

Tolkien's Influence and the World of *The Wheel of Time*

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Some people complain that *The Wheel of Time* (*WoT*) is similar to Tolkien's Lord of the Rings (*LotR*). The implication is that *WoT* is somehow *derivative* of *LotR*. But while this is a popular criticism, it reflects fundamental misunderstandings about (i) the nature of *WoT*'s worldbuilding, (ii) the function of influence, and (iii) the formation and development of genre conventions. My hope, in this chapter, is to go some way toward rectifying all three of these misunderstandings.

It is certainly true that the two series have a lot in common, especially structurally (and especially where *WoT*'s first three books are concerned). And that is not to mention *WoT*'s many thinly disguised allusions, ranging from Trollocs (Troll-Orc hybrids), Ogier (Elves with a hint of Ent), Myrddraal and The Forsaken (each inspired by different aspects of the Nazgûl), Padan Fain (Gollum), and Ba'alzamon (Sauron¹). Or, indeed, its penchant for *LotR*-related placenames like Andor or the Mountains of Mist, or the similarity between The Blight and Gorgoroth, Thakan'dar and Mordor, or Shayol Ghul and Mount Doom (indeed, *WoT* even has the Mountains of Dhoom!).

All these parallels, and many, many more, are there to be found. Indeed, Robert Jordan himself made no bones about Tolkien's influence:

In the first chapters of *The Eye of the World*, I tried for a Tolkienesque feel without trying to copy Tolkien's style, but that was by way of saying to the reader, okay, this is familiar, this is something you recognize, now let's go where you haven't been before.²

This helps to explain why Jordan's allusions to Tolkien are thinly veiled: readers are *meant* to catch them, so that they can feel at ease with the story. Astute readers will also spot many more allusions to other familiar stories: vampires (Draghkar), werewolves (wolfbrothers), Norse mythology (particularly Mat, who is a clear analogue of Odin), Arthurian legend (especially Rand, who is an analogue of Arthur), contemporary(ish) science

fiction (Loial reading *To Sail Beyond the Sunset* in *The Great Hunt*), and even the Cold War (the tale of the giants Mosk and Merk), among many, many others. Here again, Jordan was crystal clear about his intentions. Concerning his plans for the series, Jordan wrote, in a note to his publisher sent with the typescript for *The Eye of the World*, that

The story will take in parts not only of the most obvious myths (Arthur and Thor) but others, as well. Parts of the Arthurian legend will be blended with Norse myth, Greek myth and others. These will not be taken whole, however. What will be done is to show occurrences [sic] which could, over thousands of years, be distorted into the sources of these myths.³

And here, we come to the crux of the matter: *The Wheel of Time* is deliberately chock full of stories we know and love. Not accidentally, and not as the result of incidental borrowing, but because Jordan wanted to use his novels to tell the story behind these other stories, the founding myth for all human cultures. And for that reason, something very philosophically interesting is going on in *WoT*. But to see just what that is, we first need to establish the basic building blocks of modern philosophy of literature. So: RAFO!⁴

A Gleeman's Tales, the *So'feia's* Words

The first thing we need to remember is that authors are gleemen—*storytellers*. But *how* do they tell their stories? By writing them down, of course—but *what*, exactly, do they write down? At a first pass, it is tempting to say that authors write everything that they want us to imagine is true in their stories. Jordan wanted us to imagine that five young men and women from a rural backwater will grow up to save the world from evil, and so that's what he wrote down; he wanted us to imagine that Rand has red hair, so he said so; and so on. But although this much is clearly right, it does not get us as far as we might like, because there are lots of other things which must be true in the story if it is to make any sense. Rand, Nynaeve, Thom, Logain, Lanfear, and all of the other characters, for example, are obviously human beings—but we are never explicitly told as much. If they are human beings, then they must have a certain genetic profile, but we never hear about that, either. Perhaps more importantly, the law of gravity is clearly true in the story, otherwise its most basic physics would not make much sense—but again, we are never told as much. These are just some of the many pieces of information that we take for granted.

For philosophers of literature, this just shows that stories are necessarily incomplete: there are lots of details which must be true, but which the author was simply unable to tell us about.⁵ Sometimes this may be because of author error (e.g. is Bela alive or dead?), because they neglected to tie up a loose end (e.g. what is up with the portal stones, the Mad Lands, and Shara?), or

because they deliberately left it ambiguous (e.g. who is Nakomi? What happened to the pipe?). Speaking more broadly, no author can hope to tell us everything that happens in their story—at least, not in finite time. There are simply too many details—How many hairs are on Perrin's left forearm? How many times has Nynaeve tugged her braid?—most of which are too boring and irrelevant to include. There is an obvious reason we are not told every time Rand has to void his bowels: doing so would not be of much interest to most readers. Conversely, if we *did* have a scene in which he poops, we would expect it to be important to the story in some way (e.g. by contributing to the horror of the atmosphere inside Sevanna's box). Good storytelling requires authors to tell us what they think we need to know, or what will enhance our experience of the story, and to trust us to fill in the rest when and where appropriate while ignoring what is irrelevant or uninteresting.

One important consequence of this is that more is true in a story than just what we are explicitly told: a lot goes unsaid—including things of which there is no doubt that they must be true—if the story is to make sense. Similarly, often what we are explicitly told in a story is unreliable evidence for the story's content: we are often told, for example, that Stilling cannot be Healed. So if we want to know what is true in a story, we need to look at more than just what we are explicitly told; we need to also consider how reliable what has been said really is, and what has gone unsaid. With that in mind, philosophers of literature commonly draw a distinction between what stories *explicitly* tell us (“primary” story truth), and what they *implicitly* tell us (“secondary” story truth). Some things implicit in a story are just the consequences of other things that are true in the story. For example, the last we hear of Aldieb has her stabled at the Sun Palace in Cairhien after Moiraine disappears, so presumably she is still there in *Winter's Heart*. And some of what is implicit is what philosophers of literature call the story's *background*.⁶ Background is just the set of beliefs we have about the real world that inform our understanding of the story world; think of it as the baggage you take with you on your journey into the story world, things like the law of gravity, English grammar, and so on. Background helps to fill in some (but not all) of the gaps left by an author, especially when we are talking about facts whose presentation would detract from the story in some way.

Not all background comes from the real world, although plenty of it does; sometimes, it comes from other stories. So, for example, we can be confident that the events of *New Spring* are part of the past in *The Eye of the World* and *A Memory of Light*, even if they're not explicitly mentioned or alluded to. Even genre conventions can inform a story's background: a story might be about a dragon, for example, but say nothing about whether it breathes fire; if it's appropriately situated in the Western tradition of fantasy tales about dragons, then we can rest assured that this dragon also breathes fire. (*WoT*, of course, has only one Dragon, and he is human—though he does weave balefire. Here again, we see the potential historical

inspiration for a piece of real-world mythology.) This kind of background is called carry-over content, because it is carried over from other stories.⁷

The best way to think of background content is just as the set of facts (from the real world, or from other stories) that we take with us into a story world. As we read on, some of our background assumptions will be challenged by the facts on the ground; once we discover that is the case, we let go of that assumption and carry on reading. Most of the time, we do not even notice we are bringing these assumptions into the story until it becomes clear that the story is inconsistent with some assumption we were making. So, for example, you probably assumed that Randland was a fantasy realm distinct from the real world until you encountered the reference to the Apollo space program (the story of Lenn and Salya) in *The Eye of the World* (chapter 4), Mosk and Merk in *The Shadow Rising* (chapter 20), or the artifacts in the Panarch's Palace in Tanchico. Ultimately, what is true in a story is a function of both the story's explicit content and its background content, along with whatever additional facts these might entail.

Although philosophers have suggested several different ways of determining a story's secondary content given its primary content (so-called *principles of generation*⁸), we do not have the space to explore them in this chapter. Instead, I want to direct your attention to an assumption that lurks behind all of these principles. It has been called many things in the past, but most recently it has been articulated as the *Reality Assumption*:

Reality Assumption

Everything that is true in the real world is also fictionally true, unless excluded by the work.⁹

Straightforwardly, the Reality Assumption has us assuming that whatever is true in the real world is also true in the story, unless we are told otherwise. It is a defeasible *assumption* about story-content, and it is easily defeated: it can be defeated by explicit content (e.g. *WoT* is a world containing the One Power), or by genre conventions (e.g. satire is not to be taken literally), by carry-over content, or any number of other factors. What is important is just to notice that this is a commonly assumed starting point for determining story truth.

These are the basic building blocks of contemporary philosophy of literature, and they are necessary in order for us to see and understand Robert Jordan's uniquely ambitious creative achievement in writing *The Wheel of Time*, and to appreciate just why it is so philosophically rich.

The World of *WoT*: *Tia mi aven Moridin isande vadin*

We saw, earlier, that Jordan explicitly conceived of the series as a kind of crucible in which the myths and legends of the real world were forged: that is why we can recognize in it so many elements of these stories from around

the world. The conclusion we should draw from this fact is that *our world is part of WoT's world*. Yes, Randland has the One/True Power, a Creator and a Dark One, Trollocs, Myrddraal, and To'raken; these are significant differences, to be sure. But we can see elements of our world in each of these: magic, for example, was long believed to be real (and, as Arthur C. Clarke reminds us, "sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic"¹⁰), good and evil deities are a feature of many world religions throughout human history, trolls are ubiquitous in Scandinavian folklore, *The Lord of the Rings* popularized the image of the dark rider, and a number of Seanchan beasts bear a striking resemblance to Earth's extinct megafauna. *The Wheel of Time* is presented to us as a possible configuration of our world, as its once and future state. The world as we know it is part of *WoT's* story, as is the world in any number of ways in which we do not know it.

If you are reading this book, then I expect that none of this is news to you. You might have missed a throwaway detail like Mosk and Merk or the Mercedes-Benz hood ornament in the Panarch's Palace, but the series wears its design on its sleeve. In fact, readers will doubtless be struck by another clear parallel to Tolkien: Tolkien likewise conceived of himself as creating (or "sub-creating," to use his own term¹¹) a new, real-world mythology which, as Charles Mills put it, "[chronicles] the true feigned history of mythic creatures who 'reflect a splintered fragment' of the truth."¹² Tolkien himself was quite clear about his aims:

Middle-earth is *our* world. I have (of course) placed the action in a purely imaginary (though not wholly impossible) period of antiquity, in which the shape of the continental masses was different.¹³

WoT and *LotR* are thus very much alike in conception, although *WoT's* real-world borrowings are perhaps easier to see than *LotR's*. But *WoT* takes things a step further than *LotR*: it incorporates the story of *The Lord of the Rings* into its own background. In other words, it is not just the case that *LotR* influenced Jordan; rather, *it is true in WoT* that there was once (or will one day be?) a dragon called Smaug, a race of hairy-footed hobbits, a flaming eye in the sky,¹⁴ and so on.

This may seem like an extravagant claim. After all, *WoT* features no dragons, hobbits, or big flaming eyes in the sky. So what could possibly make this claim true? Two interrelated things:

1. Our world is in *WoT's* background, and *LotR* features prominently in our world.
2. The frequent allusions to *LotR*, especially in *The Eye of the World*.

We know that Jordan wanted to recreate the basis for the myths and legends we find in the real world; and we know that the allusions to *LotR* are

no accident or lazy borrowing: Jordan deliberately structured *The Eye of the World* along the same lines as *The Fellowship of the Ring*, deliberately introduced references to Underhill, the nine rings, and so on. One perfectly charitable way of explaining this is just as a kind of homage to Tolkien, much as George R.R. Martin paid homage to Jordan by introducing house Jordayne of the Tor in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. But such an interpretation does not seem equal to Jordan's ambitions, nor does it satisfactorily explain why there are *several* allusions to *LotR* sprinkled throughout the novels. A more likely explanation is that just as Tolkien wanted to use *LotR* to create a mythology for England, so is *LotR* part of *WoT*'s mythology. To see that this is the case, we will have to consider Jordan's worldbuilding, an issue we will return to below.

But first, let us take stock of where things stand. We said that stories are *told*, and that authors tell us what they think we need and want to know; we said that stories are told against the background of the real world, which allows us to fill in additional details as needed; we saw that *LotR* is supposed to be a story from our own world's distant past; and we said that *WoT* is a story from our distant past/future as well. Putting these together, we arrive at the surprising claim that the events of *LotR*—in some shape, at any rate—likewise lie in *WoT*'s distant past/future, just as the Cold War and dinosaurs do. This shows why Jordan's allusions to Tolkien are so interesting: they are part and parcel of a broader mytho-poetic project that he shared with Tolkien, though the scale of its ambition was much larger. By incorporating a fictional mythology into his own fictional mythology,¹⁵ Jordan played with storytelling norms in a new and interesting manner.¹⁶

But our friendly neighborhood *WoT*-skeptic may not yet be convinced. Jordan, after all, was clearly *influenced* by *LotR*—in fact, he was even more influenced by it than we initially suspected, since it turns out that he took on the same project of mythologizing the world! Does that not show that *WoT* is *derivative* of *LotR*, and isn't derivativeness an artistic defect? Not at all, and now let me tell you why.

Influence: *Sa souvraya niende misain ye*

Philosophers of art and other art theorists have not had very much to say about the concept of influence, as such. Still, it is worth considering the little they *have* said, because it sounds a note of caution concerning our tendency to dismiss through influence.

The art historian Michael Baxandall, for example, famously argued that "Influence' is a curse of art criticism" because it reverses the roles of agent and passive subject: the underlying grammar of "Tolkien influenced Jordan," for example, suggests that Tolkien did all the work, while Jordan simply received his wisdom (and perhaps also the credit).¹⁷ But, Baxandall argues, this obscures all of the hard and interesting work that the person

who is influenced does to assimilate and transform the insights of their predecessor into something new—at least where good artists are concerned.¹⁸ When we conceive of the influenced party as the agent in the relation, we gain access to a new and richer critical vocabulary, allowing us to say things like “Jordan drew on Tolkien,” “Jordan adapted Tolkien,” “Jordan subverted Tolkien,” and so on. In other words, as Baxandall puts it, “To think in terms of influence blunts thought by impoverishing the means of differentiation.”¹⁹

There is something to this insight, particularly with respect to the tendency to “[impoverish] the means of differentiation.” Every artist is influenced by a host of things, after all, including art’s prior history. Abstract artists working today can only do what they do because artists like Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich opened the conceptual space that made that sort of art possible, but to call that influence tends to paper over the real and significant artistic achievements of later artists, including such titans of modern art as Jackson Pollock, Salvador Dalí, and Frida Kahlo. The reason influence has a tendency to flatten the (non-) representational palettes artists draw from, according to Baxandall, is that it masquerades as a causal relationship: when x influences y , we think of that as x causing y ’s actions—while in point of fact, it is y who sees, in x , something that they must respond to, elaborate on, and so on.²⁰ Influence does not really proceed from x to w , y , and z ; it is established in retrospect, when we see that w , y , and z all latched on to something in x , and made it their own.²¹

To say that someone’s work is influenced by another is, too often, to suggest that it is in some way derivative; and to say that it is derivative is to suggest that it is in some way imitative, that the artist fails to make it their own, and so pales in comparison to its original. Oscar Wilde, for example, wrote in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* (1889) that “influence is simply a transference of personality, a mode of giving away what is most precious to one’s self, and its exercise produces a sense, and, it may be, a reality of loss.”²² In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), he adds that

to influence a person is to give him one’s own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.²³

This seems to be the substance of the complaint so often leveled at *WoT*: *WoT* looks a lot like *LotR*, and so it is less original, less aesthetically valuable.

In fact, we now have the resources to meet this charge against *WoT*. After all, the fact that Artist₂ was influenced by Artist₁ does not entail that Artist₂’s work is less creative or original than Artist₁’s—on the contrary, it often allows Artist₂ to be *more* original.²⁴ Yes, *WoT* was influenced by

LotR—but what work of epic fantasy isn't? *LotR* was a seminal, groundbreaking work that shaped the structure of modern fantasy literature, pushing it out of the realm of children's fairy tales and into the realm of respectable adult literature.

What matters is that these influences are not incidental and unthinking: they were deliberately chosen by Jordan and put to work toward certain ends. Most prominently, Jordan wanted to ease readers into his world by giving them a sense of familiarity, and he opted to do so by structuring the first novel in ways that echo *The Fellowship of the Ring*. But he also wanted to (i) extend Tolkien's mythologizing project beyond England to the rest of the world, and the rest of human history, and (ii) incorporate *LotR* itself into his own mythologizing. This project is distinct from Tolkien's; clearly, it is much more ambitious than Tolkien's (and that helps to explain why it took fifteen novels [counting *New Spring*] rather than five [counting *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*]). But, yes, it is a project that was made possible by Tolkien first attempting to create a mythology for England.

Finally, it is worth raising something of a pedant's quibble against the charge that *WoT* is derivative of *LotR*. Jordan's influences were broad, spanning the entire globe, its history, its myths, and its legends. As Jordan himself put it, "I gathered together a lot of legends, fairy tales, and folk tales from around the world and stripped away the cultural references, so that just the bare story was left. Then I reverse-engineered them."²⁵ Already, this is far more intricate—and interesting—than wholesale borrowing.

But Jordan's notes reveal that far and away the biggest influence on *WoT*'s content is not *LotR* but rather Arthurian legend, especially as told in Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485).²⁶ This influence ranges from simple names (e.g. Morgase/Morgan/Morgawse, al'Thor/Arthur, Merlin/Amyrlin, sa'angreal/sangreal, etc.) to character arcs and plotlines (although these have often been recombined or ascribed to several characters). The most obvious case here is Rand himself: like the once and future king, Lews Therin died but is prophesied to rise again; Rand is acclaimed as the Dragon when he pulls Callandor (Excalibur/Caledfwlch) from the Stone (of Tear), his mother was Tigraine (Igraine), he is supposed to marry Egwene al'Vere (Guinevere), he dies at the Battle of Caemlyn (Camlann), and so on. But we can also see elements of Lancelot's story in Lan, of Galahad in Galad, of Morgawse and Morgan in Morgase, and so on.

Genre: Sure as Peaches Are Poisonous

Alternately, we can think about influence's influence in terms of the mechanics of genre creation. A genre is, essentially, a collection of narrative elements that are typically associated with particular kinds of stories.²⁷ Fantasy, for example, canonically features magic and an array of mythical

creatures from elves and trolls to dragons, and typically occupies a late medieval or early Renaissance technological and political setting. As more and more stories are written which feature similar collections of narrative elements, a genre coalesces around them. Such collections of properties are said to be a genre's *standard* properties, the kinds of properties you'd expect to find instantiated in a typical work falling within that genre.

Because genres are identified by reference to their standard properties, we can also easily articulate properties that are *contra-standard* for some genre: the kinds of properties which are so unusual in the genre that their presence tends to count as evidence against classifying the work in that genre. So, for example, a story that features futuristic technology or action in outer space/on other planets is more properly associated with science fiction than fantasy. Alternately, as Orson Scott Card so succinctly put it, "science fiction has rivets, fantasy has trees."²⁸ In other words, rivets are standard for science fiction, while an emphasis on trees is contra-standard; conversely, the emphasis on trees is standard for fantasy, while rivets on anything other than mail are contra-standard. And some properties, of course, are *variable* for a genre: they don't count much toward one classification or another. The properties we take to be standard (or contra-standard) for a genre depend, in large part, on the kinds of properties that genre's founding members are taken to have. It is no accident that so much fantasy looks like *LotR*: *LotR* is the text that founded the genre, and so it acts as a reference point for subsequent fantasy readers and writers.

Now, this is not to say that there is never any overlap—quite the contrary! The fact that medieval/Renaissance settings are standard for fantasy does not mean that they are necessary, and plenty of fantasy boasts different settings. Urban fantasy, for example, features contemporary(ish) urban settings; even *WoT* itself, a paradigmatic work of fantasy, features a setting simultaneously from our past and future (recall, e.g., that the Age of Legends, Randland's future, lies three thousand years in its past, while our own age lies buried in even deeper time). The point is not that a given story cannot deviate from the properties that are standard for its genre. The point, rather, is that it cannot deviate *too much* and still be classed in that genre. If someone starts out to write a fantasy novel but sets their story on a ship light years from earth, with no magic except advanced technology ... Well, it will look a lot more like science fiction than fantasy.²⁹ Stories are classified into a genre when they possess a sufficient number of standard properties for that genre, and do not feature too many contra-standard properties.

Just what the precise threshold is, is a matter for readers and writers to determine collectively through their discourse and practices. A genre is built up over time, as authors return to certain key properties over and over again. Once they are robustly established in the community of readers, genre classifications can survive the introduction of contra-standard properties. Indeed, so long as the new contribution does not feature too many contra-standard properties, these can actually help to cement the centrality of the

genre's standard properties by highlighting both the kind of story it is trying to be and the ways in which it is departing from standard narratives.

This also explains why and how genres may change over time: if enough people glom on to a particular contra-standard property in their contributions to a genre, it can become standard for the genre over time. This is what happened with cozy mysteries, for example: they started out as male-led stories (think of Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and Arsène Lupin), but quickly became dominated by female protagonists (e.g. Miss Marple, Mrs. Bradley, and Miss Fisher), to the point where that is what we expect from them now. This is essentially what Harold Bloom means when he argues that great writing is a matter of misreading one's predecessors:³⁰ writers are also readers, and as such they are engaged in a kind of conversation with one another, and with the works that precede them. Their own work helps to extend the boundaries of a genre in different directions by taking slightly different clusters of properties as standard for the genre, introducing new clusters of properties as contra-standard, and so on.³¹

This does offer one last refuge for the defender of originality: if *LotR* was a pioneering work of the fantasy genre, such that subsequent fantasy was and is very much written in its mold, does that not mean that it is more original, more creative, than the works which followed it, such as *WoT*?

It does not. While it is certainly an achievement to produce a pioneering work, this is no guarantee of the work's independent quality. Many of the pioneering works of science fiction, for example—from the heady days of pulp “scientifiction” to Cold War titans like Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke—are simply unreadable by today's standards (e.g. the “science” is not very scientific, the plots are trite, the characters are cardboard cutouts, the misogyny is unbearable, etc.). Even at its worst, of course, *LotR* is nothing like that; the point is just that pioneering status is no guarantee of quality. But more importantly, we should not ignore the fact that pioneering works are themselves influenced by the history of works which precede them. *LotR*, for example, is heavily indebted to Arthurian legend and Celtic, Greek, and Norse mythology, including for its cast of critters—dragons, dwarves, elves, goblins, trolls, and so on are all drawn from mythological traditions, and *LotR* is no less creative or impressive for it. What matters is not their presence in the story, but what Tolkien *did* with and to them.

Of Rockets and Hobbits

Putting it all together, we can see that:

The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again. In one Age, called the Third Age by some, an Age yet to come, an Age long past, a wind rose ...³²

So begins every book of *WoT*. It is natural not to pay too much attention to it, although by the time Rand steps through the rings in Rhuidean most readers will have gathered that the story is built around a cyclical understanding of time, so that events in the story world are endlessly repeated (though the details may vary from one iteration to the next). This opening is our first clue that we are reading something special. It is a story that resembles many of the stories with which we are already intimately familiar—*LotR*, certainly, but also Arthurian legend, the life of Alexander, Norse mythology, and much, much more. But far from these narrative elements marking *WoT* out as derivative, a work of hackneyed borrowings and imitation, instead they serve to showcase just how rich the world of *WoT* really is. It is every bit as layered with meaning as our own cultural history, and more.

As we have seen, the complaint about Jordan's debt to Tolkien actually *understates* Tolkien's influence: if all it amounted to were several allusions to *LotR* and the narrative structure of *The Eye of the World*, then it would not amount to very much. But Jordan borrowed something much more significant from Tolkien, and the results are far more philosophically interesting and give us a very different story: he borrowed and expanded Tolkien's method of worldbuilding. As Michael Livingston puts it, "Jordan has applied philological principles to material culture, something Tolkien never dared in quite the same way."³³ Tolkien influenced Jordan insofar as Jordan's project is Tolkien's writ very, very large indeed, but the story itself is far from derivative. *WoT* represents the natural extension of Tolkien's mytho-poetic project, its enlargement to a scope far beyond what he envisaged. Jordan's project is singularly philosophically interesting because of how it weaves subsidiary fictional worlds into its own; *WoT* is a philosophical tour de force. Randland, like Middle-Earth, is *our* world, and if we unpick the threads of its history we will find both rockets and hobbits.

Notes

1. It may be tempting to identify Shai'tan (The Dark One) with Sauron, but *LotR* fans will recall that although Sauron is the current "Dark Lord," he merely took up the mantle after his master Morgoth was defeated by the Valar. This story closely parallels that of Ba'alzamon (Ishmael), who was only partially sealed by the Hundred Companions and so was able to periodically sow chaos in the world.
2. Robert Jordan, quoted in Michael Livingston, *Origins of the Wheel of Time: The Legends and Mythologies That Inspired Robert Jordan* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2022), 46.
3. Livingston, *Origins of the Wheel of Time*, 93.
4. "Read and Find Out," Jordan's stock answer to plot-related questions about *WoT*.

5. It is worth noting that there is some disagreement as to whether the incompleteness is *epistemic* or *ontological*: do we just not *know* what the pertinent details are, or is there no fact of the matter in the first place?
6. David K. Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978), 37–46, David K. Lewis, "Postscripts to R. Woodward 'Truth in Fiction,'" in J.L. Austin ed., *Philosophical Papers, Volume 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 276–280.
7. Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," 42.
8. Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 145.
9. Stacie Friend, "The Real Foundation of Fictional Worlds," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95 (2017), 29.
10. Arthur C. Clarke, "Clarke's Third Law on UFO's," *Science* 159(3812) (1968), 255.
11. J.R.R. Tolkien, "Faerie Stories," in Christopher Tolkien ed., *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 132.
12. Charles W. Mills, "The Wretched of Middle-Earth: An Orkish Manifesto," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 60(S1) (2022), 108.
13. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 91.
14. Technically, this owes more to the films than the books, where the eye is Sauron's symbol. But we should not let the facts get in the way of a good image!
15. Granted, all mythologies are fictional, but some, like Norse mythology, were once presented as real-world truth (or, at least, as closely allied to it), whereas others (such as *LotR*) never were.
16. Though perhaps not as novel as we might think; what is fanfiction, after all, if not a smaller-scale ambition of the same kind?
17. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 58, Harold Bloom articulates a similar feeling as the "paradox of poetic influence," according to which it is later poets who determine the nature and extent of previous poets' influence. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42–43.
18. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 59.
19. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 59.
20. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 59.
21. Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 60. Jerrold Levinson, on the other hand, argues that the relationship is causal—but a special kind of cause which cannot be known until some time after the fact. See Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks and the Future," in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 209–210.
22. Oscar Wilde, quoted in Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 6.
23. Oscar Wilde, quoted in Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 6.
24. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, also makes this point, 7.
25. Livingston, *Origins of the Wheel of Time*, 67.
26. See e.g. Livingston, *Origins of the Wheel of Time*, 64–65, 76–80, 84–85, 100–103.

27. The following observations on the nature and development of genres—especially as articulated in terms of standard vs. contra-standard properties—originally come from Kendall Walton, “Categories of Art,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 79 (, 1970), 334–367, although his concern is with categories of art more broadly (e.g. music, painting, sculpture, etc.). They were first articulated for genre by Stacie Friend, “Fiction as a Genre,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112 (2012), see esp. 188.
28. Howard Mittelmark, “Interview: Orson Scott Card,” in *Inside Books* (, 1989), 38–39.
29. Though even then, extra-textual considerations may impact our classification—Iain M. Banks’s *Inversions* (1998), for example, features a straightforwardly medieval setting, with nary a whiff of science fiction about it—save that it is a novel in his Culture series, one of the jewels of science fiction.
30. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, xix, xxiii, 5, 30. Bloom calls this “poetic misprision.”
31. See also Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 60–61.
32. Robert Jordan, *The Eye of the World* (New York: TOR Books, 1990), 21.
33. Livingston, *Origins of the Wheel of Time*, 56.

