occurs in all four texts (reprinted in figure 3.3 from *Wizardborn* 387).

## The Three Domains of Man

Domain Invisible

Domain Communal

Body Space

Community

Domain Visible

Wealth

Home

Body

Family

Time

Self-Definition

Free Will
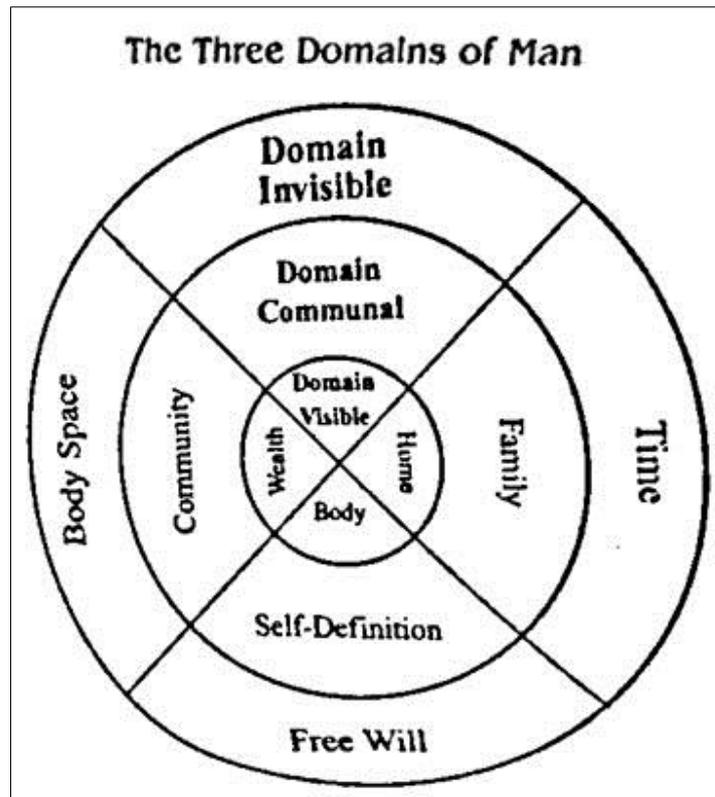
**FIGURE 3.3: THE THREE DOMAINS OF MAN.**

The diagram conveys the idea that the description of "good" or "evil" is dependent on how one affects another – men and women cannot be good in isolation:

> The drawing detailed how each man saw himself as the lord of his own realm. It showed how men gauge good and evil based on whether another person enlarges one's territories or diminish them. […] It seemed to him that a man could not truly be good in isolation. To develop such virtue, he had to recognize that he was inextricably tied to his community, to the brotherhood of mankind. A truly good man, he reasoned, could not live for himself alone […] he gave himself in service. (*Wizardborn* 387-388)

The diagram indicates the need to understand the balance achieved by being part of a community: "a truly good man [...] could not live for himself alone." Just as in the

balance indicated in figure 3.1, here too there must be a balance in deed and actions, as an imbalance is something that is "evil." But too much virtue or goodness can result in an imbalance as well, as depicted in the following parable:

> When I was a lad I knew a woman so charitable that everyone praised her. She baked bread for the poor, gave coins to the poor, gave her cow – and finally her house. At last she found herself begging on the streets outside of Broward, where she died one winter. Thus her virtue grew into a vice that consumed her. (*Wizardborn* 40)

Balance is achieved from understanding one's place in the community, in respecting both the needs of the self and the group.

This diagram found in each novel exposes and challenges the structure of power that is set up in the society in the *Runelords* novels. In the *Runelords*, magical power is mostly gained by the use of runes (words crafted into blood metal). Runelords, those of the nobility or elite members of the army, can gain endowments (of brawn, grace, wit, metabolism, beauty, voice, stamina, sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) through the use of these runes, but these endowments must be gifted from another person, a dedicate. The dedicate, usually a serf of the Runelord, grants one of their abilities to their Runelord so that the ability is passed from one to the other, resulting in the formation of a disabled peasant and a super-human lord. The dedicate and Runelord would thus physically balance each other but this relationship results in an ethical imbalance when one considers figure 3.3. The heroes ultimately conclude that taking on dedicates from another is a thing of evil, even when using these endowments to save or work for the dedicates in a feudal system, as taking runes encroaches onto another's territory. While the hero must make ethical choices on behalf of the community, the hero must also be able to recognize that a community is made up of individuals, which

includes themselves. Thus, there is not only a balance between good and evil, but a balance between the individual and the community.

This balance of the individual and community also exists within the central hero as they are inside/outside figures: they both stand with the group and are set apart from them. While Rand al'Thor in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series is identifiable as the hero of destiny, he is often detached from his communal group, and there is a frequent suggestion (made by the other characters) that his position as "hero" is a threatening one to society. In Trudi Canavan's *Black Magician* trilogy (2001-2003), the community of magicians determine that the hero *is* a threat to their society, and thus while the hero Sonea remains a part of the Magicians Guild, she is also set apart from them. In the *Runelords* series, Gaborn finds himself isolated from society as his position as Runelord and Earth King means that he cannot truly live alongside his friends and family. The central hero is often isolated from their group as they, while being part of the community, also in some ways surpass the group. This is because, as a hero, they must demonstrate some power or skill that would enable them to save their community. As an Earth King, Gaborn has powers granted to him by the Earth that surpass those skills of the earth wizards – and note that even the wizards, whether of earth, air, fire, or water, obviously have skills that are superior to that of the human race. But, as there also exists Runelords with incredible endowments, Gaborn's powers as Earth King are not only greater than the wizards, but are also unique in relation to the abilities of the Runelords, who in turn have powers and skills that far outstrips the dedicate or even the average peasant. Along with extraordinary super-human power, often, the hero might also be the last or only member of their kind. For example, in Sanderson's *Hero of Ages* (2008), Sazed the Terrisman, the man who eventually emerges as the true hero of the prophecy, is the last of his people. In Farland's *Runelords* series, Gaborn is the only

Earth King after many thousands of years, and it is unlikely that another will arise immediately after. Though his son proves to be greater than his father, this is because the son is a reincarnated avatar of a "Bright One" or an angel. Thus, while Gaborn is king of the earthly dimension, Fallion surpasses him in heavenly ones, but both heroes are vertical heroes and isolated from their family and community.

But, while isolated due to the skill and ability that will allow them to save the world, the hero is also part of a community. In the heroic epic fantasy, the protagonists – the heroes and companions – function as a communal group, either rebelling or invading against another, equally large, body of power. These individual helper figures are macrocosmically representative, or a synecdoche, of their race or different social groups. Even though racism might occur between separate groups, the individuals of the group, as representatives of their race, set aside their prejudices and unite to defeat the antagonistic force. While standing as members of their race, they may also be members of the nobility as well, and thus they embody the body of their people just as an individual king would. This is the case with the members of Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring* or in James Clemens' *Banned and the Banished* series (1998-2002), with the group made up of different races, all of which are either nobility or distinct in some way. Alternatively, the members of the group may be made-up of different classes, and the hero might be a noble figure or a distinctive sorcerer who befriends or is hidden away in the peasant population, emerging as their hero but still one of their own.[32] This

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[32] With either nobility or sorcery, there is an emphasis on bloodlines, on powers inherited from ancestry. While the hero may emerge from the "normal" population, for example Canavan's Sonea in the *Black Magician* trilogy comes from the slums and Rowling's Harry Potter is not "pure-blooded," there is still an underlying assumption that their powers and abilities originates from one parentage. Thus, while

happens in Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, with Rand being orphaned at a young age and raised by a different culture than his own; in Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy, though Vin is from the slave class, her father has noble bloodlines; another hero, Sazed, is a traveller figure, who integrates with the community, similar to Paul Atreides in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965). The epic hero is often a traveller figure who may encounter new species or races that is different from his own. As the epic structure contains a journey, this is a formal necessity. The hero's acceptance into the new group (usually demonstrated by the other characters' love for the hero) marks the hero's belongingness in the group.

It is absolutely crucial to the heroic epic fantasy that the hero is not an individual but stands with a community. This idea of a synecdoche is also true for the fractured epic narrative, but in that end of the axis (figure 0.1), the group are not united together but are often working against one another. The hero of localized heroic fantasy, in contrast to the epic is often a solitary figure, or with a sole companion, as the resolution is a much smaller one than the world scale; the emphasis in the localized heroic fantasy is of a lone figure or duo, standing against a larger force or community. In an adventure-fantasy, in which the locale shifts from series to series, the heroes travel from place to place often because of their *inability* to fit with the community. The size of the community group may be represented in different ways, depending on where the text falls in the range (figure 0.1). Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, for example, moves slowly from localized to epic, but still remains more within the localized range without reaching full epic status. As such, the community group becomes bigger by the final book, moving beyond the adventures of the hero and his two friends until it includes the larger wizarding community, but still does not encompass the entirety of the world.

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heroic epic fantasy may contest a fear of miscegenation or crossing class-systems, it still supposes that the heroic quality is an inherited trait of nobility.

While the hero might have skills and abilities that are unique from the rest of humanity, this does not necessitate that they are the strongest or most skilled, it only indicates that *they are distinguished from* the rest of the community. Indeed, another marker that differentiates the hero from the u-hero is that the u-hero often strives for perfection, a perfection that will lead to a Faustian fall, as the u-hero attempts to gain this power in immoral ways. In the first part of the *Runelords* series, the u-hero Raj Ahten is a more powerful Runelord than Gaborn – he literally has thousands of endowments, resulting in the creation of a person who is not quite human, and instead transcends into something "greater," similar to Nietzsche's Übermensch or superhuman. Raj Ahten takes on thousands of endowments in an attempt to be the sum of all men. But Raj Ahten gains endowments through manipulation or threats. Near the end of the novel, he sacrifices thousands of men to Fire, to the Power he serves, so that his own power shall increase: "He did not like to watch his people die, but Rahjim had assured him that a sacrifice was necessary. 'A few thousand men will die. But it is better that a few thousand men are lost, than all of us'" (*Wizardborn* 426). Conversely, Gaborn is granted endowments against his wishes, as the people band together to supply their own strength and energy to their king in order for him to defeat a greater evil than Raj Ahten. In heroic epic fantasy fiction, the u-hero sacrifices his people in order to gain more power, while, in contrast, the community (often represented through the fellowship of protagonists) make a sacrifice of themselves in order to give the hero a greater power so that they will be able to destroy the u-hero through an ultimate sacrifice. Thus the protagonists work together to defeat the antagonist(s) or conflict, but they unite their strength through a central hero – one who is required to make a greater sacrifice of the self in order to bring about salvation.

One of the biggest differences between the hero and u-hero is the hero's connection with other characters and humanity in general; this is what identifies the central character as "good" or "evil." Like the hero, the u-hero also has these markers which isolate them from the larger group but the association with the group is markedly different from the hero. The antagonist sets themselves apart from the group deliberately, as they attempt to reign over them by force. Accordingly, the interaction and acceptance into the community is a central facet in identifying the hero and u-hero and determining their potential as the other. While the u-hero is a failed hero and thus necessitates that they demonstrate the potential to be hero, the hero also may demonstrate the possibility of being u-hero, depicted through their interaction with the community. For example, in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, the hero Rand also behaves tyrannically, demonstrating the possibility of the hero becoming a u-hero, but before the final confrontation he reaches enlightenment and re-joins his community. In the *Runelords* series, a character notes that: "Gaborn loves his people too much, and Raj Ahten loves them too little" (*Wizardborn* 39). In a later scene, Raj Ahten's man kills his own citizens for being rude to his leader, because he says "I did not know you could care so much for one worthless old man" (154). Although Raj Ahten objects slightly to the old man's death, he has fostered an environment where his followers and citizens do not care for one another and do not believe that their king cares for them either. It is the capacity for love, a *selfless* love, which marks the character as a hero and differentiates them from the u-hero.[33]

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[33] This selfless love may originate from a Christian motif. But note that the idea of sacrifice and the messianic hero is not restricted to Christianity, as many religions and mythologies may have a messianic figure. For example, the harvest myth, (perhaps stemming from Osiris in Egyptian mythology or Ramayana in Hindu mythology) also incorporates the idea of a king who sacrifices himself for rebirth

Accordingly, in the sequel series of *Runelords*, the way that two characters respond to the same punishment – a punishment of *love* – is what determines their status as hero or u-hero. The story of the breaking in *Runelords* is retold in multiple ways, labelling the destroyer, Yaleen, as a malicious force who intended to destroy the world, or, in other versions, in order to subvert the Great Seal of Creation to their will.[34] But in another retelling, Fallion recollects that: "*She [Yaleen] had only thought it a childish prank, she insisted, though she was a person of terrible avarice*" (*The Wyrmling Horde* 17, original emphasis to indicate story within a story). This version recasts the story of the fall as a childish mistake, perhaps brought about by selfishness, but lacking the qualities of "ultimate evil" that slowly grows to embody the persona of Lord Despair. The transformation into Lord Despair comes about through Yaleen's punishment: those Bright Ones (angel-like creatures) that were left alive after the destruction of the One True World trace a rune of compassion onto Yaleen, so that they "*shared their own grief and loss with Yaleen, heaping it upon her*" (18, original emphasis). This act, of sharing their mourning of the loss of loved ones with Yaleen, through a rune of *compassion*, brings about a profound change in character:

> *Where before there had been contrition and sadness in her face, Yaleen hardened and grew angry. [...] Thousands stood in line to heap their pain upon her, but something in her broke long before her torment was*

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and the good of the community. Here the messiah's sacrifice may be motivated by duty and piety rather than love as it is in Christianity.

[34] Note that the gender for this character changes. Originally female, the character later possesses the body of man and renames herself "Lord Despair". Although the issue of gender is important, especially when considering Yaleen's connection to an Edenic Fall, these concepts are currently outside of the scope of this thesis.

*ended. When the punishment was done, there was nothing but hatred left*

*in Yaleen's eyes.*

*"I harmed your world by accident," Yaleen said, "and now you have*

*made me glad of it. You gave me torment, and I will torment you in*

*return. […] from now on, you shall call me by my new name – Despair."*

(18, original emphases)

By explaining the reasons why Lord Despair turned to hatred and animosity, Farland explains the character's evilness and therefore creates a measure of sympathy towards the antagonist, re-casting a character of horror into one that is pitied. And yet, within the same novel, the same act is done to the hero Fallion, where Lord Despair traces runes of compassion onto Fallion and there proceeds to torture his dedicates so that Fallion would feel the pain of the tortures without being physically harmed. However, rather than breaking him so that Fallion is hardened and turns to evil, Fallion thanks Lord Despair, for he feels "grateful that he could suffer instead of these innocents" (19). The repetitions within the novels, of the similarity of their punishments, create a resonance for the reader which suggests that the hero Fallion has the potential to become a u-hero. But whereas Yaleen responds to this same act by realizing a role as the antagonist, the bifurcation point for Fallion reaffirms his role as hero.

*The Vertical Hero: Crossing the Spaces between Life and Death*

As I have demonstrated, the hero is one who is part of a community and is also isolated because of their role as messianic figure; they are set apart from the group of protagonists due to the messianic-function that will allow them to sacrifice themselves for the community (the horizontal) while simultaneously transcending the community (the vertical). Above I discussed ways in which the hero is tempted by and confronts

shadowy aspects of the self in order to either confirm their role as hero or fail and become u-hero. I also suggested that this confrontation occurs multiple times, as the hero must constantly reaffirm their positioning by choosing the heroic path at each bifurcation point (figure 1.3). These confrontations with the shadowy self are *iterations that build to an ultimate confrontation* that will restore the balance in the world. Recall Frye's assertion that: "The regular pulsating meter that traditionally distinguishes verse from prose tends to become the organizing rhythm in *epos* or extended oratorical forms. [...] the two words for recurrence, rhythm and pattern, show that recurrence is a structural principle of all art" (251). Throughout this thesis, I have identified and explored repetitions in the structure of heroic epic fantasy, which function as iterations that created a resonance on what has come before it. The confrontations with the shadow self becomes a "pulsating meter [...that] become[s] the organizing rhythm in *epos*," building a pattern that will culminate in the final confrontation between hero and the shadow in order to bring balance.

It is in this final conflict that the hero makes the choice to function as a messianic hero, finally realizing their role, and becomes a Hero. In *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Joseph Campbell also marks the hero's journey with the final act being that of death or departure: "The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of the life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave" (306). The association with death – either literal or metaphorical – is the final part of the hero's journey before they realize the role of Hero. Figure 3.4 below describes how these aspects all work together to lead the hero into fulfilling their destiny in their journey. The hero does not fear death because they have made a willing sacrifice for the community, one that will result in salvation for the community (the

horizontal) and transcendence of the hero (the vertical), but before the hero can make this sacrifice, they need to comprehend all aspects of the fulcrum (figure 3.1) in order to restore balance to it. Understanding the balance then does not only indicate the comprehension of the wholeness of good and evil, but also life and death.

The messianic sacrifice of the hero results in salvation for the community

The hero's ability to cross between boundaries of death and life signifies their positioning as a gray hero, a figure incorporating both "good and evil."

Similarly, the hero's comprehension of death indicates their potential to save the world, because they can only save the world after understanding the entirety of life and death.

The gray hero is necessary in order for the hero to defeat the "ultimate evil," because the hero needs to understand and comprehend the shadowy side in order to defeat it.

**FIGURE 3.4: THE MESSIANIC FUNCTION OF THE HERO.**

The need for understanding the whole of good and evil as well as life and death can be seen in *The Runelords*. Gaborn's ultimate task (charged by the spirit of Earth) is to "save a seed of humanity":

> "I ask but one thing of you, to save a seed of humanity. If you succeed, the deed itself shall be your reward. You shall save those you deem worthy to live." [Earth tells Gaborn.]
>
> "*If* I succeed?" Gaborn asked.

> […] "Once there were toth upon the land. Once there were duskins… At
>
> the end of this dark time, mankind, too, may become only a memory."
>
> (*The Sum of All Men* 156, original emphasis)

Gaborn is told that his serving Earth with be its own reward, as service to Earth should bring about salvation for humanity. But this service creates an odd juxtaposition as serving Earth also requires an acceptance of death: "Something more than embracing life. Something more than serving man. To embrace death and decay and the totality that was Earth" (154). Gaborn must come to a realization that he might fail, and that humankind might be destroyed due to his own failure. In fact, Gaborn initially *does* fail as hero, as he pursues his quest to defeat Raj Ahten as his enemy rather than recognizing and understanding the heroic role that the Earth has set him. But at a later bifurcation point, Gaborn reverses this positioning and reaffirms his role as hero because of a conscious decision to pursue death and the space of death. Gaborn chooses to journey into the underworld in order to destroy the imbalance of the world that is being created there. This journey does not function simply as a symbolic acceptance and journey to death – Gaborn is fully aware that the journey will likely result in literal death for him and those who accompany him. These companions, working together as a community, also take part in the heroic role, the messianic function shared across several key members, with the heaviest burden on Gaborn himself.

The messianic role, the choice to offer themselves up as a sacrifice through a symbolic or literal death, is the major distinction between the hero and u-hero. Death allows the hero to cross boundaries and bridge the gap between worlds in order to function as a catalyst or sacrifice to bring about a new imagined future. The act of recognizing the sacrifice needed is a moment of Recognition for the hero. In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines Recognition as such: "*Recognition*, as in fact the term indicates, is a

change from ignorance to knowledge, disclosing either a close relationship or enmity, on the part of people marked out for good or bad fortune. Recognition is best when it occurs simultaneously with a reversal" (18-19, original emphasis). When Recognition is combined with sacrifice and the heroic function, the hero is one who recognizes that: "It's better for one person to die, than a whole world" (*Wizardborn* 284). Aristotle indicates that Recognition comes about due to "a change from ignorance to knowledge." The manner in which the hero understands their own destiny is important to the resolution of the plot. This process is inextricably linked to the sacrifice as the hero must recognize their voluntarily submission to death. As I will explore at greater detail in the next two chapters, it is often at the hero's lowest moments, when the fulcrum is tipped towards the "evil" or "dark" side of the scale, that the hero achieves enlightenment, a Recognition, and undergoes a Reversal in the balance of good and evil. In *Runelords*, it may be that the incomplete sequel series is setting up for a Reversal, as the synopsis of book nine indicates that: "The great war with the Wyrmling Hordes is over, and mankind has lost. [...] Fallion and Tuul Ra, with only a handful of allies, must hope that with resolve and cunning alone they can win the day, before darkness closes upon them for ever" (*A Tale of Tales* online). In the first series, Gaborn undergoes this trajectory when he initially fails as hero, as he does not properly comprehend his role as hero. It is only through his journey to the underworld that Gaborn is able to realize his role as Hero.

The hero's journey to the underworld – a space of death – not only signifies a literal descent (a tipping of the fulcrum so that it is unbalanced), but it is a common method to indicate either the hero's acceptance of their messianic role or, equally possible, to fulfil the hero's comprehension of how to fulfil their destiny. Using the epic journeys in Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* as

examples, Frye indicates that: "To gain information about the future, or what is 'ahead' in terms of the lower cycle of life, it is normally necessary to descend to a lower world of the dead" (321). Similarly, in *Runelords*, Gaborn and his companions must descend into the underworld in order to fulfil their destiny as they must break the runes of destruction that are being created in the heart of the underworld. These runes, a physical crafting of a written language, are usually used to allow dedicates to pass endowments to Runelords, but different versions of them are capable of having a tangible effect on the world as well. It is notable that the runes were created by mimicking the way reavers eat the dead. The reavers only eat the dead in order to gain memories of the dead – in this way, entire generations of knowledge can be passed on, creating stronger and wiser creatures. Death here reflects the idea of continuity, with reavers eating their dead to pass knowledge on. This aspect of death is indicative of the connection between sacrifice and death, of a sacrifice to an individual that results in good for the community, and as such, also demonstrates the relation of sacrifice and death to service to the community.

The hero's choice to fulfil their destiny is inextricably tied with sacrifice through service. The hero makes a sacrifice of themselves for the good of the community, just as Miller explains for the mythological hero:

> The heroic "good death" is supposed to be violent, a sword death – and it is voluntary […]. Mary Douglas believes, and I think quite correctly, that part of the mysterious and lasting potency of the heroic individual comes from his voluntary submission to death: the hero wills himself to accept and even to welcome the danger of death. (121)

In the first chapter, I briefly alluded to the idea that the hero's choice is connected to sacrifice, as Cazaril in Lois McMaster Bujold's *Curse of Chalion* chooses to die three

times, on behalf of the noble lady that he is serving. Like the mythological hero, the epic fantasy hero is identified through their "voluntary submission to death," or one who will, in some way, sacrifice themselves for humanity. George R. R. Martin makes this notion explicit in his fragmented fantasy *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-present), with the repeated phrase "Valar Morghulis," which translates to "all men must die" (*A Storm of Swords* 748). The phrase is later answered with "*'Valar Dohareis.' All men must serve*" (*A Dance with Dragons* 836, original emphasis). And when the heroes begin to emerge from this fragmented hero narrative, it is notable they are identified through this messianic function and the space of death. In *Runelords*, Gaborn and his companions signify this sacrifice by their literal journey to the underworld, an act that will serve humanity through their sacrifice.

## A Final Note on the Fluidity of the Hero

The hero may not necessarily die a physical and lasting death, so long as the hero undergoes some manner of transcendence, of becoming something more than human. At the end of the first part of Farland's series, Gaborn has taken on so many powers of runes, that he is no longer quite human. Like Frodo in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, who I described previously as being no longer able to "fit" in the community because he has become something *other* in achieving his heroic potential, Gaborn finds himself unable to maintain a normal familial relationship with his wife and children, and instead spends the remainder of his short days travelling around the world. A hero's exile and isolation signifies that the hero cannot be part of the new community, as, while they brought change, the change is only achieved by blood on their hands. Hence a period of exile might be necessary to purify the hero. Gaborn's exile comes about through his ascension, as he is the Earth King, he is, in fact, not quite human. He sleeps

under the dirt, cradled in the earth, as he is no longer able to gain rest outside of it. He is almost divine, in that he has become one with the spirit of earth. The hero is thus removed from humanity, sacrificing themselves to ascend to the heavens as something near-divine, or descend into underworld into a state of death. It is that element of sacrifice, of removing themselves from the human-world that pushes the hero from horizontal hero to vertical hero. If they remain in exile from the community, then they persist as vertical heroes, but the hero's final identification as either vertical hero or horizontal hero differs between authors and series. Despite their transcendence, some heroes may be able to remain with the community (as Cazaril does in *Curse of Chalion*), or perhaps, sit just above it, but still apart of the social structure (as I will describe in the next chapter for Tylar dy Noche in Clemen's *Shadowfall*).

The hero's messianic role – a descent to the underworld, followed by a period of transcendence where the hero is temporarily able to ascend to the heavens – signifies the hero's ability to journey across metaphysical spaces. As I identified in the first chapter, the hero is a transgressor figure in that they have the ability to cross boundaries and different dimensional spaces. Miller identifies this ability as a central aspect of the mythological hero:

> [A] more central aspect of the hero [is] his mediation between one zone and another, between this world and an Otherworld. What I call Otherworld may have a nominal connection with divine persons and spiritual potencies (gods or goddesses), or it may be merely indicated as the place of death; either, or both, is possible. (6)

Miller asserts that the hero's mediation of the upper and lower worlds (divine heaven or demonic hell) is a central aspect of the hero. Likewise, in his third essay in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," Frye associates the

conflict of good and evil functions in the quest structure of romance or myth, with the movement of the upper and lower worlds:

> A quest involving conflict assumes two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antagonist or enemy. […] The enemy may be an ordinary human being, but the nearer the romance is to myth, the more attributes of divinity will cling to the hero and the more the enemy will take on demonic mythical qualities. The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. (187)

Whereas the qualities of the hero of romance or myth is one that is analogous to the upper world (heaven), with the enemy in contrast corresponding to the lower world (hell), the hero of the heroic epic fantasy is one that fluidly moves across all boundaries, taking on qualities of both messianic powers and demonic powers via the hero's association to death.

While Messianic time in the Judeo-Christian tradition depicts an "end" time, a teleology which indicates linear time, the heroic epic fantasy has an investment with cyclical time as well. Previously, I discussed different depictions of time, focusing my attention of branching linear times that are either fixed or fluid. Another important feature in depicting the fluidity of time is describing time in terms of cyclicality. While Maria Nikolajeva in *The Magic Code* (1988) indicates that: "unlike myth and folktale describing visits to the land of death and a return to earth, fantasy presents death as an irreversible passage to the secondary world, a *linear* journey" (80, original emphasis),

this is not actually the case. In the parameters of the world in heroic epic fantasy fiction, death is not necessarily a literal or final sacrifice. For example, in *Runelords*, at the end of the first book, the ghosts or shades of the recently deceased kings and queens rise up to join the legendary figure Erden Geboren. A character later recollects this moment in the third book: "'I was at Longmot when the wight of Erden Geboren came,' Myrrima said. 'He blew his warhorn, and men who had died that day rose up and joined him on the hunt. They were happy, Averan. Death isn't an ending. It's a new beginning'" (*Wizardborn* 80). This conception of death suggests a new cycle after one's life has passed. There are two space-times of death, one that is linear and final, and another that is cyclical. The fixed linear cycle seems to indicate the idea of the death space as a reward, a Valhalla. In the *Runelords*, the depiction of this ghostly afterlife is one made for noblemen and noblewomen who spend the remainder of their time a period of idle pleasure, on a hunt. This space is an Edenic time which is completely static, a haunting that indicates people who are not released from time, but are stuck in the past, in a time when they were alive. While the notion of a "hunt" suggests a moving forward, in a pursuit of an object, this object is one that can never be reached due to the period of stasis. This static time is further complicated by the idea that the hunt is led by Erden Geboren, the *first* legendary Earth King, who is, in a way, reborn in the persona of Gaborn val Orden, the *new* Earth King, suggesting a cyclic time, but one that also suggests a reverse cycle through the reversal of names.[35]

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[35] This concept is similar to Rand al'Thor taking on the identity of Lews Therin as the Dragon Reborn in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series which I examined in the previous chapter. The idea of legendary figures being reborn in a different persona may be a frequent motif in heroic epic fantasy, and thus strengthens the conception of a cyclic time in fantasyland.

The cyclical nature of death follows the pattern of eternal recurrence that forms a large part of the recursive structure of the epic fantasy. In Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1891) the character Zarathustra engages in a conversation in which he is told: "time itself is a circle" (206). He is later told: "Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth on the year of existence. Everything breaketh, everything is integrated anew" (262). This passage illustrates the pattern of repetitions that occur in life, an idea that may be reflected consciously in epic fantasy. The opening chapters of Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series always begin with the following passage: "The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass leaving memories that become legend, then fade to myth, and are long forgot when that Age comes again. In one Age, called the Third Age by some, an Age yet to come, an Age long past" (*Great Hunt* 1). All things occur again and again. This idea is often an overt motif in *epic* fantasy, and is demonstrated metafictionally as well as implicitly in the structure of the text. As Earth had told Gaborn above, "Once there were toth upon the land. Once there were duskins… At the end of this dark time, mankind, too, may become only a memory" (*The Sum of All Men* 156). The cycle of death is inevitable, but the cycle also indicates that a new form will rise again.

This cyclical nature of death indicates the return of the hero when the heroic form is required. In *Chaos*, Gleick presents how the chaos scientist Theodor Schwenk "believed in universal principles, and, more than universality, he believed in a certain spirit in nature that made his prose uncomfortably anthropomorphic. His 'archetypal principle' was this: that flow 'wants to repeat itself, regardless of the surrounding material'" (197-198). As I have established in previous chapters, the hero functions as sites of fluidity, and accordingly, this flow "wants to repeat itself": the hero's death is

almost reassured in a cycle of rebirth as the hero figure will be called upon again in time of need. Death, then, implies a plurality in the depiction of time: of progressing forward and being elevated, of being frozen in stasis, and in being reborn in a cycle. Thus, while I argue above that the differentiation between the hero and the u-hero comes about due to their voluntarily submission to death as a messianic figure, it is notable that death is not necessarily the end. The hero, or a form of a hero, will be reborn when a hero is required.

**Chapter 4 – The Hero's Body as a Portal in Fractured Fantasyland as**

**Exemplified in James Clemen's *Shadowfall***

Up to now I have discussed both plot and character and their importance in the structure of heroic epic fantasy, but I have not yet explored an important aspect of narrative: setting. Setting is a central facet of the structure of fantasy, because, as Michael Moorcock asserts in *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* (1987): "The landscapes and its inhabitants are seen very much as a unity" (65). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, fantasyland is inextricably connected to both character and plot in heroic epic fantasy, as it is the diminishment and consequent healing of fantasyland that is central to the fantasy story. The plot of all four aspects of fantasy fiction (epic, local, heroic, fragmented) in some way focuses on healing a diminished fantasyland. In "Fantastika in the World Storm" (2007, 2011), John Clute outlines four phases for each of the major genres of Fantastika (fantasy, SF, and horror) which are all seen as iterations of each other. His phases for fantasy are:

> 1) Wrongness: some small desiccating hint that the world has lost its wholeness: the Nazgûl enter the Shire.
>
> 2) Thinning: the diminution of the old ways; amnesia of the hero and of the king; failure of the harvest; a literal drying up of the Land; and *cacophony*: […]
>
> 3) Recognition: the key in the gate; […] the hero remembering his true name; the Fisher King walking again; the Land greening. […]
>
> 4) Return: the folk come back to their old lives and try to live them again. (26, original emphasis).

The first two phases of fantasy, Wrongness and Thinning, can be related to the idea of balance that I discussed in the previous chapter, depicted in the constant increasing of

the unbalance of the world as it shifts further and further out of alignment with equilibrium.

The continuing increase of the unbalance can also be seen as an increase in entropy. Entropy means disorder, a disorder at a molecular level within a macroscopic system. It is, as Gleick explains in *Chaos* (1987): "the inexorable tendency of the universe, and any isolated system in it, to slide toward a state of increasing disorder" (257). The second law of thermodynamics indicates that in a *closed* system, entropy always increases. But, if a system were to open and combine with a second parallel system, this does not necessarily indicate that entropy would decrease, as Hawking explains in *A Brief History of Time* (1988): "the entropy of an isolated system always increases, and […] when two systems are joined together, the entropy of the combined system is greater than the sum of the entropies of the individual systems" (116). The combination of two closed systems results in an increase in overall entropy. Additionally, in a real-world system entropy is irreversible, as Hayles notes in *Chaos Bound* (1990): "The reversal of this tendency requires a 'restoration.' But any attempt of reform only creates more dissipation. A *net* restoration is beyond the power of 'organized matter;' the adjective implicitly acknowledges that matter may be unorganized, itself subject to entropic decay" (39, original emphasis). If entropy is increasing, this would then seem to indicate that the system is a closed system, as any attempt to reverse and heal the system would only add to the degradation of the system. But is this idea true of fantasyland as well?

The metaphor of entropy is noted consciously by many fantasy authors who utilize a language of degradation, chaos, and disorder:

> After that Maerad began to notice signs of neglect or poverty: tiles
> missing in a barnhouse roof or rotting carts and wagons abandoned by

the side of the road […] and not infrequently they saw farmhouses which have been abandoned altogether, their windows broken, their roofs beginning to collapse […]. It was not always so, and she still saw many houses with well-tended gardens and orchards […]; but beneath the pleasant surface of Ettinor she sensed a pervasive sense of slow decay, of hopeless struggle against entropy. (*The Gift* 244)

In Alison Croggon's *The Gift* (2004), where the hero describes the diminishment of the land as she travels on her journey, alongside the idea of general degradation and decay the text itself uses the term "entropy." But this idea of entropy is expressed overtly even in early heroic fantasy:

Elric shook his head. "[....] my power is gone."

"How? Why?"

"I know not – unless the forces of Entropy rule more strongly here."

(Moorcock, "While the Gods Laugh" 65)

In Moorcock's *Elric* series (1961-2007), "Entropy" is depicted as a destructive force that is controlled by divinities: "Above this gate, in flaring amber, was the sign of the Lords of Entropy, representing eight arrows radiating from a central hub in all directions" ("While the Gods Laugh" 67). The idea of entropy as a disruptive force that impacts on fantasyland is expressed overtly across a range of fantasy texts.

Fantasyland, as I will demonstrate, is a *fractured* system. If it is initially a closed system, as entropy increases, the boundaries of the closed system grow thinner and allow cracks or holes to form, allowing two parallel isolated systems to combine. For example, in Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* series: "[t]he veil to the underworld is torn" (*Stone of Tears* 32). When this happens, entities from outside of the system *enter* fantasyland, rather than entropy releasing *out* of fantasyland as: "the underworld would

be loosed on the world of the living" (*Wizard's First Rule* 764). As I have depicted in figures 4.1 and 4.2, instead of reversing entropy, the open system works to increase entropy dramatically, as the diffusion of entropy spreads across the open membrane. The penetration of the abnormal – a metaphysical entity that does not belong in fantasyland – tips the balance further, increasing disorder and entropy.
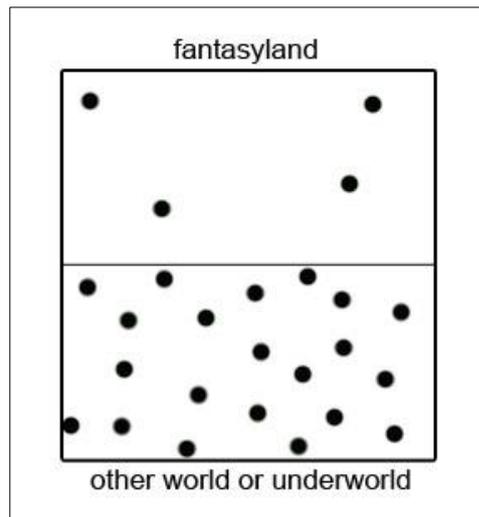


**FIGURE 4.1: ENTROPY IN PARALLEL WORLDS.**
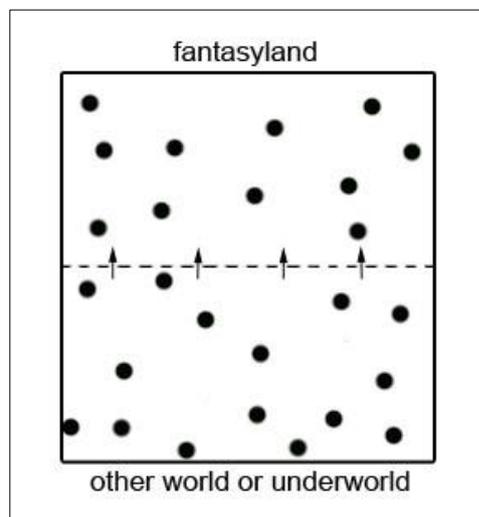


**FIGURE 4.2: WHEN TWO PARALLEL WORDS ARE BRIDGED.**

There may be two different types of metaphysical entities in fantasyland, which are viewed as either normal or abnormal. For example, in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), the conception of "Dust" is initially seen as an abnormal substance, and thus the governing body in the world seeks to rid it from fantasyland, perceiving it as

the cause of disorder. However, the hero Lyra speculates and later confirms that "Dust" is an essential makeup of the universe, a substance that leads to life and creation. In contrast, the characters' movement between parallel universes, through the method of cutting or ripping holes between worlds, allows spectres to be released into these worlds. These spectres are *abnormal* to the worlds, and their presence increases the death and decay of worlds.

The hero's role is to *reverse* the system of entropy, restoring the balance, while simultaneously re-establishing a closed system, making the broken fantasyland whole again. The hero can accomplish this monumental task by functioning as a portal who holds the door open, often allowing a metaphysical entity (or divinity) to (re-)enter the physical world and retrieve the abnormal from the physical world back to where it belongs *outside* of the system or by functioning as a divinity themselves and performing this task. Thus, by functioning as a portal between the physical and the spiritual, the hero achieves a moment of transcendence – a process where the hero embodies or replaces the divine spirit. The interaction between the metaphysical world and fantasyland is what produces the "magic" in fantasyland, and is thus different in each work of fantasy. Unfortunately, the space of this thesis does not allow an expansive survey of these systems, but I will be referencing those novels that I have examined throughout this thesis in order to better depict the different structuring of fantasylands, as well as clarifying and exemplifying these assertions through an examination of Clemens' *Shadowfall*, the first book of the incomplete *Godslayer* trilogy (2006-2007). Like many epic fantasy texts, Clemens' *Shadowfall* has several key moments in which the penetration of abnormal entities causes decay and entropy of fantasyland. The text is also explicit in describing the hero as portal between fantasyland and other planes of existence, a concept which I will clarify further below.

**Fractured Fantasyland**

The sense of Wrongness, "some small desiccating hint that the world has lost its wholeness" (Clute 26) often occurs in fantasyland prior to the events of a novel, and is frequently connected to an idea of a broken world. For instance, in Clemens' *The Godslayer Chronicles*, following a War of the Gods, the gods and the worlds are Sundered: "the kingdom of the gods had been shattered and they appeared among the lands of Myrillia (*Shadowfall* 30-31). The story of the Sundering indicates that the gods existed in a kingdom separate from the world of humans, but due to the shattering of this world, the gods are cast into Myrillia (the physical world where the novel takes place). The story clearly echoes an idea of a fall from heaven, but is combined simultaneously with a story of a breaking of the worlds. Through this Sundering, the gods themselves are broken into parts:

> "Echoes of themselves were cast high and low. The gods lost parts of themselves. All that was dark went down to the naether, while all that was light went up to the aether, forming the naethryn and aethryn."
>
> "And what were we left with here in Myrillia?" Rogger asked.
>
> "Gods made flesh, as gray as any man." (345)

The gods' bodies and their souls are split into three dimensions: Into Myrillia, the naether, and the aether. Note that humanity is portrayed as gray, neither good (light) or evil (dark), but a balance of both. I have depicted the story of the Sundering in figure 4.3 in order to visually demonstrate how parallel systems increase in entropy when these systems are combined. The gods' bodies themselves are subject to entropic decay,

as their selves are split into three parts. These parts are then released into the other worlds, through the fractured openings between these worlds.
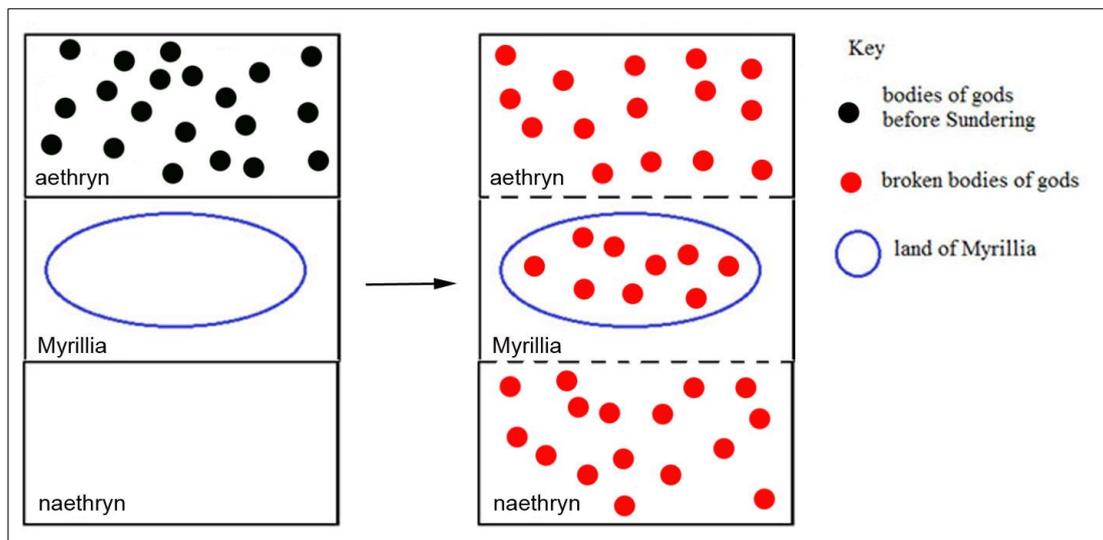


**FIGURE 4.3: THE SUNDERING OF THE GODS AND THE IMPACT ON ENTROPY IN MYRILLIA.**

Following the fall of the gods into the physical world, through this split in their personas, the gods suffer a loss of identity (not knowing their "true" name) and become "maddened and raving" (104).[36] The gods are able to regain sanity and recover their names by tying themselves to the land, a process that they call settling, and occurs prior to the events of the novel. While many countless gods still remained roaming mad through the wild, a hundred gods settled the land of Myrillia:

> Every child knew the history of Myrillia, of the madness and destruction
> that followed the arrival of gods to this world. It lasted three centuries
> until the god Chrism chose the first god-realm and imbued his Graces
> into the region, sharing his powers to bring order out of chaos. Other

---

[36] This motif, of recovering the lost knowledge, especially that of a true name, is a common one to fantasy fiction and may be connected to the decaying fantasyland.

> gods followed, settling various lands, bringing to bear their unique
>
> Graces. (43)

Thus, though the kingdom of the gods is shattered, the gods are able to somewhat reverse the process of chaos by tying themselves to the land. This idea, of "bring[ing] order out of chaos," is explicit to many fantasy texts, and is an idea I will return to in the next chapter. The gods are then connected to the land, rooted so firmly that they are unable to leave physically. They become a part of the world so intimately that the landscape reflects on their personality:

> It was said that a god's aspect reflected his or her character. Gods of
>
> loam were as patient as a budding seed, as solid as rock and hard-packed
>
> soil, while gods of the air were aloof and farseeing, ethereal in mind and
>
> grace. Gods of water, like Meeryn and Fyla, varied the most, fickle in
>
> temperament and spirits, as changeable as water itself: solid ice, flowing
>
> water, misty vapor. Then there were the fire gods, who were as quick to
>
> anger as a lick of flame, as volatile as a woodland blaze, as passionate
>
> as the heated embrace of lovers. (246)

Like many fantasy authors, Clemens explicitly expresses an idea of an intimate connection between fantasyland and the divine or metaphysical body, but, as I will describe, this relationship between land and divinity is then later replaced with the hero's body, as the divine is (or becomes) abnormal to fantasyland and must be expelled.

This process, of tying themselves to fantasyland, is fuelled by the flow of blood into the landscape (an act that is similar to that of crucifixion)[37]:

---

[37] The first god to undergo crucifixion, Chrism, with a name that alludes to Christ, is later revealed to be a eu-hero. Clemens may be offering an alternate reading of the Christ mythology, especially as it is later

In an attempt to end the ravings that plagued him, as all the gods suffered, Chrism had bled himself into the land, fully and completely, drained empty, attempting to end his life. But death did not come. Instead, as his living blood bonded to the region, he discovered peace from the ravenings. He was the first to find such solace but word spread. Others quickly followed, staking out their own realms. Only the rogues remained unfettered, preferring madness to confinement to one's realm. But even they found themselves eventually pushed and isolated among the many stretches of raw hinterland. (442)

As I have demonstrated in figure 4.4, by saturating the land with their blood, these gods are intrinsically connected to the land: "*as the humours of a body course through a god, so they do its lands*" (97, original emphasis to indicate excerpt from dictionary for the word "god-realm"). The flow of bodily fluids into the landscape, an act that takes place via a sacrificial rite, binds the broken body of the divine entity to fantasyland.

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revealed the Chrism's crucifixion was not voluntarily but was performed as punishment by the community. While the religious significance is interesting, I have chosen not to focus on it as religious themes vary greatly from author to author. In any case, for the purpose of this thesis is the point that through crucifixion, a physical penetration of a divine's body that allows him to bleed into the landscape, the divine is connected to the land in a bodily way.
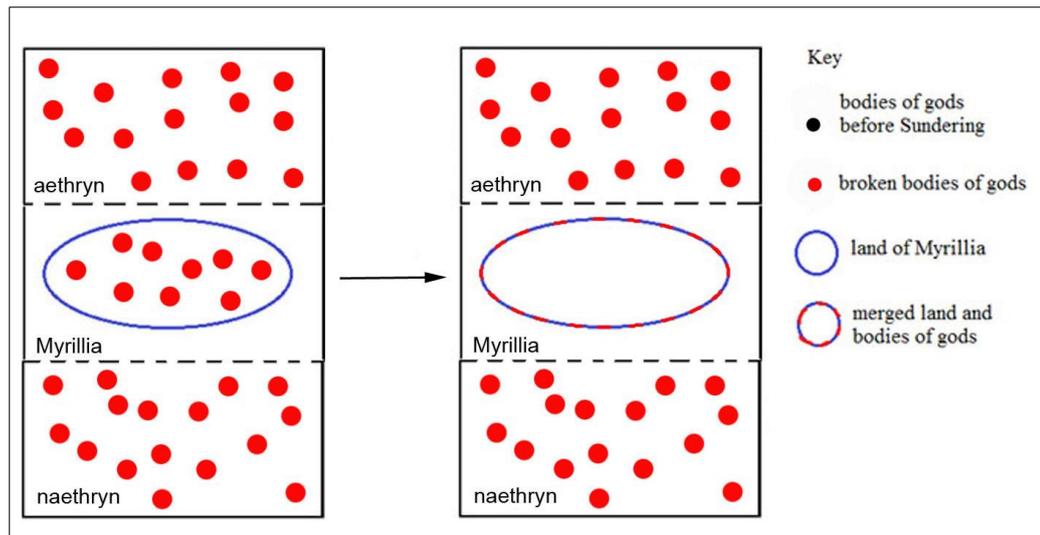
**FIGURE 4.4: THE IMMERSION OF THE SUNDERED GOD INTO THE LAND OF**

**MYRILLIA.**

Like many fantasy fictions, the interaction between the metaphysical and fantasyland is what creates the magical system of power within *Shadowfall*, but here the metaphysical is expressed through the broken divine body.[38] Magic in *Shadowfall* comes about from humours – the bodily fluids of a god – which are said to be imbued with "graces" or magic. There are nine humours or graces: "*Blood*… to open the way, *seed or menses* to bless, *sweat* to imbue, *tears* to swell, *saliva* to ebb, *phlegm* to manifest, *yellow bile* to gift, and *black* to take it all away" (29, original emphasis). The properties of Graces in their bodily fluids are the only real differentiation between godhood and humanity (as immortality is likely a result of the special properties of Grace as well). When an unsundered god, the child Dart, is presented to the reader, we discover that Dart is similar to humans in that she is mortal (she ages and can be

---

[38] In most heroic epic fantasy texts, the "metaphysical" would usually indicate a divinity of some sort, although that divinity may be explicit or implicit to fantasyland. Some fantasy texts may have nature or "Mother Earth" or perhaps just a vague idea of an underlying magical force as the metaphysical quality of fantasyland. In the following pages I will briefly explain the relationship of the metaphysical body with fantasyland, with a survey of the texts examined in this thesis.

harmed) and that the "Grace in her blood [is] faint yet certainly present. But it is oddly and persistently inert" (420). These "Graces," the divine property of the gods' bodies, come about through this splitting of the soul into the three different dimensions:

> It is said that the gods, before the great Sundering of their own kingdom, bore no special Grace. That only after their naethryn and aethryn aspects were stripped from them did the remaining flesh quicken with humoral Graces. […] It is supposed that a god's Grace manifests from some ethereal connection that persists between the gods of Myrillia and their torn counterparts, a bleeding of power that still flows through all three. (420)

It is the *fractured* world that resulted not only in the splitting of the divine bodies, but a holistic ethereal *connection* flowing between these three broken parts that results in the special magical properties of the body's humours.

The humans in *Shadowfall* are then able to cast spells using these humours, because these bodily fluids are tied to the will of a god: "'Blood,' she began softly, 'is indeed the key to all. It is tied to the will of the god. They are one and the same. It takes blood and concentration to bend the general properties of an aspect, like water, into a specific charm'" (134). The physicality of the bodily fluid that results in magic is connected to the *will* of the *god*. Recall how in the first chapter, I argued that the word fate itself means the spoken word of the gods, and thus, accepting fate means accepting the will of the gods. Here, *magic itself is an expression of the will of god*. This idea is also seen in other works of fantasy (although the connections with a divine or metaphysical entity may be less overt). In David and Leigh Eddings' *Belgariad* series (1982-1984), for example, wizards act as disciples of one of the gods. As disciples of

gods, they have access to a divine magic. Their use of magic is expressed through the idea of "The Will and the Word":

> "The Will and the Word," [...] "You simply will something to happen," the old man said, "and then speak the word. If your will's strong enough, it happens." "[...] Any word will do the job. It's the Will that's important, not the word. The Word's just a channel for the Will." (*Pawn of Prophecy* 255)

Note the idea that language is a *channel* for the expression of will. As I will expand on below, this motif of flow is one that is depicted in a variety of ways, not only through the language of magic, but also when discussing fractures in fantasyland and the hero as vessel.

*Abnormal and Normal Metaphysical Relationships with Fantasyland*

The relationship between fantasyland and a "normal" metaphysical entity (a divinity or natural force that *belongs* there) results in a flow of magic, whereas the entrance of an "abnormal" metaphysical entity causes fantasyland to fracture. As Mircea Eliade argues in *Myth and Reality* (translated 1963): "myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really *establishes* the World and makes it what it is today" (6, original emphasis). Similarly, the breakthrough of the supernatural (both the normal and abnormal metaphysical entity) into fantasyland establishes the fantasyland itself. In order to demonstrate these ideas, let me contrast the gods of the unfinished *Godslayer* trilogy to other fantasy fictions, beginning with Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris*. While *Elantris* leans more towards the local end of the epic axis, and thus one would presume that the setting would have less of an impact on

the plot and character as it is contained, this comparison will demonstrate that the setting is an important structure of the plot in *heroic* fantasy. Elantris is a city which is described as a once beautiful place: "It was called the city of the gods: a place of power, radiance, and magic. Visitors say that the very stones glowed with an inner light, and that the city contained wondrous arcane marvels" (*Elantris* 1). Like the gods of *Shadowfall* who are rooted to one location, in *Elantris*, there is a relationship to the individual to the city of Elantris, expressed through degree of power. "The farther one traveled from Elantris, the weaker the AonDor powers became" (277), signifying that location is also important for magic to exist. While the powers of AonDor are released through magical characters, knowledge of these letters is not enough to make one a wielder of magic (an Elantrian); the power of AonDor must come upon a person and they are then transformed:

> Yet, as magnificent as Elantris was its inhabitants were more so. Their hair a brilliant white, their skin an almost metallic silver, the Elantrians seemed to shine like the city itself. Legends claim that they were immortal, or at least nearly so. Their bodies healed quickly, and they were blessed with great strength, insight, and speed. They could perform magics with a bare wave of the hand; […]. They were divinities. (1)

These Elantrians, once humans, are thus elevated to a status of divinity due to The Shaod, powers of magic that have transformed their bodies. However, the prologue continues with a description of how the once beautiful city was struck by a curse, the Reod, and the once transformative powers of The Shaod converted these near-divine Elantrians into wretched creatures. The diminishment of the fantasyland occurs in the prologue of the novel before the narrative even begins, and it is up to the hero to restore and heal the diminished land.

It is later discovered that the broken landscape of Elantris is the direct result of the curse of Reod. Like many fantasy fictions, the magic in Elantris is dependent on a non-semiotic language, so that, if one is able to access the power of AonDor, then that person, by writing with Aons (the characters of the Aonic language) can alter the laws of the world. The revelation that the curse of Shaod is brought about through the broken land is uncovered when the hero Raoden realizes that the characters of Aon physically describe the landscape:

> He studied Aon after Aon, noticing other features of the landscape in their forms. Aon Eno, the character for water, included a wiggling line that matched the meanderings of the Aredel River. The character for wood – Aon Dii – included several circles that represented the southern forests. The Aons were maps of the land, each one a slightly different rendering of the same picture. Each one had the three basic lines – the coast line, the mountain line, and the dot for Lake Alonoe. (504)

All of these magical characters or letters must include the three basic lines describing the physical geography around Elantris (coast, mount, and lake) in order for the power of The Dor (the magic) to function properly. Initially, an earthquake is viewed as a physical result of the loss of magic in Elantris. But Raoden discovers that "the earthquake came just *before* the Reod" (507, original emphasis). With the formation of a large chasm caused by the earthquake, as the physical geography has changed, the characters of Aon are also unable to function until Raoden adds another line to the three basic lines, completing the previously fractured characters and thereby releasing the power of The Dor: "The Dor attacked with a roaring surge of power, and this time it hit no wall. It exploded through Raoden like a river. He gasped, basking in its power for just a moment. It burst free like a beast that had been kept trapped in a small space for

far too long. It almost seemed... joyful" (507). Note that an inanimate force, magic, is described in anthropomorphic language, being almost "joyful." The text exemplifies the connection that magic, a metaphysical force, has with the physical landscape, as the runic language describes the land itself. When the letters fail to describe the land properly, the magic becomes blocked, as if it is hitting a physical boundary wall. Correcting the runic language allows this power to release.

These examples suggest that power "flows" and that the resultant magic is a created through a connection between wholes:

> "Dor is the unseen power – it is in everything, but cannot be touched. It affects nothing, yet it controls everything. Why do rivers flow?"
>
> "Because the water is pulled downwards, just like everything else. The ice melts in the mountains, and it has a place to go."
>
> "Correct," Galladon said. "Now, a different question. What makes the water *want* to flow?"
>
> "I wasn't aware that it needed to."
>
> "It does, and the Dor is its motivation," Galladon said. (276, original emphasis)

Here again, the characters note that magic only "flows" because of will, it *wants* to flow – though inanimate, magic possesses a quality where it desires to fulfil its shape and purpose. Whereas in Clemen's *Shadowfall*, the fracturing of the land results in a magic that is divine, in Sanderson's *Elantris*, fracturing of the land results in a blockage of magic, transforming the divine immortal humans into monstrous near-dead creatures. There is a fracture in the network that results in a blockage that prevents magic from working. In contrast, in *Shadowfall* magic comes about *because* of the fracture that

results in an ethereal connection in a flow of power between different dimensional spaces or aspects of the self.

Fracturing is important in both examples: the fracturing between lands or dimensions creates holes or spaces for power to flow. Let me contrast *Elantris* and *Shadowfall* with Bujold's *Chalion* series, as, while the former are examples of fantasy texts with gods manifested in the physical world, Chalion is a good example of a text where the gods remain in the metaphysical world. Recall that in the *Chalion* universe, the five gods (Father, Mother, Daughter, Son, and Bastard) are not able to physically enter this plane of existence:

> Lord dy Cazaril claimed that the world of the spirit and the world of matter existed side by side, like two sides of a coin, or a wall; the gods were not far away in some other space, but in this very one, continuously, just around some strange corner of perception. A presence as pervasive and invisible as sunlight on skin, as though one stood naked and blindfolded in an unimaginable noon. (*Paladin of Souls* 85-86)

While the gods cannot enter the physical world, the gods' spiritual selves can sometimes interact with the characters through dream sequences or by inhabiting the body of a willing subject: "the goddess only entered the world by Cazaril renouncing his will on Her behalf" (*Curse of Chalion* 243). As the gods are required to follow the rules of the world, the gods are not able to enter the physical world without dire consequences. The trigger for the events in Bujold's series is when a drop of blood from a god enters into the physical world; "a drop of the Father's blood" (477), which was somehow "spilled, soiled" (466) into the world. *Chalion* imagines a world with the gods encompassing fantasyland as in a box structure (figure 4.5), and a drop of blood of the gods causes a generational curse across the land of Chalion. As I suggested in the first

chapter, that only a single drop of blood flowing into the physical world results in such an immense curse – one that impacts on an either nation for generations – suggests to the reader the impact of transgressing these boundaries. As I will depict with Clemen's *Shadowfall*, while the way the world is structured is different from that of Bujold's *Curse of Chalion*, both texts suggest the idea of an abnormal spirit flowing into the physical world which then causes disruption and disorder.
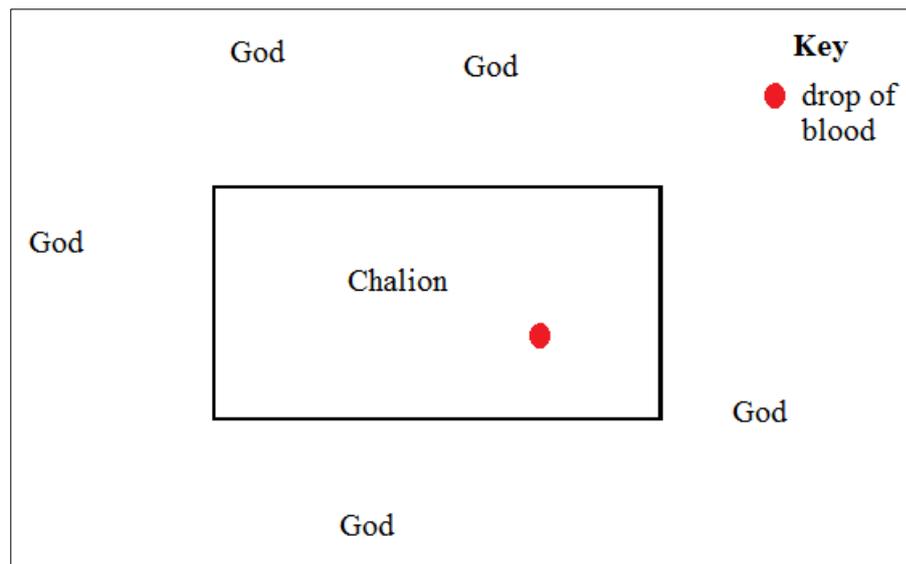


**FIGURE 4.5: DEPICTING FANTASYLAND IN BUJOLD'S *THE CURSE OF CHALION*.**

In Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, magic is described in motifs of "flow" or "channeling," and magic is identified as "the One Power," indicating a sense of wholeness and holiness: "'The One Power,' Moiraine was saying, 'comes from the True Source, the driving force of Creation, the force the Creator made to turn the Wheel of Time'" (*The Eye of the World* 168). This One Power is not abnormal to the fantasyland, as it has a hand in the creation of the fantasyland itself. The magic users, Aes Sedai, are able to touch this power by channeling the power through their bodies: "'the True Source cannot be used up, any more than the river can be used up by the wheel of a mill. The Source is the river; the Aes Sedai, the waterwheel'" (169). Thus, just as I described in the first chapter with Cazaril in Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*, the hero's body – or the body of any magic user – is able to channel the metaphysical entity

through themselves in order to express this power in the physical world. But in the *Wheel of Time*, prior to the beginning of the first book, a u-hero attempts to seal the Dark One (a Devil figure) into a metaphysical prison in order to remove his presence and influence from the world. Through this attempt, the male half of the magic becomes "corrupt" due to the touch of the Dark One on the flow of power:

> *Saidin*, the male half of the True Source, and *saidar*, the female half, work against each other and at the same time together to provide that force. *Saidin* [...] is fouled by the touch of the Dark One, like water with a thin slick of rancid oil floating on top. The water is still pure, but it cannot be touched without touching the foulness. (168, original emphasis)

There seem to be different layers of power, and to access Saidin one must penetrate the corrupted layer of abnormality on top of it. The power of The One Power is thus corrupted by an abnormal entity, the touch of the Dark One resulting in distortion to the metaphysical underpinning of fantasyland. Because of this corruption, slowly over generations, this prison begins to erode and break and the Dark One seeps back into fantasyland, unravelling its physical properties (expressed through the repetitive motif that The Wheel of Time is unravelling) and causing disorder (figure 4.6). The task of the hero Rand al'Thor is to re-seal the Dark One back into his prison, thereby removing his taint from the physical world.
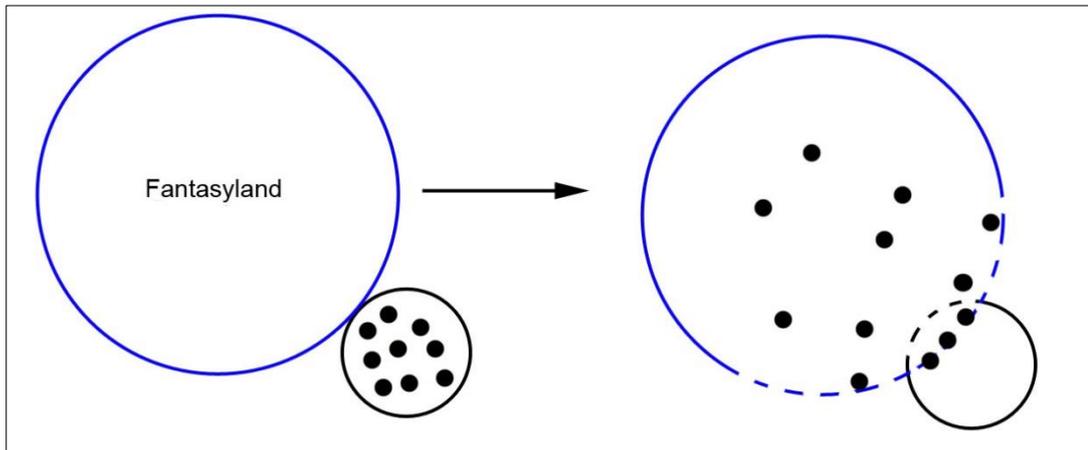
**FIGURE 4.6: DEPICTING FANTASYLAND IN JORDAN'S *WHEEL OF TIME*.**

While many fantasy novels incorporate some idea of metaphysical dimensions (often through the idea of the heavens and underworld which is likely symptomatic of the evolution from the epic), these pre-established other worlds are not true of every fantasy book. Yet, in these books that do not contain overt parallel systems, ideas of abnormal entities are still present. For example, in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy, which I will examine in the next chapter, the world and sentient life is created through the combination of the powers of Ruin (a metaphysical entity signifying chaos) and Preservation (signifying order). In this trilogy, magical powers arise from the consumption of natural metals which are later discovered to be part of the body of Ruin and Preservation. Magic arises from an act of communion with these metaphysical powers:

> *However, it is necessary to understand that when we said "body" we generally meant "power." As my mind has expanded, I've come to realize that objects and energy are actually composed of the very same things, and can change state from one to another. It makes perfect sense to me that the power of godhood would be manifest within the world in physical form. Ruin and Preservation were not nebulous abstractions. They were integral parts of existence. In a way, every object that existed*

*in the world was composed of their power.* (*The Hero of Ages*, 672,

original emphasis)

Ruin and Preservation are thus physical divinities that have taken part in the act of creation through their own bodies. And yet, their presence is still abnormal, as, once creation has been established their purpose in life is counterproductive to the progression of humanity: Ruin seeks to destroy all matter, while Preservation hopes to keep it stagnant. The divine entities, though once part of the physical world, are treated as entropic forces. Their removal corrects the balance of the world, temporarily restoring the fulcrum (figure 3.1). Though these divine entities might have been necessary to the establishment of fantasyland – both chaos and order is needed in order for life to occur – once life is created, this system of divinity must be replaced by another.

All of these examples demonstrate *the flow of a metaphysical entity* – one that is an abnormal substance that does not belong in fantasyland – into fantasyland *as the instigator* of "Wrongness: some small desiccating hint that the world has lost its wholeness" (Clute 26). These examples also depict magical powers as an expression of a relationship with another metaphysical entity – one that is normal to the fantasyland (but one that may become abnormal later). Something similar occurs in Clemen's *Shadowfall*. Although the broken bodies of the gods have fused themselves to the fantasyland creating a system of magic, much like a virus that has become part of a host body, they do not belong there. As they are abnormal to the fantasyland, and because these broken bodies are still connected to the other parts of their selves in the other dimensions, their presence in fantasyland causes the cracks and fractures to widen further. In the first page of *Shadowfall*, a naethryn (the shattered spirit of the divine that resides in the underworld) enters the world of Myrillia (the physical, human world): "It

has no form, no shape, no substance. [...] It glides up to one of those rare places where its existence overlaps into the world of substance. Few know of these moiety points. But they exist" (1). The naethryn is a metaphysical entity that does not belong in the physical world. Its action, that of killing the goddess Meeryn, results in the stimulus that launches the hero Tylar dy Noche on his journey as he is blamed for Meeryn's death. Near the end of the novel, the reader discovers that the provocation of the events in the book is motivated by other naethryn entities entering the physical world two centuries ago: "there were those among your people who used dark Grace to thin our world from yours. We broke through in tiny seepages. Enough to set a foothold here" (486). These naethryn spirits do not belong in Myrillia, but they are able to cross through and widen the cracks between the worlds because of the presence of their counterparts. The motif of crossing boundaries through fluidity is directly linked with the idea of fractures: these metaphysical entities are only able to cross the boundaries of the closed systems through cracks between these spaces. Thus, as I have demonstrated, fantasyland itself is a closed system that is prone to fractures which leads to a melding with parallel systems, one that results in an increase in imbalance and entropy.

Perhaps it is preposterous to question whether a fictional landscape operates similar to a real-world closed system. But, as I have suggested previously, fantasy is a logical system even if it is irrational in the real world. More importantly, this question of whether fantasy is open or closed seems to be a focus of much of the criticism surrounding the fantastic. For instance, Todorov's categorization of the fantastic, upon which much of current fantasy criticism is predicated, is dependent on how the reader through the hero *enters* the world of fantasy. The conception of entrance itself would indicate a doorway or boundary of sorts. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), Mendlesohn

uses this idea of boundaries to further differentiate subgenres of the fantastic, categorizing fantasy through the relation between the primary world ("our" world, or the "real" world), with the secondary world (the fantastic world). For example:

> A portal fantasy is simply a fantastic world entered through a portal. The classic portal fantasy is of course *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). Crucially, the fantastic is *on the other side* and does not "leak". Although individuals may cross both ways, the magic does not. [...] When we think of portal fantasies, we commonly assume that the portal is from "our" world to the fantastic, but the portal fantasy is about entry, transition, and negotiation. Much quest fantasy, for all that it builds the full secondary world, fits better with the portal fantasy. (xix, original emphasis)

Repeatedly Mendlesohn insists that fantasy in the portal quest narrative does not leak. She differentiates a portal-quest fantasy, "a fantastic world entered through a portal," from a fantasy that *does* leak, one which she labels as the liminal fantasy; this is where: "the point where we are invited to cross the threshold into the fantastic, *but choose not to do so*. The result is that the fantastic leaks back through the portal" (xxiii, original emphasis). However, as I have demonstrated above, not only does the "magic" seep from one world into the other, the plot of the quest itself is triggered by this leakage. Thus, identifying a quest fantasy as a movement *from* one world *to* another world is problematic, because all quest fantasies (or heroic epic fantasies) are triggered by the fluidity *between* boundaries.

Mendlesohn's portal fantasy is one in which either a hero enters a secondary fantasy world from a primary real world (like the children in Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) or the hero is already in a fantasy world, but their home is assumed

to be in an isolated environment and the hero leaves this isolation to enter the wider world (such as when Frodo Baggins leaves the Shire in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy). As Adam Roberts makes note of in his review of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, "Faulty Cartography" (2008), the Shire is not isolated from the rest of Middle-Earth:

> In an intriguing move, she then takes as paradigmatic not the obvious *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (although Narnia is discussed) but rather *The Lord of the Rings*, on the grounds that "Frodo moves from a small, safe, and *understood* world into the wild, unfamiliar world of Middle-Earth" (2). [...] but one of the striking things about it is that the border between the Shire and the rest of Middle Earth *leaks all the time*: [...]. Indeed, it occurred to me that the borderline between mundane and fantastical is porous in most of the examples of portal fantasies with which Mendlesohn deals. (511, original emphasis)

The Shire, like all parts of fantasyland, is holistically connected to Middle-Earth. It is not isolated. Recall Clute's first phase of fantasy: "Wrongness: some small desiccating hint that the world has lost its wholeness: the Nazgûl enter the Shire" (26). His example of the Nazgûl entering the Shire demonstrates the fluidity of the boundary. As well, the idea that "the world has lost its wholeness" would suggest that the world would function together holistically and that any aspect of wrongness would be reflected in all areas of the land through this breakage. When the hobbits return to the Shire after their journey, they discover that the war in Middle Earth has effected the Shire as well. Likewise, in the beginning of *Shadowfall* a character observes the Wrongness across the entire land of Myrillia: "Strangeness abounds across all the lands" (45). This Wrongness has spread to all of Myrillia, even to its most isolated sections, and thus a quest fantasy *cannot* be

defined by a hero's movement *into* the fantastic world, as fantasyland is one holistic world.

Mendlesohn's portal world is one in which the hero enters a fantasy world, thus suggesting that the hero is abnormal to fantasyland themselves. This is rarely the case. Often the epic fantasy hero is frequently removed from their home for various reasons prior to the events of the novel. In Clemen's *Shadowfall* the godchild Dart is brought out from the Hinterland and hidden at a children's school. In Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, Rand al'Thor is orphaned as a baby and adopted by another family who moves him elsewhere. Even when they are not relocated from their homes as a child, the hero may be a traveller figure who is made to leave their home, as is the case with Tylar in *Shadowfall*. The epic form necessitates a journey in order for a hero to undergo spiritual transcendence. But the journey also indicates that the hero's movement across fantasyland as *a return to the world they belong to*. The hero is thus not leaving a primary world and entering a secondary world, the *hero is part of both worlds*, as their journey leads to contact with different communities (as I described in the previous chapter), all of which accept the hero as one of their own.

In addition, the hero is often seen as inextricably part of fantasyland, their connection to fantasyland seen through their ability to access the inherent magical properties of it. For instance, the prophecies of the Dragon in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series states that: "for the land is one with the Dragon Reborn, and he one with the land" (Jordan, *Crown of Swords* i). In "Quest Fantasies" (2012), W. A. Senior argues that: "As in the American Western, the landscape functions as a character, here endowed with animate traits as the fantasy world itself seeks to heal the rift that threatens its destruction" (190). To expand on this premise, as the fantasyland seeks to heal itself, it does so in the form of the hero. As I will argue throughout the remainder of this chapter,

the hero embodies fantasyland themselves, and is thus *not abnormal to it, but is intrinsic to it*. Rather than the hero entering into the world of fantasy, it is the hero themselves that functions as a portal site, acting as a mediator between two world systems.

**The Hero as Portal**

Fantasyland, as I have demonstrated above, is a fractured system that allows entities to enter from other parallel systems. When this happens, the entropy of both systems is higher than the entropy of each individual system. How then is entropy of the individual system of fantasyland reversed and restored once the boundaries become fractured and open? Hayles summarizes a famous argument by James Clerk Maxwell who, in *Theory of Heat* (1871) describes an entropic system where a microscopic being is able to separate out molecules and in doing so is able to decrease the system's entropy:

> If we conceive a being whose faculties are so sharpened that he can follow every molecule in its course, such a being, whose attributes are still as essentially finite as our own, would be able to do what is impossible to us. […] He will thus, without expenditure of work, raise the temperature of *B* and lower that of *A*, in contradiction to the second law of thermodynamics. (Maxwell quoted in Hayles 42).

Maxwell describes a being who is able to lower the entropy of a combined system by separating molecules back into their original systems. This intelligent being that is able to reverse entropy becomes known as Maxwell's Demon, although, as Hayles notes, Maxwell himself never uses the term "demon" to discuss his "being." But Hayles continues:

Like guardians of portals to other realms in ancient myths, the demon is a liminal figure who stands at a threshold that separates not just slow molecules from fast but an ordered world of will from the disordered world of chaos. On one side is a universe fashioned by divine intervention, created for man and responsive to his will; on the other is the inhuman force of increasing entropy, indifferent to man and uncontrollable by human will. (43)

Note Hayles' idea that Maxwell's Demon "is a liminal figure who stands at a threshold" to separate entities of disorder back into their proper place of divine and human order. The liminal is a transitional border space, deriving from of the Latin word for "threshold." Extrapolating these ideas to fantasy fiction, Maxwell's Demon can be seen in the figure of the epic fantasy hero: the hero is thus a liminal figure who stands at the threshold of fantasyland separating out entities that are abnormal to fantasyland back into its proper positioning (figure 4.7).
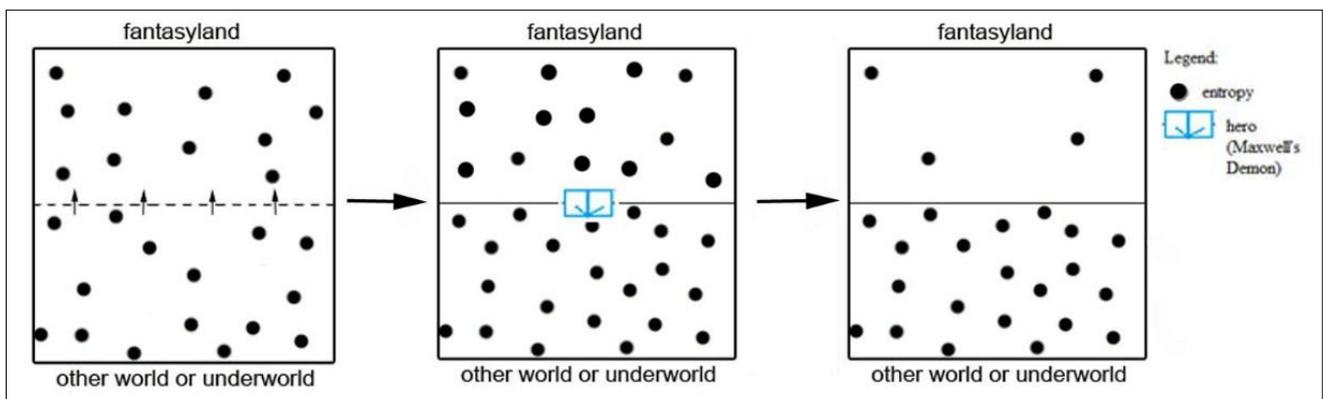


FIGURE 4.7: THE HERO AS MAXWELL'S DEMON BETWEEN PARALLEL SYSTEMS.

The idea of the epic hero as a liminal figure has its roots in the mythological hero. In *The Epic Hero* (2000) Miller identifies that the mythological hero is always connected to liminality, a transitional borderland space:

The border is very often a transitional or liminal topos between the human, profane world and a supernatural zone or Otherworld; and one

obsession of the hero [is] to find and penetrate into threatening or

unknown places and terrains, [...]. The place of the hero on the border is

thus almost a cliché: liminality is all but a given. (147-148)

Instead of a hero *entering* a fantasy world into which they are not at home, instead, as

the place of the mythological hero is on the border, so too is that of the epic fantasy

hero who mediates the transitional space between two zones.

The liminal space is also defined as a *religious* transitional space: "Of or relating

to a transitional or intermediate state between culturally defined stages of a person's

life, esp. as marked by a ritual or rite of passage; characterized by liminality

(liminality *n.*)" (*OED*). The liminal space is an intermediary between two states, and,

especially in the epic, this liminal is characterized by ritual and rites of passage. In *The

Golden Bough* (1922), James Frazer indicates that the function of the King was also a

messianic religious function, in that he was often ceremonially offered up for sacrifice

for the good of his people:

This combination of priestly functions with royal authority is familiar to

everyone (n.p.);

Kings were revered, in many cases not merely as priests, that is, as

intercessors between man and god, but as themselves gods, able to

bestow upon their subjects and worshippers those blessings which are

commonly supposed to be beyond the reach of mortals. (n.p.)

In heroic epic fantasy, the hero takes the place of this King, who voluntarily sacrifices

themselves in order to function as "intercessors between man and god."

As the fractures in the world create spaces for flow, this allows enough

movement for divinity to manifest enough to set pawns (their chosen heroes) in motion

or to act themselves through a hero as avatar. Recall Campbell's argument in *The Hero*

*with a Thousand Faces* (1949) that: "[t]he cosmogonic cycle is now to be carried forward, therefore, not by the gods, who have become invisible, but by the heroes, more or less human in character, through whom the world destiny is realized" (271). In Bujold's *Curse of Chalion*, the divine is able to flow into the physical world through the hero's body – possessing him as an avatar – in order to heal the land (by drawing in the drop of blood that was spilled). In *Shadowfall*, Tylar dy Noche is treated as both pawn and avatar. The other characters occasionally refer to Tylar as a discarded pawn, one that was used and abandoned prior to the events of the novel. His movement in fantasyland as an emerging hero suggests that "even a broken pawn can arise again and shake the board" (*Shadowfall* 106). When Tylar comes across the dying goddess Meeryn, she heals his physically broken body, and the other characters infer that: "Meeryn blessed [him] for some reason, healed [him] with the last of her Grace. She must have championed [him] for some purpose" (45). Tylar discovers that Meeryn had hidden a part of herself – the part that connects to the naethryn half – in his own body, re-building his broken body in order to make "a cage out of [his] healthy bones, requiring only one crack, one broken bone, to set [the naethryn spirit] free" (83). Thus, while she dies on Myrillia, the connection between her other entities still persist through Tylar's own body as: "A conduit for the naether-spawn, the naethryn undergod" (250). Tylar functions as Meeryn's avatar, taking on her connection to her other ethereal parts – a connection that grants him the qualities of a god as it is this connection that grants graces in the blood: "Was it all she could do? Some way to continue her own battle in this war? Had she marked Tylar as her avatar and set him loose with a piece of herself?" (452). Tylar comes to the conclusion that Meeryn marked him as her personal avatar in the physical world as she can no longer fulfil the duty herself. By acting as an avatar or pawn of a god, instead of simply *entering fantasyland through a doorway*, the epic

fantasy hero often *functions as a doorway themselves*, either anchoring the divine spirit long enough for them to heal the world through the hero, or to take on the powers of divinity in order to fulfil the role themselves.

Because of their positioning as a pawn or avatar of a metaphysical divinity in the physical world, the conception of the hero's body is particularly significant. The epic fantasy hero is often a humble one and the physical description may emphasize his ordinariness, as is the case with the hero Garion in David and Leigh Eddings' *Belgariad* series: "He was so *ordinary*. He was a peasant, a scullion, a nobody. He was a nice enough boy, certainly, with rather plain, sandy hair […]. He had a nice enough face – in a plain sort of way" (*Magician's Gambit* 12, original emphasis). Other fantasy heroes might be small in stature (such as Frodo Baggins in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*), or are often children on the cusps of adolescence (such as the Pevensies in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), or might be of old age or physically disfigured.

The central hero of *Shadowfall* is notable for having a physically broken body. Clemens makes a point to describe Tylar as a figure physically opposite to a knight:

> [T]he empty vessel left behind had been broken by a half decade spent in the slave rings of Trik. His sword arm was a callused club, numb from the elbow down. His legs had fared no better – one knee was a knot of locked bone from an old hammer blow, the other slow and painful. Even his back was crooked, tightened by scars from the whip.
>
> He was no knight.
>
> Not any longer. (6)

Note the motif of the "empty vessel" that is paired alongside the broken body of the knight. Bujold describes Cazaril similarly as a disabled knight: "His fingers didn't really straighten right, and he found himself waving a claw. The chill air bit his swollen

joints" (*Curse of Chalion* 3). Both authors emphasize that their heroes are unable to carry a sword, like a proper knight of the romance-quest genre. Like Tylar, Cazaril is also a former captain who was sold to the slave trade, indicating their fall from grace. The physical descriptions accentuate this fall: "His back, the ropy red mess of scars piled one across another so thickly as to leave no untouched skin between, legacy of the last flogging in the Roknari galley-masters had given him" (*Curse of Chalion* 12). In post-1990 fantasy fiction, there seems to be an emerging trend in epic fantasy of depicting protagonists that are damaged, physically or spiritually. While the "fallen hero" has often been a part of the adventure-mode, more recently, along with spiritual fall, authors have started depicting this fall in a more overt, physical way.

Why do these fantasy authors depict heroes that are damaged? The broken hero, I would argue, is a structural necessity of the heroic fantasy plot. To begin with, the damaged hero's body seems to be an externalization of their spirit. The first hero of *Shadowfall*, Tylar, is often depicted as morally grey, a fallen and disgraced knight who has dabbled on the edges of the underworld society. In *Elantris*, while Raoden does not suffer a loss of faith in quite the same way as Tylar or Cazaril does, as the localized hero does not need to fall as dramatically as the epic hero, Raoden's "fall" to the shadow side is still necessary in order for him to fully realize his potential as the future king. Dart, the second hero of *Shadowfall*, a girl of age thirteen, is brutally raped and spends much of the novel contemplating how she is physically and spiritually unclean:

> [S]he pushed out her hands, palms up, and bowed her brow to her forearms in the posture of supplication. As she did so, she was acutely aware of the sting of her abraded hands. It was shameful to offer such soiled palms, but then again, it was somehow fitting, considering the corruption of her body and spirit. (*Shadowfall* 71-72)

Like Dart's expression of shame, the physical deformities of Tylar and Cazaril seem to be an externalization of their "spirit." They feel that they are broken in some way.

But along with being an externalization of their fallen spirit, the broken hero comes about because it is their very brokenness that allows their body to function as a portal site for the metaphysical into the physical world. In the first chapter I argued that the hero has a shape to their soul and that the hero can choose whether or not to fulfil the function of this design. While the soul is not physical, the body is the container, the mediator between the physical and spiritual world. In *Shadowfall*, at the moment when Meeryn's naethryn spirit enters Tylar's body, Tylar finds himself poised between two boundaries: "Where a moment ago he had stood at the edge of a bottomless abyss, now he hung over the same. But as he spun, he recognizes his mistake. There was not one abyss, but *two* – one above and one below" (18, original emphasis). Tylar's body functions as a site of merger between two abysses. Thus, the body of the hero is pertinent, especially in *Shadowfall*, as its shape may determine how the hero fulfils the function of their design. When Meeryn heals Tylar's broken body so that he can function as her hero or "knight" after she has departed the world, the narration in *Shadowfall* echoes that of *Curse of Chalion*: "Then the water finally emptied from the broken vessel that was his body. Tylar collapsed in on himself, spent and drained. The momentary blessing was gone" (*Shadowfall* 19). Repeatedly the language in these texts evokes the idea of a vessel – the spirit of the divine enters Tylar's "broken vessel," just as Cazaril's body functions as a cup in *Chalion*. In both examples, the vessel, the body that contains the spirit of the divine, is described as broken. Prior to the divine spirit entering his body, Tylar describes his body as an "empty vessel" (6). The broken body of Tylar is reformed and healed only when the goddess Meeryn ties her naethryn spirit

to his body, allowing her spirit to flow into Tylar's body, using it as a container.[39] If Tylar desires to release the naethryn spirit into the physical world of Myrillia, then Tylar's body *must* be broken again in order to allow a fracture that would allow the spirit to leak out: "It was as if she had made a cage out of your healthy bones, requiring only one crack, one broken bone, to set it free" (94). Tylar's physical body is a site of fracture between the physical world and the metaphysical world. Similarly, in *The Curse of Chalion*, Cazaril is required to die three times "for the practice" (468) in order to be capable enough to accept a metaphysical spirit to enter the physical world through his body. The hero is broken because it is the *break* in their body that allows the metaphysical entity to pass through him into the physical world.

The broken hero comes about because they are representative of the entropy of fantasy land. As Attebery argues in "Fantasy as an Anti-Utopian Mode" (1986): "Fantasy explores inward, examining the fears and ideals of the individual, projecting interior forces onto a symbolic landscape and spreading parts of a personality among character good and evil, wise and foolish" (6). This expression of the landscape is also

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[39] An important facet is indicated by the use of the words "cup" and "vessel" – these words (perhaps especially in Christianity) would indicate a female body. But here there is an inversion of the gender type, with the male body functioning as a vessel to hold the spirit of a female divinity. As often land is gendered as well – the notion of Mother Earth indicating a fertile female landscape – the healing of the land via the male body may indicate a renewal of fertility, and also evokes the Osiris myth of the scattering of the broken male body inseminating the female landscape. The language of the "cup" and "vessel" evokes a wider theological connection with Christianity, but whereas Bujold's Christian background can be read in the *Chalion* series, Clemen's *Shadowfall* depicts subversive Christian motifs. Note however that the heroic epic fantasy genre as a whole should not be read as a Christian-genre, as the implications of the text would be dependent on the particular attitude and religious backgrounds of individual authors.

represented in the body of the characters. And thus we have a broken hero who must fall before they can ascend and heal fantasyland. Attebery further declares that two themes of fantasy fiction are often combined:

> Fantasy may be turned to many ends, but it is most successful when it recounts two sorts of progressions. One is the movement from immaturity to maturity: the coming of age or the acquiring of wisdom. This is the principal theme of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, of George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and *Lilth,* and of Lloyd Alexander's Chronicles of Prydain. The other is the healing of an ailing land or society, what might be called the Fisher King motif. MacDonald evokes this theme in *The Princess and Curdie*, Le Guin develops it in *The Farthest Shore*, and Tolkien weaves it among the many strands of *The Lord of the Rings*. Many stories combine the two themes: Frodo's growth is tied to his role as savior. (7-8)

The two paths – the healing of the hero and the healing of the land – are often combined into one. The arc of the hero is restoration, recuperation, redemption; the healing of the damaged hero is part of the broader trajectory of the hero's journey. Initially the divine is embedded in fantasyland itself. Once this entity becomes abnormal to fantasyland, as the hero comes to replace the divinity (as I will explain below), the divine's relationship with the land becomes replaced with the hero, who then, in turn, becomes representative of the broken land. Like the Fisher King motif, healing the hero also results in healing the land. This is especially true for those fantasies that depict a broken hero but as the broken hero is not always obvious to the reader (they might not be physically disabled like my examples of Cazaril and Tylar), a spiritual growth (often following a spiritual fall) might take its place. The redemption and healing of the hero's body is thus linked

with a spiritual growth. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell identifies that: "the initiated warrior is an agent of the divine will; his training is not only in manual but also in spiritual skills" (72). As an agent of divinity, the hero's journey must contain a metaphysical development alongside a physical transformation.

## From Romance to Myth

Through the act of healing, both hero and fantasyland undergo a transcendence where they become something "more." The flow of the naethryn spirit into Tylar's body further unravels Tylar's essence: "*I am undone*, he thought, knowing it to be true" (18). But by being "undone", Tylar's body is crafted into something new, a body that is able to contained a divine essence and become immortal itself. Thus these heroes must break – be undone – in order to be reformed into something new – *not* in the normative body – but something *more*: the hero's body – one that is capable of restoring and healing a broken fantasyland. The hero can only restore and heal fantasyland by functioning as a portal – either allowing a metaphysical entity to enter through their body to retrieve the abnormal from the physical world or more often, by performing the task of expelling the abnormal themselves. This action is tied to the hero's messianic function where the hero's sacrifice allows them to fulfil the necessary role of dispelling the abnormal out of fantasyland and to re-establish the boundaries. In this moment, the hero achieves transcendence, a process where the hero embodies or replaces the divine or metaphysical spirit.

Through this transcendence, the epic fantasy hero moves from the hero of romance – a potential state – to the mythic hero – a realized state. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) Frye differentiates modes of fiction by the hero's power of relation to the environment and with other humans:

> 1. If superior in kind both to other men and to the environment of other
> men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth
> in the common sense of a story about a god. […]
>
> 2. If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is
> the typical hero of romance. (33)

Thus I argue that the epic fantasy hero *moves from the romance hero to the mythic hero*, with *the romantic hero reflected in the broken landscape* and *the mythic hero arising from a healed landscape*. Miller suggests something similar for the mythological hero: "the mythological epic and its archetypical thematic elevates the hero, who is made the shadowy partner or the earthly avatar of divinity, to an awesome height" (31). Through the hero's journey, the hero is *elevated* through their status as the "shadowy partner or the earthly" of the divinity. There is a movement upward as the hero comes closer to the divine entity that they represent. Frye also indicates that there is also a movement between the five modes of fiction that he identifies: "Our five modes evidently go around in a circle" (42). While Frye is discussing the movement of the modes from one text to another, it is not unfeasible that a single work of text can move from one mode to the other. Frye himself states that SF is "a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency to myth" (49). Consequently I assert that the trajectory of a single work of heroic epic fantasy fiction is one that moves from romance to myth. This movement is similar to the movement of the heroic to the epic in figure 0.1, which I discussed in the introductory chapter. As the hero's powers becomes greater in an ever-expanding cosmos, the fantasy hero moves from the hero of romance – the localized hero – to the hero of myth – the epic hero. *Both* local and epic hero begins as romantic hero, reflected in the broken landscape, but the epic hero, as they achieve transcendence, arises from the healed landscape as a mythic hero.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, this transcendence comes about due to the hero's role as a messianic figure. In Bujold's *Curse of Chalion*, for instance, Cazaril is only able to re-establish balance in the world after he has died. Recall that: "Perhaps heaven was not a place, but merely an angle of view, a vantage, a perspective. *And at the moment of death, we slide through altogether. Losing our anchor in matter, gaining... what?* Death ripped a hole between the worlds" (457-458, original emphasis). Again, the excerpt depicts the idea of crossing boundaries through a broken fragment of the world, but here this broken boundary is directly connected to the moment of death. This moment of death is what allows the epic fantasy hero to gain transcendence and cross into other world. Campbell describes this moment as The Belly of the Whale:

> The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died. (74)

In *Shadowfall* and *Curse of Chalion*, the heroes experience the actual moment of death. They have died or are "undone" (*Shadowfall* 18). But, the epic fantasy hero, like the mythological hero, *is reborn*: "passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation. […] But here, instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again" (Campbell 77). In heroic epic fantasy, the hero's messianic function, the voluntary sacrifice that the hero makes for their community, would indicate that through this act of dying, the hero is reaching transcendence where he becomes one with god. Recall Bakhtin's argument that I noted in the first chapter: "The series of adventures that the hero undergoes does not result in a simple affirmation

of his identity, but rather in the construction of a new image of the hero, a man who is now purified and reborn" (117). The hero may become a saint (like in Bujold) or a god (Clemens), or perhaps something in between, but, nonetheless, something that is clearly beyond even the most distinguished human, as the hero fulfils their potential of Hero.

Through this moment of transcendence, the hero is able to reverse the entropy of fantasyland as the hero removes the damaging influences of the abnormal entropic entity. Sometimes this act necessitates that the hero kills a divine or immense metaphysical entity. There is an element of sacrifice in this as well, with a lineage back to a harvest or corn god that must be sacrificed in order for there to be a renewal of the land – that is, for spring to come. For example, in *The Golden Bough*, Frazer relates the myth of Osiris: "a personification of the great yearly vicissitudes of nature, especially of the corn" (n.p.). When the Egyptian god Osiris is murdered, his body is cut into pieces and scattered across the land. His wife Isis finds his broken body and restores it in order to bear an heir. The fertility and healing of the land (represented by spring) is the other side of the coin that represents brokenness (impotence). This connection is seen in the cyclical movement of nature and the seasons, represented by nature-myths, as Frye asserts:

> The fundamental form of process is cyclical movement, the alternation of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death which is the rhythm of process. [...] Thus: 1. In the divine world the central process or movement is that of the death and rebirth, or the disappearance and return, or the incarnation and withdrawal, of a god. (Frye 158)

The normal gods have already removed themselves from the world; recall that they are "invisible" (Campbell 271) – but for those gods that are active and manifest in the physical world, they need to *be* removed, as they no longer belong in that world.

The removal of this divine force necessitates that a hero or another protagonist takes their place. In the final pages of *Shadowfall*, Tylar dy Noche realizes that he "had no choice. At the end, the godslayer had become a god" (498). At the climactic moment of the novel, the hero Tylar kills the u-hero god and takes his place, his heroic potential fulfilled as he becomes a god himself. Note that the hero's transcendence following the removal and subsequent replacement of the divine or abnormal entity usually occurs in the climactic moment of the series, rather than in the first novel, as happens in *Shadowfall*. It is likely that the climactic moment of this unfinished trilogy will result in an even larger usurping of the divine order, as the hundred settled gods and the numerous hinterland gods will probably be removed entirely from the fantasyland, rather than just the one u-hero god. The destruction and consequent replacement of the abnormal entity may take several novels or series. In Eddings' series, the abnormal god is destroyed in the first series (*Belgariad)*, and is only replaced in the sequel series (*Malloreon*). In this series, a new hero, Eriond, is required to sacrifice himself – this time, by leaving behind human existence and becoming a god – in order to fill the vacuum left by the death of the god slain in the first series, along with the removal of the pantheon from that world. The other gods in the pantheon depart for other worlds, leaving Eriond in charge of the current planet with the charge of uniting all of the fractured cults and religions:

> "You'll probably live long enough to see the day when Eriond is the God of the whole world. That's what was intended from the beginning."
>
> [...] What happens to the other Gods then? Aldur and the rest of them?"
>
> "They'll move on. They've finished with what they came here to do, and there are many, many other worlds in the universe?"
>
> "What about UL? Will he leave, too?"

> "UL doesn't leave any place, Garion. He's everywhere." (*The Seeress of Kell* 303-304)

Note that UL, the father of all the gods (along with the universe, who is their mother) does not depart the world, because the "ultimate" creator is infused in all parts of this holistic world, but that the other gods are forced to leave, to become "invisible" and move on to another world that requires their presence. The same resolution occurs in Sanderson's *Mistborn* series (2006-present). The first book ends with the death and destruction of the u-hero "god", who is not replaced until the conclusion of the third novel of the trilogy and the metaphysical entities are also removed. Finally, at the conclusion, one of the heroes must step forward and take their place as a new god, leaving behind his human existence, as Eriond does in *The Malloreon*, in order to fill the vacuum left by the removal of these gods.

The act of killing a god (or to a lesser extent, a king) is the ultimate transgression of boundary; by the act of deicide or regicide, the hero replaces the god or king, usually with themselves. If the hero kills a king, then another must take his place. If the hero kills the god, then again, a new god must arise. The hero's transcendence comes about because the hero has plummeted to the depths and slayed an awesome figure. When Nietzsche famously proclaims that "god is dead", he continues:

> Is the magnitude of this deed [of killing god] not too great for us? *Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?* There was never a greater deed - and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now! (*The Gay Science* 181, my emphasis)

As the madman in Nietzsche notes, a new history, a greater history, is born after the death of god: a new pattern is established.

The replacement of the god with a new one would indicate a pattern of cyclicality. Clute's fourth phase, "Return," also suggests cyclicality to the progression of the fantasy story. These ideas of the cyclicality of fantasy are expressed consciously in fantasy texts. For example, in Croggon's *The Gift*, when the elemental (a fairy queen) Ardina fears the end for her people, the hero Maerad responds:

> "Say not an end. […] Say rather another beginning."
>
> "Perhaps," said Ardina. "But an ending, nevertheless. (305)

As Campbell asserts, "The basic principle of all mythology is this of *the beginning in the end*" (231, my emphasis) – and vice versa of course. The death of a king or a god indicates the end of one type of social order and the beginning of something new. The citizens of this new fantasyland (if they have survived the revolution) have a chance to re-build their society in a wholly new way. The healing of fantasyland does not indicate a simple *reversal* of the forces of entropy, instead a new cycle is created, similar to the one before, and yet still different. The next chapter will examine these cycles of repetition in greater detail, suggesting an element of chaos in the cycle.

**Chapter 5 – Perfect Epic Empires: Heroes as Agents of Change in a Chaotic**

**Cycle as Seen in Brandon Sanderson's *Hero of Ages***

*Kelsier had heard stories.*

*He had heard whispers of times when once, long ago, the sun had not been red. [...]*

*Those days, however, were nearly forgotten. Even the legends were growing vague.*

— Brandon Sanderson, *Mistborn: The Final Empire* 5

Often in heroic epic fantasy fiction the narration will depict an idea of an Edenic time that takes place prior to the events of the novel. A nostalgia of a lost past is in fact part of the epic tradition, as Bakhtin indicates in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975): "The world of the epic is the national heroic past: it is a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (13). Likewise in heroic epic fantasy heroes are described as stronger, more powerful, more heroic in these earlier times, in the "ages of legends" – a time period depicted within the fantasy text through the use of excerpts and references to mythologies, histories, religious texts, and prophecies. In Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008) the characters note that the mistborns (magic users) were more powerful in earlier ages because the power gifted by a divinity (magical abilities granted to them by the consumption of the divine's body) was more concentrated in these first mistborns. In the sequel *Alloy of Law* (2011), which is set three hundred years later, this pattern continues as the characters note that the heroes of legend – those characters from the first trilogy – are more powerful than can be found at this time. It seems that the society of the current age always imagines the world of the past as a stronger, and thus a more blissful, one. But the Edenic past also necessitates the idea of

a "fall." A near-apocalyptic event – usually a massive battle on the world or metaphysical scale – is a physical trigger of the fall, as is described in the inner histories of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Eddings' *Belgariad* series, Clemens' *Banned and the Banish* series, Farland's *Runelords* series, and in countless other novels. As I identified previously, this fall is almost always connected to the conception of a "breaking," the thinning of the boundary walls of fantasyland, making it incomplete and un-whole.

The idea of an idyllic past followed by a fall aligns with the entropy in fantasyland that I outlined in the previous chapter. Fantasyland begins in a state of high order and peace but then deteriorates. Clute's last phase of fantasy, that of "Return," ("Fantastika in the World Storm" 26) suggests a conclusion to the heroic epic fantasy plotline that is *cyclical*, of returning to this lost Edenic state. Mathews in *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997) likewise asserts that: "time is not seen as linear or progressive but as cyclical. The reader witnesses the ending of one age *and* the beginning of a new one" (81, original emphasis). As I identified previously, the function of the hero is a messianic function, where their sacrifice for humanity will result in the world being "saved." However, though the world is saved, which may indicate that the world has returned to this Edenic state, messianic time is generally *linear*, depicting a progression to the "kingdom of heaven" following an apocalyptic battle. A writer following the Judeo-Christian tradition may impose the kingdom of heaven as the final realized state, rather than suggesting that the world will fall again. As I suggested previously, heroic epic fantasy fiction, in contrast, merges linear messianic time with a cyclical pattern of eternal recurrence that is found in other cultural traditions.

As fantasy *is* cyclical, the conclusion of fantasy achieves a state that is not quite utopic. In "Fantasy as an Anti-Utopian Mode" (1986), Attebery concludes that fantasy fiction is distinct from utopic fiction[40]:

> In fantasy, the ideal world is one in which the individual can achieve heroic status. In utopia, the ideal is a world in which no one need be a hero. Fantasy depends on its dangers and its villains, its eternal struggle between light and shadow. Utopia attempts to arrange the light so as to eliminate the shadows. In a fantasy, the good is a goal never reached but always visible. The archetype involved in both modes is the earthly paradise. (6)

Fantasy is a *constant struggle* to achieve a utopia – a utopia that can never be reached. Consequently, the hero of epic fantasy fiction can only return the world to an Edenic or Utopic state for a flickering moment. In fact, the idea of a perfect static existence is

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[40] In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), Darko Suvin indicates that the conception of utopia, following Ernst Bloch's philosophy, is concerned with "any overstepping of the boundaries given to man, hence a quality inherent in all creative thought and action" (39). As I have discussed throughout this thesis, crossing boundaries and borders is an essential structure of the fantasy genre. Ascertaining the relationship between fantasy fiction and utopia fiction is important to the study of fantastika genres, especially as many SF scholars have argued the relationship between utopic fiction and SF, whether they are distinct literatures or if utopic fiction is a subsect of SF fiction. Suvin concludes that:

> Strictly and precisely speaking, utopia is not a genre but the *sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*. Paradoxically, it can be seen as such only now that SF has expanded into its modern phase, "looking backward" from its englobing of utopia. [...] conversely, SF is at the same time wider than and at least collaterally descended from utopia; it is, if not a daughter, yet a niece of utopia. (61, original emphasis)

Thus by identifying fantasy as an anti-utopia, this classification not only draws comparison to utopic fiction, but to SF as well.

often found to be problematic in utopian theory, as Lyman Tower Sargent describes in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994): "the words *perfect* and *perfection*, with their suggestion of completed, finish, static, and unchanging, were frequently used, and the issue of perfection, as has already been mentioned, still bedevils scholarship" (21, original emphasis). A utopia that achieves perfection is not possible, as perfection itself is not a desirable state.

The reason utopic fiction is distinct from fantasy fiction is because of this struggle and search for perfection. Thus, in "Fantasy as an Anti-Utopian Mode" Attebery concludes:

> It may not be obvious why such themes are incompatible with utopian thought. The idea of restoring the world, in particular, might seem to lend itself to the presentation of a perfected society from which evil and injustice are expelled by the exertions of a hero. But healing a land is not the same as perfecting it. In a fantasy, the well-being of an individual or of a land (and in fantasy the two are ultimately inseparable) is expressed as a matter of being in harmony with nature. Just as nature nowhere demonstrates perfection – try to find a peony without ants or a truly flawless diamond – yet everywhere inspires the thought of it, fantasy likewise invites us to relish the brief and imperfect for its revelation of timeless beauties. (8)

While it is possible to *heal* fantasyland from its broken state, it is unlikely that the fantasyland will be *returned* to its previously unblemished condition and, more importantly, even if it *is* possible to return fantasyland to an Edenic state, once this state is reached fantasyland would begin to deteriorate immediately due to entropy. A stable Edenic state – one that is static – is not possible.

Thus, instead of returning the world to an Edenic state, I assert that the coming of the hero allows society to move forward in time, *past* the static existence in order to progress into the future. While fantasyland may reach an Elysium state instead, this state is only temporary. In fantasy fiction, the kingdom of heaven is rarely the last realized state, as the texts allow for further progression. This idea of progressing into the future is similar to different political interpretations of utopia. Darko Suvin views utopia as degrees of perfection, as "more perfect" than our society but *not* an "absolutely perfect place" ("Degrees of Kinship" 36); Ernst Bloch perceives utopias as a dynamic quality, as utopia that are yet to be, the "Not-Yet-Conscious, Not-Yet-Become" (*The Principle of Hope* 129); Lyman Tower Sargent brackets off the idea of perfection in utopia as something that opposes a totalitarian static state ("The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" 1994). These perspectives of utopia view it *not* as a static existent, but instead a progressive one, where constant change will allow for a better future. In *The Image of the Future* (1973) Frederik Polak argues that: "Social change will be viewed as a push-pull process in which a society is at once pulled forward by its own magnetic images of an idealized future and pushed from behind by its realized past" (1). Society's idealistic or realistic image of the future in the present affects the outcome of the actual future. Polak continues:

> Poised on the dividing line between past and future is man, the unique bearer and transformer of culture. [...] His mental capacity to categorize and reorder reality within the self (present reality) and in relation to perceptions of the not-self (the Other) enable him to be a citizen of two worlds: the present and the imagined. (1)

This conceptualization of a utopia for the future is similar to the premise I outlined in the first chapter: that is, the hero must always function as if every choice is made

through free will, and, in this way, the hero chooses a path in the crossroads of time (figure 1.2) "poised on the dividing line between past and man", as they navigate past narrative bifurcation points. The hero is thus a "transformer of culture," bridging the current disintegrating fantasyland with the image of a re-unified healed fantasyland.

Previously I noted that Prigogine and Stengers link this bifurcation point to the emergence of a self-organizing system. In *Order out of Chaos* (1984) they describe how entropy results in a creation of new structures:

> We now know that far from equilibrium, new types of structures may originate spontaneously. In far-from-equilibrium conditions we may have transformation from disorder, from thermal chaos, into order. New dynamic states of matter may originate, states that reflect the interaction of a given system with its surroundings. We have called these new structures *dissipative structures* to emphasize the constructive role of dissipative processes in their formation. (12, original emphasis)

Prigogine and Stengers identify these "far-from-equilibrium conditions" as the solution to how to combine linear time (irreversible processes) with cyclical time (reversible processes). As I will describe further below, in heroic epic fantasy fiction, these far-from-equilibrium conditions, rather than reversing the system, causes a new system to originate entirely. These far-from-equilibrium conditions are a result of the fantasyland having reached a point of extreme conditions (the increase in entropy that begins to thin or tear apart the world, essentially Clute's ideas of wrongness and thinning: "*cacophony*"; "the world has lost its wholeness" (26)), and is *further fuelled by the actions of the heroes as strange attractors*, as heroes increase greater turmoil in the system in order to bring about change.

In heroic epic fantasy, in far-from-equilibrium conditions, when entropy has increased dramatically in fantasyland so that the world is near collapse, the hero steps in as strange attractor which assists the bifurcation point (this time in the journey of the world rather than the character's) into selecting the "correct" path. As I emphasized in the previous chapter, the plot of fantasyland is one that is triggered by flows and seepages. This flow increases exponentially until it becomes turbulent, pushing the system into a "far-from-equilibrium condition." I have already introduced this phenomena and that of the strange attractor in chapter two. In a system of flow, as velocity of the flow increases, strange attractors pull these movements towards them, increasing turbulence and causing further dissipation of energy. This visual conception can also be applied as a metaphor to describe the heroes of fantasy fiction. Note that here I mean the collective heroes and not the singular Hero, as the collective group works together as strange attractors. Prigogine and Stengers assert that: "At all levels […] *nonequilibrium is the source of order. Nonequilibrium brings 'order out of chaos'*" (286-287, original emphasis). The heroes increase turbulence in a system, pushing the entropic system into further increasing nonequilibrium, which in turn creates a new and different equilibrium, bringing order out of chaos, just as in figure 5.1. Note that in figure 5.1, while a flat line of stability is established in a new equilibrium, the line has shifted *up* so that the stable line is at a different position than the original line of stability.
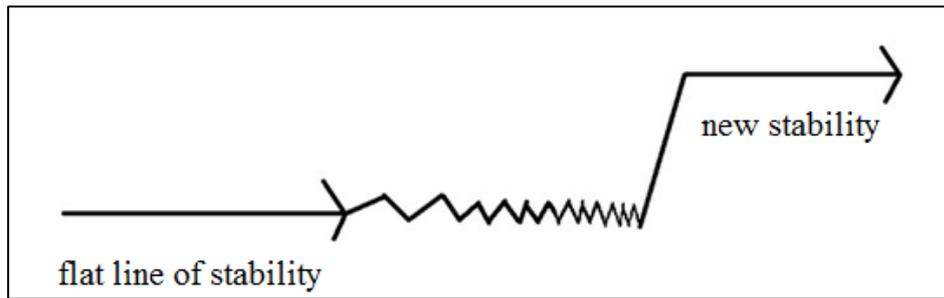
**FIGURE 5.1: INCREASE IN TURBULENCE CREATING A NEW EQUILIBRIUM.**

This idea, of a narrative that moves between two different equilibriums, is also expressed by Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970, translated 1975):

> The image will be as follows: *All narrative is a movement between two equilibriums which are similar but not identical*. At the start of the narrative, there is always a stable situation; the characters form a configuration which can shift but which nonetheless keep a certain number of fundamental features intact. Let us say for instance that a child lives with his family; he participates in a micro-society which has its own laws. Subsequently, something occurs which introduces a disequilibrium (or, one might say, a negative equilibrium); thus for one reason or another the child leaves his house. At the end of the story, after having overcome many obstacles, the child – who has grown up in the meantime – returns to the family house. The equilibrium is then re-established, but it is no longer that of the beginning: the child is no longer a child, but has become an adult among the others. The elementary narrative thus includes two types of episodes: those which describe a state of equilibrium or disequilibrium, and those which describe the transition from one to the other. [...] Every narrative

includes this fundamental schema, though it is often difficult to

recognize. (163-164, original emphasis)

While Todorov's example focuses on an individual, this movement can be seen in the

narrative of fantasy fiction on both the individual and world scale. Recall Attebery's

assertion from the previous chapter, that: "Fantasy may be turned to many ends, but it

is most successful when it recounts two sorts of progressions. One is the movement

from immaturity to maturity: the coming of age or the acquiring of wisdom. [...] The

other is the healing of an ailing land or society" ("Fantasy as Anti-Utopia" 7). The

transition between two equilibriums in fantasyland is thus expressed through both

individual and world.

As I identified previously, fantasy fiction is largely concerned with balances,

but, when this equilibrium becomes unbalanced, due to "thinning" and entropy, often

the only way to re-establish a balance is by creating a *new* equilibrium: "The

equilibrium is then re-established, but it is no longer that of the beginning" (Todorov

163). However, since heroic epic fantasy fiction is rarely contained to a single novel,

and is instead depicted through trilogies or series spanning numerous books, instead of

a narrative that is a "movement between two equilibriums," the narrative arc throughout

the series may contain *several* equilibriums, all of which "are similar but not identical."

Accordingly, fantasy narratives may be seen to cycle from sequel to sequel, a constant

movement between different equilibriums, but these forms are still new and distinct

from what has come before. The cycles are not exact copies of one another.

I will examine these ideas by looking at cycles that lead to a "new equilibrium"

in Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy (2006-2008), especially the last book, *Hero*

*of Ages* (2008). The trilogy contains diary excerpts and recollections of events that

occur a thousand years before the story's narration begins, and consequently, because

of the length of time depicted by the author, it is possible to identify the patterns of repetition of events that span over multiple ages. Sanderson originally planned for the *Mistborn* trilogy to be part of a nine-book (three-trilogy) series: "I wanted to move away from the idea of fantasy worlds as static places, where millennia would pass and technology would never change. The plan then was for a second epic trilogy set in an urban era, and a third trilogy set in a futuristic era" (*The Alloy of Law* 7). However, Sanderson has not yet published these sequel trilogies, as *The Alloy of Law* and its sequels, while part of that world, is a "side deviation" (7). But I will briefly discuss these texts in order to discuss the convention of sequels in the heroic epic fantasy and the implications on the structure and conclusions of these narratives in such a tradition.

**Cycles of Utopia and Anti-Utopia**

In *The Final Empire* (2006), the first book of the *Mistborn* trilogy, a group of thieves and miscreants gather to overthrow the tyrannies of Lord Ruler, a man who claims immense, seemingly omnipotent power, and sets himself up as god. Consequently, the group must not only abolish the existing government which has remained stagnant for a thousand years, but they must also overturn the one remaining religion on the world and kill a god. In this way, fantasy fiction often depicts a unity of political and religious power. At the end of the first novel, Kelsier, the leader of this team and a hero of the slave class (called skaa), sacrifices himself, allowing himself to be killed so that the skaa will rise up in revolution in response and destroy the existing government. When Vin, the main hero of the novel, manages to kill Lord Ruler, Kelsier in turn becomes deified, and a "Church of the Survivor" springs up amongst the skaa,

replacing the previous church.[41] Thus the first book depicts the replacement of a god, a political and religious figure, who has risen up a thousand years ago. At the end of the novel, the surviving members of the protagonist group conquer the city and place an ally, a man from the noble class, on the throne.

In the next book, *The Well of Ascension* (2007), which takes place a year after the events of the previous novel, the characters find that King Elend Straff is unable to maintain order among the citizens. Throughout this second novel, Elend endeavours to give the populace democracy and instigate laws that give the skaa freedom. But entropy continues to increase in fantasyland and the world faces a literal collapse. Although Elend attempts to regain the people's confidence by proclaiming himself a member of the Church of the Survivor, he is eventually voted out of his own throne by the council that he himself had set up. Elend is compelled to reclaim the throne through force using a koloss army (an army of inhuman "superhumans") after his attempt to regain power by reinstating the unity of church and state fails. Thus, ultimately, at the end of the novel Elend and Vin re-establish a non-democratic, tyrannical government over the capital city barely a year after overthrowing the previous one.

Through this new government, they create what Lyman Tower Sargent describes in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994) as a "convinced utopian [trying] to build a eutopia":

> When a convinced utopian tries to build a eutopia, conflict will arise because, failing to achieve eutopia, he or she will use force to achieve

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[41] Sanderson makes overt connections between Kelsier's deification with that of Christ's. Kelsier seemingly returns to the people to speak to them after his death, mimicking Christ's resurrection. In the next book, the Church of the Survivor takes on the object that killed Kelsier (a spear) as a symbol of their church, similar to the cross of Christianity.

> it. Force will be necessary either because people question the desirability
> of the eutopia or because there is disharmony between the perfect
> blueprint and the imperfect people. Eutopians will not, and cannot, give
> up the vision […]. Life in a perfect society is best even for imperfect
> people because they will accept it as better or law (force) will impose it.
> Antiutopians conclude that only the last alternate is possible. They
> believe that a deliberately constructed society of this sort can only be
> maintained by the continual use of force. (24)

This idea, of a convinced utopian who has failed, is comparable to the idea of the u-hero that I explored previously. Throughout *The Well of Ascension* and *The Hero of Ages* Vin and Elend spend much time in contemplating the tyranny of their government, as they wish to implement the perfect (eutopic) society for their people, but can only do so through force. Vin and Elend fear repeating Lord Ruler's mistakes, as they later learn that the Lord Ruler was a u-hero himself; he was an ordinary man who took on omnipotent powers and set himself up as the god Lord Ruler in order to *save* humanity:

> *In fact, with each thing he did fix, he created new issues. […] So, instead*
> *of plants that died from the distorted sun and ashy ground, we got plants*
> *that didn't provide quite enough nutrition. He did save the world. True,*
> *the near-destruction was his fault in the first place – but he did an*
> *admirable job, all things considered.* (*Hero of Ages* 164, original
> emphasis)

Both parties suggest that their tyrannical rule is what is best for their people. Though Lord Ruler is initially presented as an antagonist, and Elend and Vin are presented as protagonists, both incorrectly identify themselves as heroes: they believe their actions

will *save* the world. They are eutopic rulers who resort to using force to implement their idea of a utopian society, which instead results in an anti-utopian depiction of society.

However, unlike Lord Ruler, Elend and Vin hope that their dictatorship is a *temporary* measure and that eventually a democratic government can be put in place once the world is saved. The word dictator, in fact, comes from the Latin word *dictātor*, which was a political position in the Roman world where a chief magistrate would take emergency powers during a time of crisis for a short amount of time (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). The position is meant to be a short-term one and eventually the freedoms and rights of the people would be returned to them. In the same way, Elend and Vin do not believe that their society needs to be "maintained by the continual use of force" (Sargent 24). The world at this point in the novel is literally coming to an end, a "far-from-equilibrium" situation like the one I described above. Earthquakes in the planet suggest that the world has come too close to the sun and is, again quite literally, falling apart. The mists and the ash have increased to the point where very little sunlight can reach the vegetation and the human race faces starvation and extinction. This is an extraordinary situation and consequently the dictatorship established by the protagonists is hoped to be a temporary one that would heal the land and return it to its previously unbroken state.

In contrast, Lord Ruler's tyrannical government is brought about because of stagnation. During his thousand years of rule he suppresses all areas of progress and technology:

> *The Lord Ruler didn't just forbid certain technologies, he suppressed technological advancement completely. It seems odd now that during the entirety of his thousand-year reign, very little progress was made. Farming techniques, architectural methods – even fashion remained*

*remarkably stable during the Lord Ruler's reign. He constructed his perfect empire, then tried to make it stay that way.* (*Hero of Ages* 242-43, original emphasis)

Note the language used with regard to utopia (or anti-utopia), as Lord Ruler creates a "*perfect* empire, then tried to make it stay that way" (my emphasis). The god or king whose authority is seen as antagonistic *because* of this stagnation is a common motif across many fantasy fictions. As entropy is increasing in fantasyland, the authoritative figure that is unwilling to act or move is detrimental to restoring fantasyland. In Moorcock's "While the Gods Laugh" (1961-1962), for example, Elric attempts to gain knowledge of a book that could swing the balance into favouring either the forces of Law or the forces of Chaos. But instead of attempting to tip the balance into favouring the forces of Law, the Masters (or divinity) fear the other outcome, and accordingly hide and guard the book: "*We exist only to fight – not to win, but to preserve the eternal struggle*" (69, original emphasis). Though the Elric cycle may be viewed as a localized or adventure fantasy rather than epic, (as the hero does not attempt to remove the metaphysical entities and take their place), this fantasy still demonstrates the overarching conception of the stasis of fantasyland.

In another example, Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* (1971), although stagnation is not yet established, the hero Ged fears that the world will be corrupted by this stasis: "A false king ruling. Ruling forever. And over the same subject forever. No births; no new lives. No children. Only what is mortal bears life, Arren. Only in death is there rebirth. The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement – an eternal becoming" (423). Just as in other fantasy fictions, in Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, achieving and maintaining balance does not indicate stagnation; it means a *constant movement*, "an eternal becoming," a constant creation into something new and different. A constant cyclicality

can be seen as a stasis too if it is unable to bring anything new into the cycle (figure 5.2).
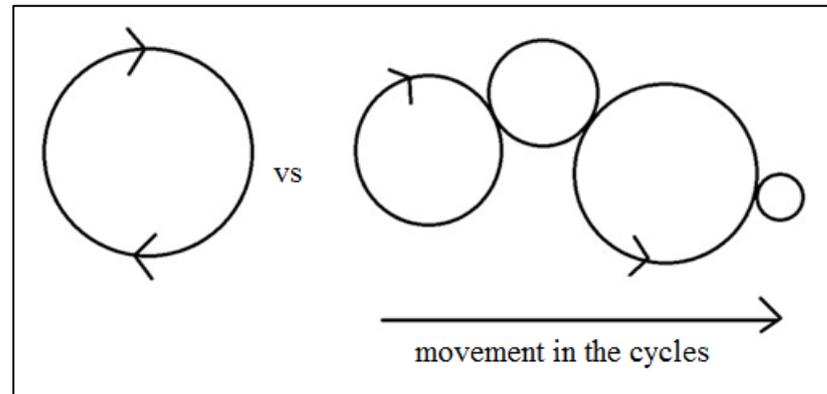


**FIGURE 5.2: STATIC CYCLE VERSUS CYCLES WITH MOVEMENT.**

For example, in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, the antagonist warns the hero Rand al'Thor that he has been battling the Dark One in a war that occurs again and again:

> The battle we two have fought – do you remember any part of that? Do you have any glimmering that we have fought before, battles without number back to the beginning of Time? I know much that you do not! That battle will soon end. The Last Battle is coming. [...] And this time the cycle will not begin anew with your death. [...] This time the Wheel will be broken whatever you do, and the world remade to a new mold. (*The Great Hunt* 243)

As the Wheel of Time repeats itself, a reincarnation of Rand has been battling the Dark One since the beginning of time. This cycle of repetition is a pattern of stasis itself and can only be broken if a new pattern is established; as I will describe below, the new pattern can also be a wheel again, but there has to be enough differences that indicate that change has been made.

In the *Mistborn* trilogy, though the government under Lord Ruler is tyrannical, and it is this very lack of progress that leads to the anti-utopian state of tyranny, following the defeat of Lord Ruler it is apparent that the population *prefers* stasis.

Though many of them were slaves, they mourn the death of Lord Ruler as they find comfort in the routine. Additionally, as the food supplies had diminished greatly since his death, the people find that the world under King Elend's rule is a much harsher one than under Lord Ruler even though Elend is not to blame for these conditions. The population indicates that *the stability of their oppression is preferred to the chaos of their freedom.* For this reason, in *Hero of Ages* various citizens rebel against King Elend's rule and set up their own city-states, thereby restoring stability to the population:

> "[H]e gave both nobility and skaa what they wanted. […] Stability, child. […] Society was collapsing, and people were starving. […] Then Yomen stepped in. […] Yomen immediately took control of the plantations and brought food to his people."
>
> […] Before, it might have seemed incredible to her that – after a thousand years of oppression – the people would willingly return to slavery. Yet, something similar had happened in Luthadel. They had ousted Elend, who had granted them great freedoms, and had put Pendron in charge – all because he promised them a return to what they had lost. (*Hero of Ages* 227)

In two different cities, the skaa population willingly accept the rule of an obligator (a former member of Lord Ruler's government) and a nobleman respectively because they preferred the stability of their old life. In a third city, the populace overthrows Elend's government and instead a skaa, calling himself the Citizen, takes his place. After the collapse of Lord Ruler's thousand-year rule, a period where the civilization was in complete stasis, the cycle repeats itself in smaller patterns, as various citizens and city-

states rebel against the current government, as they try to return to the equilibrium they are familiar with (figure 5.3).
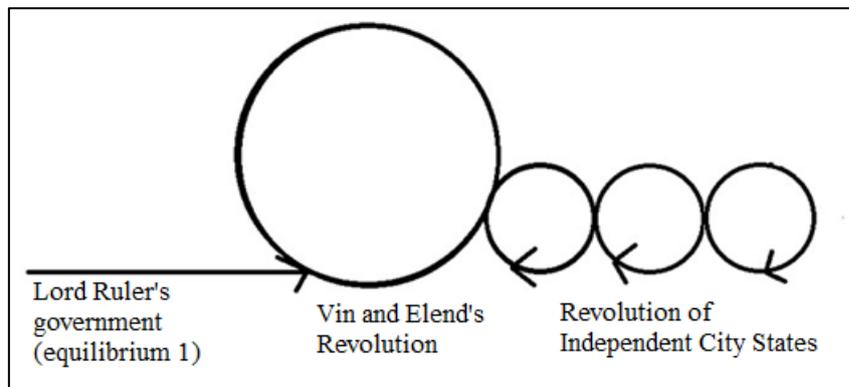


**FIGURE 5.3: THE CYCLES OF SANDERSON'S *MISTBORN* TRILOGY.**

Each of the independent city-state governments mimic Lord Ruler's tyrannical rule regardless of the class-system their new government is based on: Yomen is a member of Lord Ruler's original government, Penrod is a noblemen, and Quellion is a skaa, but all three governments restrict the skaa population back into slavery: "Seems that the longer old Quellion is in charge, the more he looks like that rat the Survivor killed" (217). The men leading these cities are thus directly paralleled to Lord Ruler. All three governments, though they originate from different classes in society, all repress their populace back into a state comparable to before the revolution, when Lord Ruler governed the world. These new governmental bodies embody the conception Karl Marx has of the lower middle class:

> The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. (*Communist Manifesto* 231)

Note Marx's language in using "the wheel of history," indicating that the visual discourse of this idea can also be found in a political ideology. These governments "fight against the bourgeoisie," Elend's kingship, *not* because they are revolutionary, but in fact because they are counter-revolutionary, they "try to roll back the wheel of history."

True revolution can only come from a leader who ascends from all classes, a hero who acts a bridge between all members of the community. In political terms, the hero seems to embody Marx's idea of the communist as the assembly of heroes draws together the common interests of the community in the figures of a small group of agents:

> The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. (234)

As I suggested previously, the group of heroes are all individuals representing their own species or race. Each member of the fellowship is isolated in some way from their own community but they are unified in the larger group of protagonists. This group of heroes represent "the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality." But the hero is not communist, not truly, because they are rarely from the working-class, but instead are often a member of nobility or the bourgeoisie.[42] Their relationship to the proletariat differs from the Marxist ideal.

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[42] While more recently fantasy heroes are starting to originate from the lower classes, often, there still is some suggestion that these heroes might have noble bloodlines. For example, while Vin in *Mistborn* is part of the skaa class, her father is later revealed to be part of Lord Ruler's priest class (who are responsible for policing the Empire).

Thus, in order to "ascend from all classes," religious terminology is used to bypass and amalgamate different strands of society. *Ascension* from all classes can only occur with messianic figures: characters that are noble born but identify with the other classes, either due to upbringing (fostering with lower class parents, for example) or adoption into the community via a pilgrimage experience (Paul Atreides in Herbert's *Dune* (1965) is a good example). As I described in chapter three, the heroes recognize that they are part of a larger group, an ecological network, as the characters start to recognize the connections between occurrences in the world and their own place and purposes within these networks:

> *I speak of us as "we." The group. Those of us who were trying to discover and defeat Ruin. Perhaps my thoughts are now tainted, but I like to look back and see the sum of what we were doing as a single, united assault, though we were all involved in different processes and plans. We were one. That didn't stop the world from ending, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.* (*Hero of Ages* 64, original emphasis)

The hero here accurately summarizes the unity of the group in defeating the antagonist force, even if they were "all involved in different processes and plans." As emblems of their community, the unity of the heroic group suggest that the defeat of the antagonist force must be a result of collective human agency. Revolution must come from the entire populace (represented through the heroes), if they are to be successful, or risk deteriorating into greater and greater entropy.

This conception of the necessity of unity is similar to Sargent's summary of Plutarch's description of the founding of Sparta in *Utopianism* (2010): "in Lycurgus's Sparta every person was to completely dedicate themselves to the country. They were to lose themselves in the whole: 'he trained his fellow-citizens to have neither the wish

nor the ability to live for themselves'" (17). Each hero or protagonist must dedicate themselves to the whole, sacrificing their life if need be in order to restore fantasyland. For example, as I will describe further below, in order to prevent the metaphysical entity Ruin from regaining his body and thereby gaining power, the kandra society is required to commit suicide at the prophesized moment so that Ruin cannot take control of their bodies and act through them. Like the Spartans, they were supposed to "have neither the wish nor the ability to live for themselves" (Sargent 17). But instead of abiding by the wishes of the whole, many of the kandra population attempt to overthrow their elders, as they do not desire any harm to come to their (utopic) existence. The population desires stability, even if it results in suffering, or unhappiness, as they equate that stability with perfection. Thus, to the populace, a *hegemonic order is better than chaos*. It is the heroes' role to rebel against this order and collectively work together in order to break out of the flat line of stability and progress into the future.

## From Flow to Turbulence: Identifying Systems of Chaos

As the population attempts to return to a life that they are familiar with even if it leads to further repression and entropy, how do the heroes *heal* fantasyland if it is caught in a cycle of repetition, which is itself stagnant? In this universe governed by entropy, how does order arise? How does equilibrium re-establish itself? Hayles answers that question for a real-world system in *Chaos Bound* (1990):

> Within chaos theory, two general emphases exist. In the first, chaos is seen as order's precursor and partner, rather than as its opposite. The focus here is on the spontaneous emergency of self-organization from chaos; or, in the parlance of the field, on the dissipative structures that arise in systems far from equilibrium, where entropy production is high.

> The realization that entropy-rich systems facilitate rather than impede
> self-organization was an important turning point in the contemporary re-
> evaluation of chaos. (9)

Illuminating Prigogine and Stengers' ideas in *Order out of Chaos* (1984), Hayles describes how order arises out of chaos: "The essential change is *to see chaos as that which makes order possible*. Life arises not in spite but because of dissipative processes that are rich in entropy production. Chaos is the womb of life, not its tomb" (Hayles 100, original emphasis). The idea of life arising out of chaos is not entirely a new one, as it can be seen in various mythologies. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell indicates that there are two stages of the world: "First, from the immediate emanations of the Uncreated Creating to the fluid yet timeless personages of the mythological age; second, from these Created Creating Ones to the sphere of human history" (271). The same holds true in heroic epic fantasy; as in many creation stories, the world and the gods are created from chaos first, who then in turn create humanity:

> "Ruin and Preservation," said one of the others. "They created our
> world, and our people."
>
> "Neither could create alone," Haddek said. "No, they could not. […]
>
> "For, to preserve something is not to create it – and neither can you
> create through destruction only." It was a common theme in mythology
> – Sazed had read it in dozens of the religions he'd studied. The world
> being created out of a clash between two forces, sometimes rendered as
> chaos and order, sometimes named destruction and protection. (*Hero of
> Ages* 621-622)

These origin stories are similar to the way that modern chaos theory is understood. In *Chaos* (1987), Glick suggests that in some systems of chaos: "order arises

spontaneously in those systems – chaos and order together" (8), just as the origins of the universe is depicted in mythologies and in fantasy fiction.

While in *Chaos Bound* Hayles defines the first branch of chaos as "order out of chaos," Hayles distinguishes the second branch of chaos theory as: "order that exists *within* chaotic systems" (9, original emphasis). Gleick simplifies this idea as: "order *masquerading* as randomness" (22). One simply has to take a step back and see the bigger picture so that the pattern of order could be identified in a seemingly random pattern. This second system of chaos often occurs in the way magic is depicted, especially in the *Mistborn* trilogy, as, since magic is a result of divine interaction, their influence results in an ordered system. For example, when the "natural" mists of the world start killing people or making them ill:

> The calculation came out to be exact – precisely sixteen percent of the soldiers fell sick. To the man. […]
>
> "It's like the chaos of normal random statistics has broken down," Noorden said. "A population should never react this precisely – there should be a curve of probability, with smaller populations reflecting the expected percentages least accurately." (*Hero of Ages* 191-192)

Note that the text explicitly evokes the idea of chaos itself, especially in how it relates to statistics as it would occur naturally in a bell curve. The pattern of order only begins to emerge when the army starts to keep a record of the number of people who fall sick and try to make sense of the seeming chaos.[43] As I suggested with the illustration of the

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[43] An important facet of chaos that I do not have the space to expand on in this thesis is the chaos of information. This idea is important because, as I suggested in previous chapters, it is the Hero that usually is able to decipher and decode prophecy. Thus it is pertinent that in the *Mistborn* trilogy, the Hero is revealed to be a scholar who has thoroughly investigated the prophecies and histories of the world and

game-playing motif in the first chapter, such an exact number (sixteen percent in *every* population group) cannot be attributed to coincidence or randomness, and instead indicates that a divine entity (whether malignant or benign) is influencing these events. Eventually the characters realize that the number sixteen is a divine number, because the number of allomantic metals ("special" metals that trigger magical abilities) are also sixteen in number: "Allomantic metals come in sets of two, with groupings of four. […] Two by two by two by two. Four physical metals, four mental metals, four enhancement metals, and four temporal metals" (618). There is a precise order to the way the metals give magical abilities, and because the metal and the magic is a gift from a divine force, this special percentage of sixteen is a clear sign of "order," of some divine force at work that is manipulating the universe into a recognizable pattern. This divine force had intervened for a purpose. Although Allomancy is an inherited quality, the magical ability can only be triggered once a person undergoes a traumatic event. The people who had fallen sick as a result to being exposed to the mist are those who have a repressed Allomantic ability, exactly sixteen percent of the population, and, after recovery, are able to use this magical ability.

While Hayles indicates that in the real world the two branches of chaos theory – order out of chaos and order within chaos – are usually incompatible with each other, in heroic epic fantasy, these branches are fused in the form of the heroes as strange attractors. As I described previously, as abnormal metaphysical entities flow into fantasyland, the entropy of fantasyland increases exponentially, causing the flow of the abnormal entities to further increase, until turbulence occurs. A strange attractor is: "simply any point within an orbit that seems to attract the system to it" (Hayles 147).

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is only able to heal the world through amalgamating pieces of information: "And, in a moment of transcendence, he understood it all. He saw the patterns, the clues, the secrets" (716).

These strange attractors: "served as efficient mixers. They created unpredictability. They raised entropy" (Gleick 258). Rather than simply restoring order, the heroes as strange attractors draw further turbulence to them.

Though they raise entropy, the heroes also create a level of organization. Prigogine and Stengers indicate that once flow rate has increased until it forms turbulence, this turbulence, though it may appear to be disordered and irregular, is, on another level, seen to be ordered: "turbulent motion appears as irregular or chaotic on the macroscopic scale, it is, on the contrary, highly organized on the microscopic scale" (141). The increase in turbulence leads to a far-from-equilibrium situation in which self-organization emerges. Prigogine and Stengers identify that this self-organization can *only* occur in far-from-equilibrium situations: "To use somewhat anthropomorphic language: in equilibrium matter is 'blind,' but in far-from-equilibrium conditions it begins to be able to perceive, to 'take into account,' in its way of functioning, differences in the external world" (14). Prigogine and Stengers argue that when disorder increases too dramatically, the system will correct itself, almost as if the system itself is conscious of its own imbalance: "Viewed in this way, the transition from laminar flow to turbulence is a process of self-organization" (141-142). This is certainly true in heroic epic fantasy, as the system introduces an element that will correct itself *through the form of the heroes*. These heroes act as strange attractors, further increasing the entropy of the system, so that the system will reach a far-from-equilibrium condition so that a new self-organized system may emerge. As I depicted above in figure 5.1, turbulence increases in the system until a new level of equilibrium has been reached.

By functioning as strange attractors, the heroes act as agents change in a fantasyland that is stuck in stagnation. As Mendlesohn indicates in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*: "the hero moves through the action and the world state, embedding an

assumption of unchangingness on the part of the indigenes. This kind of fantasy is essentially imperialist: only the hero is capable of change; fantasyland is orientalised into the 'unchanging past'" (9).[44] Heroes are instruments of change. This is the case with Lord Ruler's government in Sanderson's *Mistborn: The Final Empire,* persisting in a fixed state for a thousand years in a state of "eternal" tyranny; it is rooted in an "unchanging past". As I described above, the population in the *Mistborn* trilogy often demonstrate their willingness to return to a government similar to the one under Lord Ruler, even if it results in a loss of freedoms, as long as it provides a comfort in stability. Thus, in the excerpt above the hero asserts, "*That didn't stop the world from ending, but that's not necessarily a bad thing*" (*Hero of Ages* 64, original emphasis). An apocalypse is desirable because it suggests an implementation of a completely new authority system, a revolution that results in a new political system and often a new religion as well. But, as I described in the previous chapter, in order for this to occur, the hero must kill or remove a divinity or a metaphysical force and take its place.

The heroes as strange attractors are thus a source of instability and change and their arrival in the community might be a fearful one, as the arrival of the hero is the mark of something new in a static world. Part of the prophecies of the hero in the *Mistborn* trilogy states that the hero will be: "*one who would be an emperor of all*

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[44] If Mendlesohn is referring to imperialism/orientalism in terms of political and racial orientations, then, it is certainly true that in her example of Eddings' *Belgariad* series, the "westernized" hero Garion moves through an "orientalised" landscape. But in Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy, the opposite occurs, as the "orientalised" hero Sazed moves through fantasyland. Although *Mistborn* is a more recent novel than *Belgariad* (1982-1984) the idea of an "orientalised" hero is not entirely new: Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* Quartet (1968-1990) is notable for having non-Westernized heroes. While there is not space in this thesis to discuss the orientalism and imperialism of fantasyland, I believe further study is required about the political positioning of fantasy.

*mankind, yet would be rejected by his own people*" (608, original emphasis). The heroes are rejected because they are bringing change to a population that does not desire it. In *The Hero of Ages*, the arrival of Sazed and TenSoon into the kandra community denotes them as agents of change *because* of their isolation and individuality. The kandra were originally humans, a race of Terris people, before they were transformed into a new species. The kandra species are conscious, intelligent, shapeless creatures who are capable of mutating and mimicking other forms and species. But this ability, along with their consciousness, can only occur because of the physical penetration of a unique metal – a portion of a god's body – into their own body. As I discussed previously, the metaphysical entity can only use another host body as an avatar through the physical penetration of it. The First Generation of kandra had made a promise to the u-hero Lord Ruler that at a prophesized time – The Resolution – their entire community will remove this metal from their body, thereby losing their consciousness, but in the process preventing Ruin, a metaphysical entity, from using their bodies as vessels for his own will. The arrival of the heroes marks the time of The Resolution. While TenSoon is a member of the kandra community himself, Sazed, one of the last surviving members of the Terris people, thinks of him: "*There is a kandra who fits in with his people as poorly as I do with my own*" (677, original emphasis). This alienation and isolation from the rest of his community marks the heroes as special or as distinctive individuals whose unity with the other heroes will aid in the removal of the abnormal metaphysical force.

Revolution here works in a plurality of ways. When TenSoon speaks to the kandra people and tells that the time of Resolution is near, the kandra decide to ignore his words and punish TenSoon instead: "TenSoon was to be their sacrifice. Their way of restoring order and orthodoxy" (83). Interestingly, though the kandra society is depicted as a "utopia" (67), there are still entire generations that are seen as rebellious,

and thus TenSoon's death is meant to act as a type of scapegoat in order to restore order. This idea of a scapegoat is reminiscent of the messianic hero which I discussed previously, but, whereas the messianic hero is the end point of an apocalyptic time whose sacrifice brings a new world into being, here, the peoples hope that TenSoon's sacrifice will restore their community to its earlier utopic state. When the First Generation (the authority of the kandra people) come to realize that TenSoon's words should be followed and they then announce that the time of Resolution is at hand, the Second Generation take charge in a coup instead, attempting to overthrow the long-standing government so that *stability can be maintained*:

> "You fear change," Sazed said, meeting the kandra's eyes.
>
> "I fear instability," KanPaar said. "I will make certain the kandra people have a firm and immutable leadership." (662)

Rather than listen to the wisdom of their established leaders, the government is overthrown, so that the kandra way of life can continue to be the same, and thus their revolution brings stasis. It is only through the actions of the heroes that the kandra community eventually accept the sacrifice that they must make, removing the devices that had given them consciousness, in order to allow the rest of fantasyland to progress into the future. "The Hero will have the power to save the world. But he will also have the power to destroy it" (715). As the prophecy predicts, the coming of the hero will destroy the familiar world and society, but the hero can only save the world by first destroying it in order for it to be rebuilt anew. Thus this destruction also allows society to move forward in time, *past* the static Utopic existence, and progress into the future.

Through the process of establishing a new equilibrium, heroes will often be "used up" in an act of sacrifice, just as a catalyst in a chemical reaction – and here I include heroes, Hero, and u-hero. Frequently, the Hero *must* remove themselves from

society or risk starting a new cycle of stagnation, as the hero has the capability of becoming the u-hero if they remain. As Campbell identifies: "The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies *himself* today" (303, original emphasis). Thus in the *Mistborn* trilogy, while Preservation is generally seen as the benevolent metaphysical entity and Ruin the malevolent one, Preservation recognizes that his persona is one whose stasis is detrimental to the act of creation. Recall that humanity can only be created with the combination of Ruin and Preservation together:

> "They had a deal, those two. Preservation wanted to create men – to create life capable of emotion. He obtained a promise from Ruin to help make men."
>
> "But at a cost," one of the others whispered.
>
> "What cost?" Sazed asked.
>
> "That Ruin could one day be allowed to destroy the world," Haddek replied. (622)

Preservation wanted to create humanity because he realized that he could not destroy Ruin, as his job is to preserve not destroy. With the help of Ruin, Preservation could create humans, one of whom will arise as Hero and have the capability of destroying Ruin. The first human hero to emerge is Lord Ruler, who takes on the metaphysical power of Preservation in order to save the world. Through his attempt to maintain order, Lord Ruler becomes a tyrant, and thus fails as hero, becoming a u-hero. Throughout the first book, the protagonists must subvert and defeat Lord Ruler's government. Accordingly, the reader may question whether it is Vin – the focal protagonist – or Kelsier – the leader of the group – who is identified as the Hero of the prophecies. But, Kelsier's death at the end of the novel removes this possibility, while simultaneously confirming him as a lesser hero – one who has fulfilled a heroic function of making a

sacrifice that will bring about change.[45] As Vin mistakenly identifies herself as the Hero of the prophecy, Vin and Elend's attempt at establishing order after Lord Ruler's death proves to have the same consequences as that of Lord Ruler's rule. Like Lord Ruler, Vin takes on the power of Preservation in order to save the world. The death of Vin and Elend at the end of the trilogy removes the risk of them becoming tyrants and functioning as corrupting models of stasis.

The death of these u-heroes allows the right Hero to bring balance to fantasyland, but through this process, the Hero in turn is also unable to remain in the community. Sazed takes on the power of both Ruin and Preservation, replacing these abnormal or divine entities, and then becomes "invisible" (Campbell 271), removing himself from the physical plane of humanity. The removal of the Hero can be done in various ways, and depending on the text, does not necessarily indicate a complete removal from the community. Through the process of replacing a higher authority, the hero may become a god or a king, as kingship would also indicate an idea of transcending above their fellow people. This is what happens with Tylar in Clemens' *Shadowfall*, where, at the end of the novel, Tylar must rise as god-king, taking the place of the god he had slayed. Alternatively, the moment of transcendence may pass, and the hero is then depleted. In *Tehanu* (1990), the fourth book of the Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, Ged describes how in his act of fulfilling his heroic role, his power was lost:

> "Like pouring out a little water," he said, "a cup of water on to the sand.
> In the dry land. I had to do that. But now I have nothing to drink. […]
> All I had in the end was one cup of water, and I had to pour it out on the

---

[45] Although as death is not *final*, especially for heroes, there always exists a possibility of his return.

sand, in the bed of the dry river, on the rocks in the dark. So it's gone.

It's over. Done." (546)

The language that Ged uses is that of an empty vessel that has run dry, a hero that has utilized all of his power until it has run out. He is thus able to return to a "normal" life as a farmer, rather than resuming his position as Archmage. Cazaril in Bujold's *Curse of Chalion* describes a similar experience; recall that Bujold also uses the language of a vessel or a cup to describe the hero. Cazaril attempts to recapture the ephemeral moment where this vessel was filled by god, but finds himself unable to do so: "'I have not the words for what I saw. Talking about it is like trying to weave a box of shadows in which to carry water.' *And our souls are parched*" (476, original emphasis). Although Cazaril is able to reconnect with society, this is only because his moment of transcendence is fleeting, and consequently he finds himself profoundly changed – almost depleted. Like Ged, once he has fulfilled his messianic function of the hero, Cazaril is able to return to a "normal" life. The transcendence of Heroes in other novels may be more permanent, and as a result, these heroes are unable to return to society. Farland's Gaborn in the first *Runelords* series decides to wander the earth, as he finds himself incapable to remain in normal society because of his unnatural powers, and the second hero, Averan, likewise retreats to the underworld rather than remain in human society. Rand in Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, like Sazed, takes on the power of both destructor and creator, but then removes himself from society as well, also wandering the earth, preferring to be anonymous rather than remaining as king or god-king.

Like Rand al'Thor, Sazed's function as hero is take on the power of two contradictory forces, creation and destruction, creating a unity or whole out of two broken parts. In the *Mistborn* trilogy, the metaphysical entities of Ruin and Preservation both belong together in order to bring balance: "Ruin and Preservation were dead, and

their powers had been joined together. In fact, they belonged together. How had they been split?" (*Hero of Ages* 718). If Ruin is to stand for "entropy" and Preservation for "stability," both cannot exist as individual entities, as they are opposite to each other. And yet, while their removal is necessary in order for progress to be made, this new system must be a combination of both powers if it too is going to be able to take part in creation:

> *He wouldn't simply bear the power of Preservation. He needed the power of Ruin as well.* The powers were opposites. As he drew them in, they threatened to annihilate each other. And yet, because he was of one mind on how to use them, he could keep them separate. They could touch *without* destroying each other, if he willed it. For these two powers had been used to create all things. If they fought, they destroyed. If they were used together, they created. (715, original emphasis)

Sazed thus takes on the power of two contradictory metaphysical entities creating a new equilibrium out of their unity, establishing their *wholeness*. At the extreme far-from-equilibrium moment, one where "the entire city was burning from the heat of the sun" (721), Sazed destroys and then replaces these divine entities with himself, taking on their powers. In doing so, the hero is able to heal fantasyland, creating a new paradise.

**Cycles of Repetitions between Sequels**



(equilibrium 2)

Revolution of
Independent
City-States

Lord Ruler's
Government
(equilibrium 1)

Vin and Elend's
Revolution

Equilibrium
Deteriorates Again
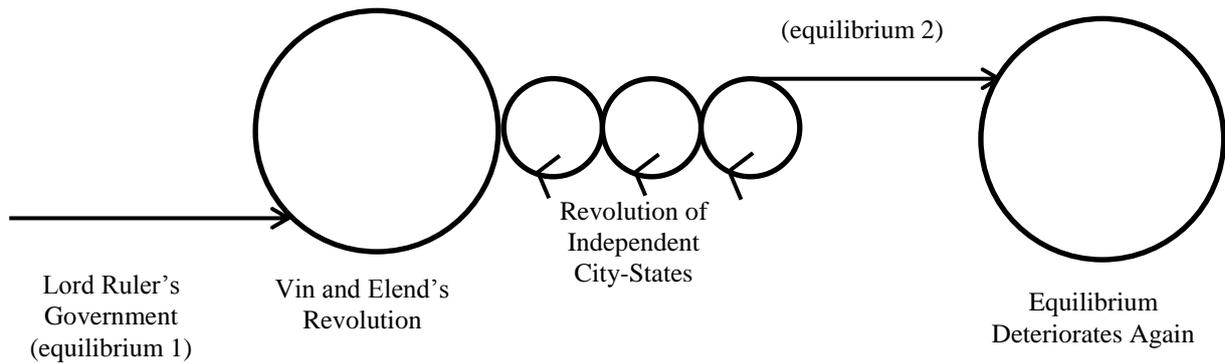
FIGURE 5.4: THE NEW EQUILIBRIUM DETERIORATES.

Sanderson's plans for two sequel trilogies indicates that though the Hero "saves" the world, it is not a permanent solution; the new equilibrium reached in figure 5.1 is a temporary state. As I noted above, a utopia that is static would lead to an anti-utopia, so it is necessary that the utopia moment is only fleeting. As fantasyland is entropic, it will begin to deteriorate again immediately, leading to a new cycle (figure 5.4). However, this new cycle is not a simple repetition of what has come before it. As I described in the first chapter using the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, repetitive patterns do not indicate that: "the same cause, if repeated, will produce the same effect" (Russell 185). Additionally, as I described further in chapter two, the repetitive patterns in heroic epic fantasy fiction are chaotic systems: "systems that almost repeated themselves but never quite succeeded" (Gleick 22). The cycle of repetitions found from sequel to sequel in heroic epic fantasy can be described by the chaotic system depicted

by the Lorenzian Waterwheel model. As Gleick describes, the waterwheel is a chaotic

system discovered by Edward Lorenz (reprinted in figure 5.5 from Gleick 27).
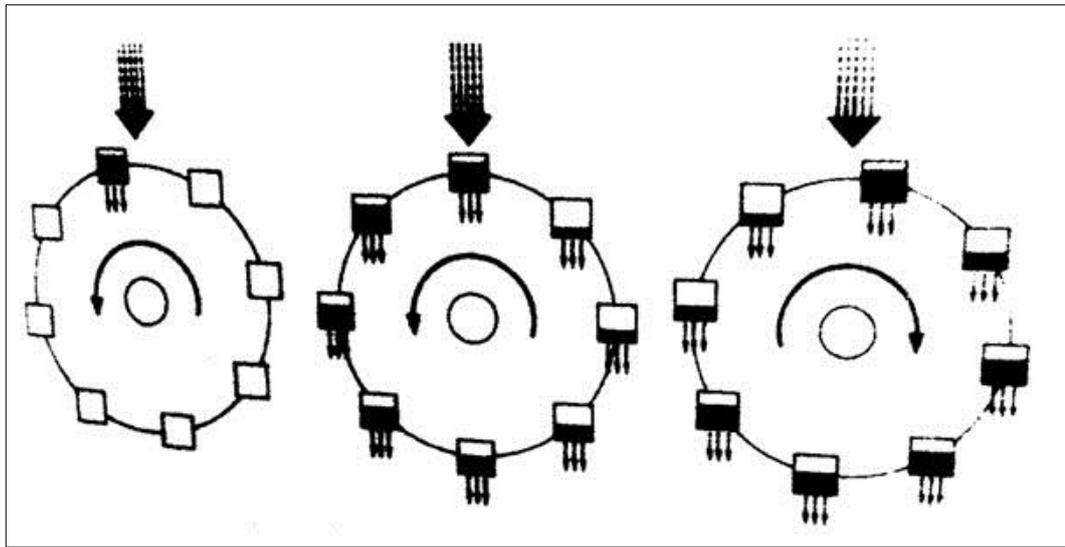


**FIGURE 5.5: LORENZ'S WATERWHEEL MODEL.**

In this system, "water pours in from the top at a steady rate" (Gleick 27). But as the

water pours in, the buckets fill, and the speed at which the wheel turns can speed up or

slow down, even though the water from the top continues to fall at the same rate:

> As buckets pass under the flowing water, how much they fill depends
>
> on the speed of spin. If the wheel is spinning rapidly, the buckets have
>
> little time to fill up. […] Also, if the wheel is spinning rapidly, buckets
>
> can start up the other side before they have time to empty. As a result,
>
> heavy buckets on the side moving upward can cause the spin to slow
>
> down and then reverse. In fact, Lorenz discovered, over long periods,
>
> the spin can reverse itself many times, never settling down to a steady
>
> rate and never repeating itself in any predictable pattern. (27)

The rate at which the wheel spins is not a predictable pattern, and thus it is a chaotic

system. Recall Stephen H. Kellert definition of chaos theory, as: "*the qualitative study*

*of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic nonlinear dynamical systems*" (2,

original emphasis). Chaos theory offers a study of *patterned* behaviour that is *not*

*predictable*. While there is a pattern of repetition between and within fantasy texts, as these repetitions are not quite exact, the cyclical narrative time can result in different outcomes.

In a series of articles (1988, 1997, 2001) Donald Palumbo identifies that repetitions between SF epics can be seen at descending scales of plots and subplots, asserting that: "For the monomyth itself has numerous, striking affinities with many of the same chaos-theory concepts articulated and demonstrated in the Dune series" ("The Monomyth and Chaos Theory" 34). Examining Joseph Campbell's "cosmic cycle," Palumbo demonstrates that the repetitions between and within Herbert's *Dune* series and Asimov's *Foundation* series showcase "self-similarity":

> Its repetition with variations *across* the volumes, as it is the specific plot structure in volume after volume of the series, and *across* the characters, as character after character pursues his or her own scheme within a scheme, corresponds to the fractal's characteristic of duplication across the same scale. ("Plots within Plots" 59, original emphasis)

Palumbo examines what Hayles would describe as "*recursive symmetries between scale levels*" (Hayles 13, original emphasis): repetitive patterns across novel to novel demonstrating layers of similarities, but layers that build to create a deeply complex narrative. Likewise, Janet Brennan Croft in "Túrin and Aragorn: Evading and Embracing Fate" (2011) also argues that Tolkien's work demonstrates fractal patterns: "you find the same structure, the same motifs, reinforced through repetition and variation, down to the very heart of the work" (155). These fractal patterns, rather than being simple structures, build a complexity to the narrative structure. Fractal images do not focus simply on the similarities but also on the differences: "a form of repetition with variation" (Croft 156). Though heroic epic fantasy follows a cyclical pattern, a

pattern of eternal recurrence by means of the repetitions between different narratives, the repetitions are never quite exact.

Many epic fantasy writers produce a long series of books within the same world or create multiple sequel trilogies or series; while repetitive narrative patterns can be identified from sequel to sequel, they are "a form of repetition with variation." Though Sanderson planned for two trilogies to follow *Mistborn*, at the moment he has produced three novels (with a planned fourth novel), all of which are set in the same time period as his proposed "second" trilogy. The first sequel to the *Mistborn* trilogies (2006-2008), *The Alloy of Law* (2011), is a localized heroic fantasy, taking place in a setting reminiscent of a Western with a main character, Wax, who functions much like a sheriff trying to bring order to a place that is overrun by outlaws. Though in the story he moves back from "The Roughs" to the capital city Elendel, Wax discovers that the city itself is a place of crimes and chaos. In the next book, *Shadows of Self* (2015), the chaos of the city increases, as the narration reveals greater and greater unrest within the population. Notably, although *Alloy of Law* is strongly in the localized end of the scale, its sequels move slowly into the epic scale as divine forces start to reveal their influence. The situation in *Shadows of Self* is not unlike the events of the first *Mistborn* novels, where the people, led by the u-hero Kelsier, are encouraged to riot and overthrow the long-standing government of Lord Ruler. However, there is an important distinction between the two patterns. In the first novel, Kelsier, though a u-hero, is presented as a protagonist who is overthrowing a tyrannical government. In *Shadows of Self*, though the government is also corrupt, the events fuelling *this* rebellion are motivated by antagonistic forces who are *equally* corrupt.

The antagonists in *Shadows of Self* utilize the memory of the first rebellion in order to evoke a feeling of repetition within the population:

*She has to be doing it on purpose*, Marasi thought, walking through the room. *Trying to echo that night when the Lord Ruler fell. A people on the brink of insurrection. Noble houses at each other's throats. And now…*

Now a speech. The governor would have his moment before the crowd, and they would sense the resonance even if they couldn't put their finger on it. They'd been taught about that night since childhood. They would listen to him, and expect him to be like the Last Emperor, who had spoken long ago on the night of the Lord Ruler's death. (285, original emphasis)

Thus the antagonists themselves are exploiting the resonance between the first trilogy and the second series, highlighting repetitions within these patterns in order to guide the population into re-creating the pattern. Note the language, of "resonance" and "echo," as the character consciously reflects on the similarities between narrative patterns. But, as chaos theory suggests, "the repetitions were never quite exact. There was pattern, with disturbances. An orderly disorder" (Gleick 15). The character Marasi concludes that: "Governor Innate was *not* Elend Venture. Far from it" (*Shadows of Self* 285, original emphasis). While the patterns are the same, there are enough variations that they *are* different stories. This is often true of stories that are depicted through sequels. The heroic epic *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015), for example, can be seen as a repetition of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), but the patterns are yet still distinct enough that it is a different story. Like the model of the Lorenzian Waterwheel: "the spin can reverse itself many times, never settling down to a steady rate and never repeating itself in any predictable pattern" (Gleick 27). More importantly, these variations lead to different bifurcation points in the trajectory of

fantasyland (figure 3.2). While in *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, Kelsier leads the people to a violent revolution, the heroes of *Shadows of Self* are able to prevent the people from extreme violence. Although the governor is replaced in *Shadows of Self*, the government structure itself still stands and remains in place.

These repetitions between sequels work to deliberately produce a feeling of déjà vu in the reader so that the experienced reader can recognize the allusions made to the previous text. In *Narrative Discourse* (1972, translated 1980), Gérard Genette asserts that:

> [T]he mere fact of recurrence is not what defines the most rigorous form of iteration, the form that is apparently most satisfying to the spirit – or most soothing to Proustian sensibility. The repetition also has to be regular, has to obey a law of frequency, and this law has to be discernible and formulable, and therefore predictable in its effects. (124)

The reader, through their experience with the first narrative, is led to certain expectations in the second narrative, which then may be enforced or subverted. In this way the act of recurrence functions to build iterations for the reader who is already familiar with the narrative or the heroic epic form, creating a resonance through the act of reading.

The relationship between a first series or trilogies and its sequel trilogies can be seen as: "*a movement between two equilibriums which are similar but not identical*" (Todorov 163, original emphasis). *The Alloy of Law* series rewrites the events of the first *Mistborn* trilogy. At several points throughout *Shadows of Self*, and even more frequently in its sequel *The Bands of Mourning* (2016), the divine being Harmony (who was the hero Sazed in the first trilogy), expresses concern that he has created a *too*

perfect world for the people. Though technology has increased significantly from the first series, there was no *need* for them to progress and develop further technology. A comparison with a new race of humanity encountered in *The Bands of Mourning*, a group of peoples called the Malwish who are discovered on the other ends of the world, results in the understanding that the Malwish have gained further technologies than themselves because their environment is harsh and hostile. Thus, while a near-utopia has *stifled progress* for the citizens of Elendel, the need for survival *has fuelled progress* for peoples living in harsher conditions. And yet, due to this lack of struggle, a far-from-equilibrium situation is quickly reached *because* the population had not progressed for hundreds of years, and any hint of chaos or entropy functions as a catalyst that over-stimulates the entire system. Though the *Alloy of Law* sequel depicts far less of a dire situation than the events of the first novel (in which the earth was literally breaking apart), there is still a movement between two comparable equilibriums, both of which depict a movement between static equilibriums followed by non-equilibrium, but as they are exhibited in different ways they lead to different bifurcation points. As Attebery asserts in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), using *The Lord of the Rings* as a model:

> Each parallel movement effectively rewrites those that went before. Each prepares the way for those yet to come. The explicit prophecies and embedded narratives merely reinforce the intricate structuring of the narrative, pointing out to the reader the way the magic code governs the unfolding of events. (59-60)

As I have discussed previously, each repetition functions as an iteration, which builds on – or rewrites – the movement that has come before, demonstrating that, while there are repetitions between series, these repetitions lead to new journeys.

With a narrative time that is a constant movement between two equilibriums, how does the author manage to deliver a conclusive ending? A novel in an earlier part of the series often ends on a final climatic moment, but with no real resolution of the overarching plot. At the end of a trilogy or a series, however, one might find that the author might leave room for another sequel. Indeed, to a postmodern audience, an ambiguous ending might be more satisfactory than a conclusive one. In *Ancient Symbology in Fantasy Literature* (2012), William Indick asserts that the fairytale ending delivers a particular feeling to the reader:

> [T]he quintessential fairytale ending, "and they lived happily ever after," is a timeless state of paradise, a fantasy of returning to the Primordial Time, which is represented in Myth as the epoch of Genesis, the era of Eden, when gods and goddesses created and still inhabited the world. The motif represents an unconscious yearning to return to the Eden from whence we came. (29)

While the happy ever after ending of a fairy tale may evoke a longing for an Edenic utopia, the fantasy novel indicates that this utopia is only temporary. Due to entropy, when the conclusion of fantasy delivers a utopic ending, the reader is aware that fantasyland will begin to deteriorate, and that a sequel series is possible as a result, as fantasyland struggles to achieve perfection once again.

Consequently, the heroic epic fantasy tale frequently ends with a few loose ends. In fact, even J. R. R. Tolkien in "On Fairy-Stories" (1947), on which he develops his philosophy on fantasy, describes the ending of fairy tales as following: "The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (*for there is no true end to any fairy-tale*)" (68, my emphasis). In a footnote to the parenthesis, Tolkien continues:

> The verbal ending – usually held to be as typical of the end of fairy-stories as "once upon a time" is of the beginning – "and they lived happily ever after" is an artificial device. It does not deceive anybody. End-phrases of this kind are to be compared to the margins and frames of pictures, and are no more to be thought of as the real end of any particular fragment of the seamless Web of Story than the frame is of the visionary scene […]. A sharp cut in the endless tapestry is not unfittingly marked by a formula, even a grotesque or comic one. (80)

Tolkien suggests that the final resolution is only a temporary one, as he recognizes that the conclusion of the narrative does not result in a frozen time. He describes the story as a web or tapestry, the imagery of weaving of time here suggesting that the tapestry or web is endless, just as when telling a history of the world, a historian may convey parts of the story but cannot repeat it in its entirety. The formulaic "happily ever after" end of a story is an "artificial device" that tells the reader that the story continues, but the narration has stopped – for the moment.

That sequel trilogies are often published so close together would suggest that some fantasy authors plan for a sequel trilogy or series. For example, Sanderson published his *Mistborn* trilogy from 2006 to 2008, and in the stand-alone sequel series starting with *Alloy of Law* published in 2011, he clearly indicates his plan to publish further sequel trilogies. Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory's *Obsidian* trilogy, published from 2003 to 2006, is followed *immediately* by the *Enduring Flame* trilogy, which was published from 2007 to 2009. David and Leigh Eddings *Belgariad* series, five books published from 1982 to 1984 is followed by the sequel series *Malloreon*, another five books published from 1987 to 1991. These authors deliberately leave some questions unanswered, but questions that seem unimportant at the time. In a postscript

to the latest published *Mistborn* novel, *The Bands of Mourning*, Sanderson concludes: "There's always another secret" (439), indicating the nature of fantasy fiction as one that does not have any closure.

These unanswered questions leave room for the reader to hope. Tom Moylan, in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), describes how for the philosopher Ernst Bloch, utopia is when ideas result in a change of the status quo:

> Present time is provincial and empty. If humanity becomes too much taken with the present, we lose the possibility of imagining a radically other future. We lose the ability to hope. We lose what Bloch identifies as the *novum*: the unexpectedly new, that which pushes humanity out of the present toward the not yet realized future.[46] (21, original emphasis)

Accordingly, the unanswered questions in the first series or trilogy allow the reader to hope for a future, that is, for the development of another series of books that will fulfil their desire for a "return" to that fantasy world. The end of the series only comes about when "balance" is restored by re-unifying parts into a completed whole – and it is of course possible that these parts can be split again, so that an imbalance results in a new story. For instance, in Bujold's *Curse of Chalion*, Cazaril indicates that he was allowed to live (after dying three times), because he may need to function as hero again: "I'm not quite sure if putting me back into the world this way was a parting gift of the Lady, or just a chance benefit of Her need to have someone on this side to hold open the gate for Her" (482). Although Cazaril is not called upon to be hero again, two more stand-alone novels in the same universe identify other characters as heroes who allow

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[46] Note that in his definition of SF, Suvin's extrapolates on Bloch's conception of the "novum."

metaphysical entities to enter the world through their bodies in order to fix or restore fantasyland. Fantasyland is not fixed permanently. At the end of Farland's *Runelords* novel, the hero Averan declares: "'The damage is repaired,' Averan said. 'The new course will be better for us than the old'" (*Lair of Bones* 449), yet the hero Gaborn declares that his child will "finish what I cannot" (452) indicating that, though the fantasyland appears to have been healed, there is more work to be done – and, indeed, the first *Runelords* series is followed by five more novels. Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy delivers a final scene that appears to be absolute; in the epilogue, the hero Sazed leaves a note to another protagonist, Spook: "*The book contains a short record of the events that led up to the world dying and being reborn*" (723, original emphasis to indicate written text). The death and rebirth of the world seems to indicate the end of the journey for the heroes, as their heroic function is fulfilled. However, Sazed also adds a postscript, discussing the fourteen known metals that fuel magical powers: "*P.S. There are still two metals that nobody knows about. You might want to poke about and see if you can figure out what they are. I think they'll interest you*" (723). Sazed's final words indicate that there's still another mystery to solve, and thus the reader may anticipate another sequel to Sanderson's trilogy before the formal announcement is made. Instead of delivering an Edenic ending where characters live happily ever after and all problems are solved for all eternity, fantasy authors conclude their series with hope for the novum, "the unexpectedly new," which will push the fantasy reader toward the hoped for next cycle.

**Conclusion – A Brief Reflection on the Resonance of the Hero Epic**

As I have identified in each chapter, repetitive structures are an important part of heroic epic fantasy. In creating a new novel, a new fantasyland, a fantasy author needs to create a balance between the repetition of these motifs and the "play," or manipulation, of them into something new. This is the way the genre develops. Cawelti stipulates that genre fiction contains conventional motifs with newly invented ones:

> A successful formulaic work is unique when, in addition to the pleasure inherent in the conventional structure, it brings a new element into the formula, or embodies the personal vision of the creator. If such new elements also become widely popular, they may in turn become widely imitated stereotypes and the basis of a new version of the formula or even of a new formula altogether. (*Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 12)

Through the manipulation of these expected motifs, fantasy authors are able to evolve the genre, utilizing previously known fantasy tropes and changing them slightly into something different. Attebery likewise asserts that fantasy can be described in two distinct ways:

> Fantasy is a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices […] into a predictable plot [...].
>
> Fantasy is a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterized by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought. (*Strategies of Fantasy* 1)

The reader not only experiences pleasure through the recognition of this stock pattern, a skilled author, through a "stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness" is able to

manipulate the expectation of these motifs in order to deliver adapted and new motifs which will then further the pleasure of the reader.

These repetitions, while pleasurable due to their familiarity, are also strange and disquieting. They are uncanny, appearing to be something familiar while simultaneously being different from the first iteration. As Campbell identifies, this pattern of eternal recurrence is important to Stoic philosophy in their conception of an individual's (the hero's) "fate":

> According to the Stoic doctrine of the cyclic conflagration, all souls are resolved into the world soul of primal fire. When this universal dissolution is concluded, the formation of a new universe begins (Cicero's *renovatio*), and all things repeat themselves, every divinity, every person, playing again his former part. Seneca gave a description of this destruction in his "De Consolatione ad Marciam," and appears to have looked forward to living again in the cycle to come. (224)

As I have demonstrated, this description of the cyclical pattern of "every person, playing again his former part" can also be applied to contemporary genre fantasy, either with the reincarnation of the hero or with the heroic function being confirmed with each repetition.

These repetitions are a *resonance*: "1a. The reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighbouring object. Also: a sound, or quality of sound, resulting from this" (*OED*). Throughout this thesis, I have emphasized both the shape and rhythm of the heroic epic form. Recall that Frye describes the repetition of the epic thus: "The regular pulsating meter that traditionally distinguishes verse from prose tends to become the organizing rhythm in *epos* or extended oratorical forms" (251). This regular pulsating meter of the

heroic epic is expressed through the resonance of repetition. In complex organic chemistry, resonance is when structures alternate or vibrate between different structural forms. Thus the concept, in chemistry, incorporates shape and structure with the idea of vibration, repetition, movement in form. Turning to the *OED* then, "resonance" encapsulates all nuances of the word that I have indicated throughout my thesis, tying together scientific models with artistic and affective ones: "2. Corresponding or sympathetic response; an instance of this. In later use also: the power or quality of evoking or suggesting images, memories, and emotions; an allusion, connotation, or overtone" (*OED*). The repetitions of the heroic epic pattern that I have identified all build on each iteration, creating a resonance that evokes a memory, emotion, or overtones of a previously held understanding of the text. As Page Dubois argues, the cyclic nature of epic mythology is not a simple repetition of form: "The Iliadic notion of history is not so much one of cyclical repetition but rather one of regeneration which must be enacted by a human or divine agent" (9). Heroic epic fantasy fiction, drawing as it does from the epic, demonstrates this act of regeneration that is enacted and re-enacted by the hero, the agent or avatar of a metaphysical entity, which works to establish a new balance in an entropic system.

With each iteration the hero must confirm their role in the heroic function, as it is possible that the hero might transform into a u-hero, or that a u-hero might convert to become a hero. The relationship between the two demonstrates another principle of resonance: "5b. *Chem.* The property exhibited by certain molecules of having a structure which cannot be adequately represented by a single structural formula, and which can be said to be intermediate between two or more structures differing only in the distribution of electrons; (apparent) alternation *between* several structures of this type" (*OED*, original emphasis). As I described above, in chemistry, molecules

alternate between several structures of the form, and thus it is difficult to describe the molecule under "a single structural formula." As Gleick describes in relation to chaos: "Flow was shape plus change, motion plus form" (195). This is the manner in which I have described the heroic function, a character that is able to flow or allows flow, creating movement between the physical and metaphysical world, through the shape of their soul. But though they may have the same function, the shape of the hero's soul is not identical from hero to hero.

The hero's function is to act as a conduit for the metaphysical world. This function can be expressed in a variety of ways, as the hero can allow a benign force to enter fantasyland or conversely expel a malevolent force out of fantasyland. Hayles reminds us that fractal shapes come from the word broken itself: "He coined the word 'fractal' from the Latin adjective *fractus* (meaning 'broken') and fractional; it connotes both fractional dimensions and extreme complexity of form" (165). The hero's shape is one that is often broken, and it is through this very brokenness that the hero is able to act as a threshold between worlds. The Hero acts as an agent of divine intervention by separating and removing elements of chaos and entropy and re-ordering fantasyland.

But the hero can only do so by becoming a highly charged particle of chaos and change themselves, demonstrating another nuance of the word resonance: "5d. *Particle Physics*. A short-lived particle or excited state of a particle that is manifested as an increase in the probability of interaction with other particles at certain energies" (*OED*). Recall that a new equilibrium can only be reached at the point of extreme unbalance. Prigogine and Stengers emphasize that: "At all levels, be it the level of macroscopic physics, the level of fluctuations, or the microscopic level, *nonequilibrium is the source of order. Nonequilibrium brings 'order out of chaos'*" (286-287, original emphasis). Once entropy begins to increase and unbalance is achieved, the hero, as agent of change,

further increases the level of non-equilibrium in fantasyland so that they can bring order out of chaos.

The hero's role is to "choose and choose and choose again" (Bujold, *Curse of Chalion* 394), with each choice confirming their position as hero – a position that leads to either regeneration of the world, or an entropic collapse. As Mathews asserts: "Every minute of time represents a choice and thus a potential downfall or salvation that will affect not only the individual moral agent but also the delicate balance of good and evil in the world at large" (72). The hero's choices lead to a resolution where good conquers evil – but only for a flickering moment. Once the hero establishes a new equilibrium, the forces of entropy will begin to work on fantasyland again, leading to yet a new extreme situation, but one similar and yet different from the previous cycle – producing yet another resonance as the cycle is repeated.

As Barthes suggests in *The Pleasure of the Text*: "The stereotype is the word repeated without any magic, any enthusiasm" (42), and this may be the way that repetitions and formula fiction is generally imagined by those who do not find pleasure in fantasy fiction. However, Barthes identifies that repetition can be pleasurable for two contradictory reasons: "the word can be erotic on two opposing conditions, both excessive: if it is extravagantly repeated, or on the contrary, if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness" (42). Enough of the motifs of heroic epic fantasy are repeated from cycle to cycle in order for the reader to experience a feeling of recognition and take pleasure in that "extravagantly repeated," but a perfect reproduction of them would alienate the reader. Rather than being simplified, repetitive, and formulaic, the repetitions within the heroic epic pattern create a resonance by building layers of depth and complexity: "7. *Art*. Richness of colour, *esp.* that produced by proximity to a contrasting colour or colours" (*OED*, original emphasis). This final definition of

resonance suggests that not only is resonance created through "1a. The reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection", or the repetition of patterns and sounds, but also by *contrast*, by identifying the ways in which the pattern is slightly different. It is in this juxtaposition that the beauty of the heroic epic pattern is created and exposed.

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