Fantasy Literature as a Tool for Self-Improvement

B.A. Essay

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This essay explores how fantasy literature shows the reader aspects of their own personality by reflecting certain human desires, and in doing so raises questions which can lead the reader to expand their understanding of themselves and become a more rounded version of themselves. Six fantasy books are examined. They are The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis, The Eye of the World by Robert Jordan, "The Highwayman" by R.A. Salvatore, A Game of Thrones by George R.R. Martin, and Mistborn: the Final Empire by Brandon Sanderson. Each book is shown to resonate very strongly with one human desire. The Hobbit resonates with a desire for order. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe resonates with a desire to be relevant. The Eye of the World resonates with a desire to feel wonder. "The Highwayman" resonates with a desire to be able to overcome adversity. A Game of Thrones resonates with a desire to feel the thrill of being in danger. Mistborn: the Final Empire resonates with the desire to be competent. It further examines some of the things that can be learned from the novels in question. One of the things one can learn from The Hobbit is the difference between disparate races. One of the things one can learn from The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is responsibility. One of the things one can learn from The Eye of the World is to be open to new things. One can, among other things, learn how to hope from "The Highwayman." One can learn what form of danger frightens one most from A Game of Thrones, among other things. Lastly, one can learn about the nature of one's own competence in Mistborn: the Final Empire, among other things.
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Introduction

Humans have many desires, and while not everyone has the same desires, there are some that are arguably present within every person to varying degrees. Mythologies, legends and folktales have reflected these desires throughout history, bespeaking their importance to humanity. Creation myths explain how the world came to be. The creation story in Norse mythology, where the giant Ymir is slain and the world is fashioned from his corpse, is an excellent example of this (Gill). This bespeaks a desire for everything to be defined and structured. Religions sometimes portray humans as key figures in the universe. In Christianity, for example, God is believed to have made humans in his own image. This makes humanity special, seeing as how God is the most important figure in existence (Hurlbut). This bespeaks a desire to be of relevance in the universe. Mythologies, legends and folk tales often contain wonderous elements. Asgard, the world where the group of gods known as the Aesir live, is connected to the human world by a rainbow bridge called Bifrost (ThorNews). This bespeaks a desire for adventure and a sense of wonder. In countless religions across the world, there is an existence after death. For example, in Greek mythology, the souls of the dead go to the underworld (Mark). This bespeaks a desire to be able to overcome adversity, for the prospect of death is a source of adversity. Stories from mythology often involve dangers of all sorts. Ragnarök, the end of the world in Norse mythology, is an excellent example of this (Hirst). This bespeaks a desire to experience the thrill that comes from being in danger. Many mythologies, legends and folktales portray characters who are very competent. Daedalus, the Greek inventor and scholar who created, among other things, the labyrinth where the minotaur of Crete was kept, is an excellent example (Socrates). This bespeaks a desire to be competent. The fantasy genre is heavily influenced by mythologies, legends and folktales from all over the world, and so it is only natural that they should reflect these desires as well. Fantasy literature is studied herein. The six fantasy novels that are discussed are: *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, *The Eye of the World* by Robert Jordan, "The Highwayman" by R.A. Salvatore, *A Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin, and *Mistborn: the Final Empire* by Brandon Sanderson. *The Hobbit* is discussed because it is such an early work in the fantasy literary genre as it is known today. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is discussed because it is also an early work in the fantasy literary genre as it is known today. *The Eye of the World* is discussed because it is part of a very large and popular fantasy series. "The Highwayman" is discussed because it was published
relatively recently. *A Game of Thrones* is discussed because it is part of such a popular literature fantasy series. *Mistborn: the Final Empire* is discussed because it was published relatively recently. Fantasy literature makes the reader more aware of certain aspects of themselves by reflecting certain fundamental human desires, and in doing so can help them to grow and thrive as a person, as can be seen in how *The Hobbit* reflects a desire for order, in how *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* reflects a desire to be relevant, in how *The Eye of the World* reflects a desire for a sense of wonder, in how "The Highwayman" reflects a desire for being able to overcome adversity, in how *A Game of Thrones* reflects a desire to feel the thrill of danger, and in how *Mistborn: the Final Empire* reflects a desire to be extraordinarily competent in some field or other.

**Chapter 1: The Hobbit**

Humans have always had a need to understand what is at work in the world, in order to bring some semblance of order and organization to their chaotic existence. Throughout history, people have attempted this by assigning names and personalities to aspects of the world, and that is how myths, folk tales and legends are born. Creation myths explain how the world came to be. Norse mythology, where the giant Ymir is killed and the world cobbled together from his corpse, is a good example of this (Gill). Mythologies sometimes explain more abstract concepts in human existence. Christianity, for example, tries to define good and evil. The seven heavenly virtues are the human traits that are considered good. They are humility, liberality, chastity, meekness, temperance, brotherly love and diligence (Laney). The seven deadly sins are the human traits that are considered evil. They are pride, wrath, envy, lust, greed, gluttony and sloth (Cline). The fantasy genre has been influenced by mythology, folk tales and legends, and by extension by a desire for order and organization. One fantasy story that illustrates that is *The Hobbit*, an early representative of the fantasy genre, written by the British author J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Hobbit* is a fantasy novel that demonstrates the power of literature to make the reader more aware of their own personality, in this case their desire for order, and in doing so gives them the means by which to grow as a person, as is evidenced by the fact that there are races who are distinctly evil by Christian standards, by the fact that there are races who are distinctly good by Christian standards, by the fact that hobbits are creatures of habit and by extension creatures of order, and by the fact that several characters throughout the story show common courtesy to others.
The world the book takes place in is home to races that are distinctly evil by Christian standards, and this clear distinction between good and evil speaks to the desire for order and organization. First, there are the three trolls Bilbo and his companions fall afoul of. The trolls are evil creatures by the standard of Christian dogma. William said at one point that Tom and Bert had eaten an entire village of people between them (Tolkien pp. 33). This shows that they indulge in the deadly sin of gluttony (Cline). Second, there are the goblins of the Misty Mountains. The goblins are very good at making the kinds of technology that kills many people at the same time. They hate everyone, and especially those who are prosperous and orderly (Tolkien pp. 59). This shows that they indulge in the deadly sin of wrath (Cline). They also raid settlements, where they capture slaves (Tolkien pp. 94). They use slaves because they are slothful (Tolkien pp. 59). This shows that they indulge in the deadly sin of sloth (Cline). Third, there are the Wargs. These creatures are described as an evil variety of wolves, that sometimes accompany the goblins on raids, and share what they plunder there (Tolkien pp. 94). This seems to indicate that they indulge in the deadly sin of greed (Cline). And fourth, there are the dragons. They are incredibly greedy for treasure, even though they can not necessarily tell which piece of treasure is good and which piece is bad. They do not make things on their own, but they are more than willing to kill people and destroy villages in order to plunder what treasure they find there (Tolkien pp. 23). This demonstrates that they indulge in the deadly sin of greed (Cline). There are indeed races in the world the book takes place in that are clearly evil when measured against Christian standards, and this speaks to the human desire for order and organization.

The setting of the book is home to races that are good by the standards espoused by Christian dogma, and this distinction between good and evil resonates with the desire for things to be orderly and organized. First, there are the hobbits. The way they are described, the reader is led to believe that they are good, with faces that are described as good-natured, and their laughs are described as being fruity (Tolkien pp. 4). Because of their pleasant demeanor, which could partially be meant to put others at ease, they could be said to practice the heavenly virtue of brotherly love (Laney). Second, there are the Wood-elves. They are a goodly race, as is made clear in the description of how well they treat their captured enemies, and said treatment includes giving their prisoners plenty of food and drink (Tolkien pp. 156). This demonstrates that they practice the heavenly virtue of brotherly love (Laney). And third, there are the giant eagles who live in the northern mountains of the world. They are described as being noble, unlike other
eagles who had the capacity to demonstrate cowardice and even cruelty (Tolkien pp. 97). Since they are not cruel, they could be said to practice the heavenly virtues of meekness and brotherly love (Laney). There are indeed several races within the setting of the book, that are good according to Christian values, and this resonates with the human desire for things to be neatly organized and orderly.

Hobbits are creatures who like to have a daily routine, and by extension they are creatures of order. First, there is the fact that hobbits tend not to like the unexpected, and indeed the Bagginses had a good reputation among their fellow hobbits because they never did anything unexpected (Tolkien pp. 3). Second, there is the fact that hobbits tend not to like adventures, and the Bagginses had a good reputation among other hobbits because they never went on adventures (Tolkien pp. 3). And third, there is the fact that Hobbits tend to have a liking for relaxation and comfort. As much is shown in the description of them, where it is said that they would like to have two dinners if they have anything to say about it (Tolkien pp. 4). Hobbits do indeed like to have a fixed routine in their lives, which means they are creatures who value orderliness.

There are many instances throughout the book where characters demonstrate common courtesy, and it can be argued that common courtesy is orderly, for it is a code of conduct by which one abides. First, there is the fact that Bilbo invites Balin in for tea after the dwarf knocks on his door, even though he has no idea who the blue-bearded dwarf is (Tolkien pp. 8). Second, there is the fact that Balin bows to Bilbo in greeting before strolling in, even though he does not know the hobbit (Tolkien pp. 8). Third, there is the fact that Thorin sends a formal letter to Bilbo where he thanks him for his hospitality, and accepts his help in reclaiming the ancient dwarf homeland (Tolkien pp. 28). And fourth, there is Smaug, who speaks eloquently and with surprising manners to Bilbo, even though malice quite obviously seethes behind the formal words (Tolkien pp. 204). Characters do indeed demonstrate a common courtesy towards others in many instances throughout the book, which is why it can be argued that common courtesy, as a code of conduct, is orderly.

*The Hobbit*’s focus on the desire for order can open up several avenues for the reader to gain a more rounded view of the world, and by extension improve themselves as a person, as can be seen in the fact that there are races that are clearly evil by Christian standards, in the fact that there are races that are clearly good by Christian standards, in the fact that hobbits are creatures of habit and by extension creatures of order, and in the fact that several characters in the novel
show other characters common courtesy. The most prominent example of order in *The Hobbit* is the categorization of good and evil into clearly distinct categories. The focus on the Christian evil can raise the question of whether the evil races are actually evil, or if they are simply different from humans. Likewise, the focus on the Christian good can raise the question of whether the good races are actually good, or if they are simply different from humans. Mulling over these questions can widen the horizon of the reader. Another example of order in the book is that of habits. The focus on habits can raise the question of what can be gained if one is willing to go outside one's comfort ring. Thinking about this question can make the reader more aware of when they hold back merely out of habit and can encourage them to try something new. Another example of order is that of common courtesy. This focus raises the question what common courtesy is really worth. Mulling over this question can make the reader more aware of the actual worth of common courtesy. *The Hobbit* does indeed use the desire for order to help the reader improve themselves.

**Chapter 2: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**

Humans have a desire to be relevant, albeit to varying degrees depending on the person in question. Some would like to become relevant through achieving some destiny, while others would like to become relevant by being extremely good and virtuous, or by protecting other people from harm. This desire to be relevant can be seen in myths, legends and folk tales in several ways. Humans are sometimes portrayed as being special in the grand scheme of the universe in the myths, folk tales and legends of the world. A good example would be Christianity, where an all-powerful God is believed to have made humans in his own image (Hurlbut). Mythologies also tend to feature beings who are integral parts of the world, as they govern the world. Egyptian mythology, for example, features a wide pantheon of gods and goddesses, each of whom is responsible for some aspect of the world or human existence. Ra is the god of the sun, Bast is the goddess of cats, Anubis is the god of death, and so on (Wigington). Another mythology that demonstrates this would be Hindu mythology. It also features a wide pantheon of deities who are responsible for aspects of the world or human existence. Shiva is the god of destruction, Krishna is the god of love and compassion, and Rama is the deity of virtue and truth, and so on (Das). Mythologies, folk tales and legends have greatly influenced the fantasy genre, and the desire for relevance can be seen there. One book that is particularly well
suited to the fulfillment of this desire is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, another early representative of the genre, written by the English author C.S. Lewis. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is a fantasy book that shows literature’s ability to make the reader more aware of themselves, in this case their desire to be relevant, and in so doing gives them the means by which to better themselves as a person, as is evidenced by the fact that the main protagonists are the prophesied ones, by the fact that Aslan is a Jesus figure, and by the fact that the White Witch is a Devil figure.

The main protagonists are the prophesied ones, through whom the reader can vicariously experience the sensation of being relevant. First, the four children are referred to as the flesh and bone of Adam, which makes them seem more biblical (Lewis 1:43:01-1:43:11). Second, the four children are destined to become kings and queens, which makes them seem like nobility (Lewis 1:43:11-1:43:14). And third, the coming of the four children is supposed to herald the end of the tyranny of the witch, which makes them into savior figures (Lewis 1:43:14-1:43:19). The reader can indeed experience being relevant vicariously through the main protagonists of the story, who are prophesied to accomplish great things.

Aslan is similar to Jesus Christ, and the reader can vicariously experience how it is to be so important to the world. First, there is the fact that Aslan is tortured and humiliated before he is killed, just as Jesus Christ was humiliated and tortured before he was nailed to the cross (Lewis 3:26:13-3:27:21). Second, there is the fact that Aslan dies for the sins of Edmund, just as Jesus Christ died so that the rest of humanity could be saved from sin (Lewis 3:29:52-3:30:42). Third, there is the fact that Aslan comes back to life, just as Jesus Christ supposedly rose from the dead on Easter Sunday (Lewis 3:39:27-3:39:53). And fourth, there is the fact that Aslan can perform miracles, like when he breathed life into those the White Witch had turned to stone, and Jesus Christ could perform miracles like giving sight to the blind and walk on water (Lewis 3:48:11-3:49:53). The reader can indeed experience how it is to be incredibly relevant to the world through Aslan, who is very much like Jesus Christ.

The White Witch is similar to the Devil, whose importance lies in the danger he represents for mankind, and the reader can experience how important she is to the world vicariously. First, there is the fact that she tries to get Edmund to bring his brother and his two sisters to her by offering him Turkish Delights, just as the Devil tries to bring everyone else to his side with promised rewards (Lewis 00:44:42-00:45:05). Second, there is the fact that she has
an army of evil creatures at her beck and call, just as the Devil has legions of fallen angels at his beck and call (Lewis 3:23:42-3:24:35). And third, there is the fact that she has the job of punishing those who commit certain crimes, much like the Devil has the job of punishing those sinners who come into his care (Lewis 3:10:43-3:10:55). The reader can indeed experience vicariously how important the White Witch, who is similar to the Devil, is to the world.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*’s focus on the desire to be relevant can open the reader up to new ways of thinking about themselves in regards to their desire to be relevant, and in doing so help them become a better and more rounded version of themselves, as can be seen in the fact that the main protagonists are people who are spoken of in prophecy, in the fact that Aslan is similar to Jesus Christ, and in the fact that the White Witch is similar to the Devil. The desire to be relevant is shown in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* through the lenses of responsibility. The focus on the main protagonists being the prophesied ones raises the question of whether the reader would be able to handle responsibility. The focus on Aslan being a Jesus figure raises the question of whether the reader would be willing to shoulder the responsibility of giving their own life for others. The focus on the White Witch being a Devil figure raises the question of whether the reader thinks evil is external, or something that is inside every person. Thinking about these things can make the reader consider their own responsibilities. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* does indeed use the desire to be relevant to improve the reader.

**Chapter 3: The Eye of the World**

Humans are, by their very nature, attracted to things that invoke a sense of wonder. There are countless myths, legends and folk tales that have been influenced by this attraction. Asgard, for instance, is the world where the Aesir of Norse mythology live, and it is accessible from the human world by a rainbow bridge that is called Bifrost (ThorNews). There have also been countless legends of places with magical properties. The Fountain of Youth, whose waters have the power to restore youth to people, is one such place (Minster). There have also been legendary creatures that evoke a sense of awe in people. The dragons of China, who were supposedly able to manipulate water, storms and so on, are an excellent example of this (O’Brien). This desire for a sense of wonder has influenced the fantasy genre as well. One fantasy book can be said to satisfy this need particularly well, and that is *The Eye of the World*, written by the American author Robert Jordan. *The Eye of the World* is a fantasy book that is a good example of how
literature can make the reader more aware of their own personality, in this case their desire for a sense of wonder, and by extension gives them the tools by which to improve themselves, as is evidenced by how the characters go to new places, get to know new cultures, encounter new inhuman creatures, bear witness to magical powers and phenomena, interact with different organizations, and by how they come into contact with magical objects.

There are many instances throughout the book where the characters from the Two Rivers visit a new place that ignites in them a sense of wonder. First, there is Baerlon, which ignites a sense of wonder in the people from the Two Rivers because it is so large and populous compared to their own home town (Jordan pp. 184-185). Second, there is the ruined city of Shadar Logoth. It is the first city that Rand sees, and he feels wonder at the size and majesty of the city, even though it are merely the ruins of a city (Jordan pp. 275). Third, there is Caemlyn. This is the first living city that Rand sees, and he is awestricken by both the size of it and the amount of people it has (Jordan pp. 528-529). And fourth, there is the Green Man's place, the garden where Rand, Egwene and even surly Nyaneve feel soothed by the beauty of the plants around them, hence arguably feeling wonder (Jordan pp. 742-743). There are indeed many instances throughout the book where the characters visit new places that make them feel a sense of wonder.

The different cultures that populate the world the book takes place in are every bit as much a part of the world as are the towns and cities, and learning about these cultures makes for a sense of discovery and wonder. First, there are the people of Caemlyn, who wear a red strip of cloth tied about the hilt and sheath of their swords (Jordan pp. 535). Second, there are the people of the Two Rivers, who are stubborn and resolute in the face of adversity (Jordan pp. 92). Third, there are the Shienarans, whose laws forbid anyone from hiding their face while within a town (Jordan pp. 693). And fourth, there are the tinkers, who wear gaudy clothing and live in equally gaudy wagons (Jordan pp. 367). Learning about the different cultures that inhabit the world the book takes place does indeed create a sense of wonder and discovery.

The inhuman creatures that populate the world the book takes place in are every bit as much a part of the world as are the towns and cities, and learning about these creatures creates a sense of discovery and wonder. First, there are the half man, half beast monstrosities known as Trollocs, who attack Rand in his home in the Two Rivers (Jordan pp. 68). Second, there are the black-clad Myrddraal, who lead the Trolloc band that comes to the Two Rivers (Jordan pp. 85). Third, there are the bat-winged creatures known as Draghkar, who hunt for Rand and his
companions (Jordan pp. 146). And fourth, there are the enormous Ogier, one of whom Rand meets at an inn in Caemlyn (Jordan pp. 547). Learning about the inhuman creatures inhabiting the world the book takes place in does indeed create a sense of wonder and discovery.

There is a wide variety of magical phenomena that exists in the world the book takes place in, and learning about those magical phenomena can create a sense of discovery and wonder in the reader. First, there is the way the Green Man's place appeared around the characters without warning (Jordan pp. 739). Second, there is the mist-like phenomena known as Mashadar, that haunts Shadar Logoth and kills with a touch (Jordan pp. 295). Third, there is the Waygate, which gives access to what seems to be an alternate dimension that is dark and dangerous (Jordan pp. 666-667). And last but in no way least, there are Rand's dreams where he meets and converses with Ba'alzamon (Jordan pp. 201-203). Learning about the magical phenomena of the world the book takes place in can truly invoke a sense of wonder and discovery in the reader.

The different organizations that exist in the setting of the book are very much a part of the world, as much so as are the places and creatures, and learning about them instills a sense of wonder and discovery. First, there are the Whitecloaks, who zealously fight everything they believe to be a servant of the Shadow (Jordan pp. 445-449). Second, there are the Aes Sedai, who are women with the ability to use magic, and they have a reputation for being schemers (Jordan pp. 101-105). Third, there are the Forsaken, who are ancient servants of the Dark One, and the stuff of stories mothers tell to their children to make them behave (Jordan pp. 14). And fourth, there are the Darkfriends, who are people who have sworn their allegiance to the Dark One (Jordan pp. 712). Learning about the organizations that exist in the world of the book does indeed make for a sense of wonder and discovery.

There is a wide array of magical objects in the world the book takes place in, and seeing those magical objects can invoke in the reader a sense of wonder. First, there is the dagger the female assassin tried to kill Mat with in the stable, a magical weapon that caused the wood it cut to blacken and smoke (Jordan pp. 509-510). Second, there is the Eye of the World, which was apparently the essence of Saidin (Jordan pp. 745-746). Third, there was the Horn of Valere, which had the power to summon certain heroic individuals from the past back from the dead to fight (Jordan pp. 772). And last but not least there is the cuendillar, a material that supposedly could not be destroyed by any conceivable force (Jordan pp. 771-772). The magical objects that
populate the world the book takes place in do indeed have the potential to invoke a sense of wonder in the reader.

*The Eye of the World*'s focus on the desire to feel a sense of wonder can open the reader’s eyes to some of their own characteristics, which can lead to them becoming a more well-rounded version of themselves, as can be seen in how the characters travel to new places, experience new cultures, meet new nonhuman creatures, see magical phenomena, get to know different organizations, and in how they encounter objects with magical properties. Perhaps the biggest question raised by *The Eye of the World* in regard to wonder is that of how the reader reacts to discovering new things. The focus on the discovery of new places can raise the question of whether the reader himself wants to see new places, or whether they simply want to spend their days in an environment they find familiar. The focus on encountering new cultures can raise the question of how open the reader is to cultural ideas that are different from their own. The focus on encountering inhuman creatures can raise the question of how certain knowledge of said race's existence would fit into the preestablished worldview of the reader. The focus on magical powers and phenomena can raise the question of whether magic is merely another branch of physics within the fantasy world, and not merely an outside force superimposed upon normal reality. The same question can be raised by the focus on magical objects. The focus on encountering new organizations can raise the question of which, if any, organization the reader would be a member of if they existed within the setting. Mulling over these questions can make the reader more aware of their prejudices. *The Eye of the World* does indeed use wonder to help the reader improve themselves.

**Chapter 4: "The Highwayman"**

Humans are mortal creatures, who live lives fraught with adversity of all types. As a result of that, countless mythologies, folk tales and legends throughout history have focused on overcoming adversity. For example, in Greek mythology, the souls of the dead go to the underworld. Those who led a goodly existence went to a pleasant place known as Elysium, while those who led evil lives went to an unpleasant place known as Tartarus (Mark). Another example is the afterlife in Islam, where those who are good and faithful are rewarded by a happy life after death, while those who are evil are punished by an afterlife of suffering (Huda). Both of these examples bespeak the desire to be able to overcome adversity, for death is arguably the greatest
source of adversity. The examples also demonstrate how people do not want good people to be
treated the same as evil people. Another example of mythology drawing on the desire to be able
to overcome adversity is in Egyptian mythology. Geb is the Egyptian god of earth, and his name
was sometimes invoked in an attempt to heal the sick (Wigington). This demonstrates a desire to
be able to overcome sickness, which has always been the bane of humanity. The desire to
conquer the obstacles in one's path has influenced the fantasy genre. One fantasy book can be
said to demonstrate that very well, and that is "The Highwayman," which was written by the
American novelist Robert Anthony Salvatore. "The Highwayman" is a fantasy novel that shows
how literature can hold a mirror up to aspects of the reader, in this case their desire to be able to
overcome adversity, and by doing so gives them the means by which to grow as a person, as is
evidenced by how Bransen is able to overcome his infirmities, by the happy ending to the story,
by the fact that true love can blossom in the harsh world it takes place in, by the fact that the
villains are eventually defeated, by the fact that true friendship can thrive in the harsh world the
story takes place in, and by the fact that the main character fights against those who rule.

There are many instances throughout the novel where Bransen Garibond manages to
overcome his infirmities. First, there is the time when Garibond Womak discovers that Bransen
can read the book of Jhest (Salvatore pp. 166). Second, there is the time when Bransen uses the
powers of the soul stone to talk like a normal person (Salvatore pp. 194). Third, there is the time
Bransen uses the soul stone to move like a normal person (Salvatore pp. 194). And fourth, there
is the time when Bransen uses the powers of the soul stone and the knowledge from the Book of
Jhest to shoot a bolt of his inner magical energy at Rennarq (Salvatore pp. 308-309). There are
indeed a number of occasions in the book where Bransen Garibond is able to overcome his
infirmities.

Despite how grim things look toward the end of the book, there is still eventually a happy
ending. First, there is the fact that Bransen was not executed after the death of Laird Prydae, and
instead was simply exiled from Pryd Holding, along with Cadayle and her mother (Salvatore pp.
312-314). Second, there is the fact that Cadayle got through her ordeal with Laird Prydae alive
and unviolated (Salvatore pp. 311). Third, there is the fact that Callen managed to survive her
ordeal with Bernivvigar, the Samhaist (Salvatore pp. 297). And fourth, there is the fact that
Bransen managed to keep his mother's sword (Salvatore pp. 314). There is indeed a happy
ending to the story, despite how grim things looked for the main characters toward the end of it.
Despite how harsh and unforgiving the world the book takes place in is, there are still many examples of true love shining through, both romantic love and the love between family members. First, there is how Bran Dynard and SenWi fell in love, despite being from different countries and following different religions (Salvatore pp. 25-26). Second, there is the love SenWi’s showed for her newborn son, when she used her remaining strength to save his life, even as her own life fled from her body (Salvatore pp. 117). Third, there is the love between Bransen and Cadayle, which leads Bransen to storm Laird Prydae’s castle toward the end of the book (Salvatore pp. 304-310). And fourth, there is the time when Garibond offered himself up as Bernivvgar’s sacrificial victim instead of Bransen, even though that meant having his testicles sacrificed (Salvatore pp. 168-169). There are indeed many examples of true love, both romantic love and the love that exists between family members, shining through, despite the unforgiving nature of the setting.

Despite how grim things look at times in the book, the villains of the story always end up getting just deserts for everything they have done. First, there is the time when Bransen defeated the bullies harassing Cadayle and her mother (Salvatore pp. 224). Second, there is the time when Bransen Garibond decapitated Bernivvgar (Salvatore pp. 296). Third, there is the time when Bannagran accidentally throws an axe at Prydae, which ends up killing the Laird of Pryd Holding, and making Bannagran feel guilty about the death of his friend (Salvatore pp. 309-312). And fourth, there is the time when Brother Reandu, after a short fight with Master Bathelais, accidentally causes Master Bathelais to fall down a great distance (Salvatore pp. 305-306). This later results in Bathelais dying from his injuries (Salvatore pp. 313). The villains of the story do indeed end up getting what they deserve for their misdeeds, despite how grim things look at times in the book.

In spite of how harsh and unforgiving the world the book takes place in is, there are still many examples of true friendship in the story. First, there is the time when Garibond Womak allows Bran Dynard and SenWi to hide the battered and unconscious Callen Duwornay in his house, despite the fact that doing so is against the law and can well get them all executed (Salvatore pp. 74-76). Second, there is the time when Prydae and Bannagran are talking about their battles with the powrie dwarves, and how Bannagran is used to giving Prydae the bloody caps of several of the creatures Bannagran has slain, so that Prydae can wear them as his trophies (Salvatore pp. 203). Third, there is the time when Cadayle helps Bransen, who was being bullied
at the time because of his handicap (Salvatore pp. 206-207). And fourth, Brother Reandu helps Bransen towards the end by trying to stop Master Bathelais from magically blasting Bransen from the air, even though the consequences for Brother Reandu can be quite severe (Salvatore pp. 305-306). There are indeed many examples of true friendship throughout the novel, despite how unforgiving and harsh the world the book takes place in tends to be.

There are several instances throughout the book where Bransen Garibond chafes against the authorities and actually manages to come out on top. First, there is the time when Bransen steals money from Prince Yeslnik, as well as the jewelry worn by Yeslnik's wife (Salvatore pp. 18-19). Second, there is the time when Bransen resists arrest at the hands of one of Laird Prydae's tax collectors, and instead bests the man in a fight and leaves him bound, gagged and naked (Salvatore pp. 242-244). Third, there is the time when Bransen manages to steal his mother's Jhesta Tu sword back from Laird Prydae's castle (Salvatore pp. 234-235). And fourth, there is the time when Bransen manages to defeat Laird Prydae’s soldiers who ambush him in Cadayle and Callen's house (Salvatore pp. 288-290). Bransen Garibond does indeed manage to come out on top in many of those instances when he fights against those with authority.

"The Highwayman" focuses on overcoming adversity and can open the reader up to new avenues of thought, through which they might expand their horizons and become better as a person, as can be seen in how Bransen manages to overcome the limitations of his crippled body, in the happy ending, in the fact that romantic and familial love can indeed blossom in the harsh and unforgiving world the story takes place in, in the fact the villains are eventually repaid for their misdeeds, in the fact that true friendship exists in the story despite the hardships of the setting, and in the fact the main character is able to chafe against those who rule and come out on top. Perhaps the biggest lesson one can learn from "The Highwayman" story is that of hope. The focus on Bransen overcoming his infirmities raises the question that if he could recover from his seemingly hopeless position, then could the reader perhaps overcome the adversity in their own life. Also, the focus on fighting those in charge raises the question how powerful the average citizen can be, further strengthening the point that the reader could perhaps overcome the adversity in their own life. The happy ending of the story raises the point that while things may look grim, things can still become better. The focus on true love and true friendship in a bleak world are also examples of this. The fact the villains are defeated is yet another example that things can work out in the end. By mulling over these points, the reader can find hope and press
on, even if the odds may seem stacked against them. "The Highwayman" does indeed use the desire to overcome adversity to help the reader improve themselves.

Chapter 5: A Game of Thrones

People are drawn towards things they find exciting. The rush of adrenaline can create a thrill, and few things can give a person a bigger adrenaline rush than being in danger. This desire has influenced myths, legends and folklore throughout the world. A good example of this is Ragnarök, the end of the world as it is prophesied in Norse mythology (Hirst). Another good example of danger is the god Shiva in Hindu mythology, for as the god of destruction and dissolution it is his duty to destroy worlds, so they can then be remade (Das). A third example of danger can be found in Islam. This danger is that of sin, for a sinful life earns a person a trip to an afterlife of suffering (Huda). The desire for the thrill of being in danger has influenced the fantasy genre. One fantasy story that reflects this is A Game of Thrones, written by the American author George R.R. Martin. A Game of Thrones is an example of how literature can illuminate certain aspects of the reader's personality, in this case their desire for the thrill of being in danger, and in so doing gives them the tools to potentially become better as a person, as is evidenced by the examples of danger to the moral code of a character, by the examples of danger of a sexual nature, by the examples of danger from the environment, by the examples of danger from creatures, by the examples of danger from magic, by the examples of the danger inherent to politics, by the examples of the danger that stems from betrayal, and by the examples of danger from violence.

There are numerous instances throughout the book where a character faces danger to their moral code. First, there is the time when Sansa has to tell Robert Baratheon what really happened between Arya and Jeoffrey, and she must decide between her loyalty to her sister and her love for the young prince (Martin pp. 156-158). Second, there is the time when Ned has to decide whether he will condone the assassination of Daenerys Targaryen, who is only a child (Martin pp. 351-355). Third, there is the time when Jon has to decide between leaving the Night's Watch to go and help in the war against the Lannisters, even though doing so can mean being executed as a deserter by the Night's Watch (Martin pp. 772-780). And fourth, there is the time when Ned has to decide between lying by saying he had committed treason, which would mean he could escape execution, or stick with the truth, which meant he would be executed (Martin pp. 725).
There are indeed many instances of characters facing danger to their moral code throughout the book.

There are several instances throughout the novel where a female character faces danger of a sexual nature. First, there is the time when Qotho threatened to stake Mirri Maz Duur to the ground and let passing men as well as whatever dogs were around rape her, and he also threatened to do the same to Daenerys (Martin pp. 708). Second, there is Daenerys on the night of her wedding, where she is dreading the consummation of the marriage (Martin pp. 103). Third, there is the dancer who is raped by a dothraki warrior in the wedding of Daenerys and Khal Drogo (Martin pp. 102). And fourth, there are the women in the village of the Lamb Men who are raped after the dothraki raid it (Martin pp. 667-669). There are indeed many scenes where a female character comes under threat from sexual dangers.

There are countless dangers that stem from nature, and several of these dangers are presented in the book. First, there is the fact the wound Khal Drogo suffers in the raid on the village of the Lamb Men becomes infected, and infections result from bacteria that come from the environment (Martin pp. 708). Second, there is the time when Gared of the Night's Watch tells Ser Waymar Royce that he had lost several extremities to the cold, and that his brother had been found frozen at his post (Martin pp. 4). Third, there is the danger that comes from scaling great heights, as is demonstrated when Bran climbs the castle at Winterfell and almost loses his grip on several occasions (Martin pp. 80-85). And fourth, there is Gared's mention of what winter is like, and of how it is said that the snow can pile into forty-foot-deep piles (Martin pp. 4). There are indeed many examples of the dangers that come from nature.

There are many animals and other creatures in the world the book takes place in, and they can pose a tremendous threat to the inhabitants of the world. First, there are the direwolves. The dead direwolf that Robb and his party find is larger than the pony Bran rode on (Martin pp. 17-18). And even a young direwolf is easily capable of savaging an adult human, as is demonstrated when Bran's direwolf kills the assassin sent to kill Bran (Martin pp. 133). Second, there are the wights, who, by virtue of already being dead, can be incredibly difficult to kill, and their appendages can move on their own accord after being severed from the body (Martin pp. 566-567). Third, there are the dragons. They have sharp fangs, as was noted by Tyrion when he was studying the dragon skulls in the basement of the palace (Martin pp. 121). The largest of said skulls are massive, with the skull of Balerion the Black Dread, who was the largest, being so
huge that a mammoth would have been able to fit inside its mouth (Martin pp. 122). More than that, they were able to breathe fire (Martin pp. 123). And fourth, there are the creatures known as the Others. They seem to bring the cold with them when they come (Martin pp. 8). Their swords are incredibly sharp, and capable of cutting through ringmail (Martin pp. 10). More than that, their swords seem to be able to shatter regular steel swords with a prolonged barrage of blows (Martin pp. 10). The people who inhabit the world the book takes place in are indeed under threat from a variety of animals and other nonhuman creatures.

There are several instances throughout the novel where someone faces danger from magic, in one form or another. First, there is the fact that blood magic requires a life in order to save a life, as is demonstrated when Mirri Maz Duur slits the throat of Khal Drogo's horse during the ritual to heal the Khal (Martin pp. 710-715). Second, there is Bran's magical vision while he is unconscious, where he is falling with the three-eyed raven talking to him. The raven tells him that he will die if he hits the ground, which implies that magic played a part in preventing his injuries from killing him (Martin pp. 161). Third, there is Khal Drogo's condition after Mirri Maz Duur used her blood magic to heal his festering wound. He is turned into a living, but mindless, husk of his former self (Martin pp. 759). And fourth, there is another example of the fact that blood magic requires a life to give life. The example is the condition of Daenerys' child when it is born. It is born dead, and it has evidently been dead for years, and it has scales, a tail and bat-like wings. Its flesh falls off the bones at a touch, revealing the grave worms inside (Martin pp. 756-757). There are indeed many examples throughout the novel, where some person or animal is faced with danger from magic in some form.

There are many examples that can be found throughout the book, where the danger inherent to politics is made evident. First, there is the danger the currently presiding monarchy poses to the remnants of the overthrown line, as is evidenced by the fact that Robert intends to send assassins after Daenerys Targaryen (Martin pp. 351-352). Second, there is the danger of knowing what one is not supposed to, as is the case with Jon Arryn, who is assassinated because he knew about the true lineage of Cersei's children (Martin pp. 481). Third, there is the danger inherent in having secrets, as is the case with Cersei, who must keep the truth about the lineage of her children from reaching others (Martin pp. 486-488). And fourth, there are the dangers that come with letting the wrong person ascend to the throne, as is demonstrated when Littlefinger explains to Ned that if Stannis Baratheon succeeds to the throne, he will wage war and plunge
the realm into chaos (Martin pp. 511-512). There are indeed many examples of the danger inherent to politics.

There are many examples of characters being betrayed by someone over the course of the book. First, there is the time when Littlefinger betrays Ned, by having the men who are supposed to be loyal to Ned kill Ned's men, and then Littlefinger holds a dagger to Ned's throat (Martin pp. 529). Second, there is the fact that Tywin Lannister sends Tyrion and his hilltribe allies to be routed in battle, in a strategic attempt to put Robb Stark and his forces into a position where they will be vulnerable (Martin pp. 692). Third, there is the time when Cersei causes Robert's death, by making Lancel Lannister make the king too intoxicated, which then results in Robert being gored by a boar (Martin pp. 634). And fourth, there is the time when Mirri Maz Duur betrays Daenerys by letting her pay the prize for the ritual, and in exchange she turned Khal Drogo into a mindless automaton (Martin pp. 759). There are indeed several examples of characters falling victim to betrayals.

There are numerous examples of violence, in one form or another, throughout the book. First, there is the assassin who is sent to murder Bran, where he lies unconscious in his bed (Martin pp. 132-133). Second, there is Tyrion's trial by combat, where Bronn fights Ser Vardis Egen, and Bronn ends up pushing a marble statue on top of the knight, then stabbing him to death (Martin pp. 442-443). Third, there is Ned's execution, where his head is lopped off his body by Ser Ilyn Payne (Martin pp. 727-728). And fourth, there is the time when Ser Waymar Royce is fought and subsequently stabbed to death by the Others (Martin pp. 10). There are indeed many examples of violence throughout the novel, whether it be a trial by combat, a simple execution or some other form of physical violence.

A Game of Thrones' focus on danger can introduce the reader to new ways of thinking, through which they can widen their worldview and better themselves, as can be seen in the dangers to personal moral code, in the danger of being sexually abused, in the danger that stem the environment, in the danger that stems from various creatures, in the danger that stems from magic, in the danger that lies in politics, in the dangers that come from the possibility of betrayal, and in the danger that stems from violence. Perhaps the most prominent form of danger in A Game of Thrones is physical danger. Rape is a danger that stems to the body of a character, and it can also result in pregnancy, and childbirth can be dangerous. The dangers of the environment are to the body of a character. Dangers stemming from creatures are also dangers to the body.
Violence usually poses danger to the body. Magic can also pose a danger to the body. This focus on physical danger can raise the question of how much the reader likes activities that cause adrenaline highs. The second most prominent form of danger in the novel is social danger. Politics are all about position, and the dangers that politics present can be dangers to position. Betrayal can destabilize one's position in society. The focus on social danger raises the question of how extroverted the reader may be. The least plentiful form of danger in the book is emotional danger. Danger to the moral code of a character means the loss of their innocence, and if they value their innocence then that loss cuts deep. Thinking about these things can help the reader find out what kind of danger they fear most, and by extension why that form of danger scares them the most. *A Game of Thrones* does indeed use the thrill of being in danger to aid the reader in improving themselves.

**Chapter 6: Mistborn: the Final Empire**

People would like to be extraordinarily competent in some area, though what that area is depends largely on the person. The desire to be competent has influenced myths, legends and folk tales throughout history. A good example of this is the tale of Daedalus, who was a scholar and inventor. He was the one who invented the labyrinth the minotaur of Crete inhabited. He also invented wings that allowed him and his son, Icarus, to fly (Socrates). Another good example of competence would be the story of Beowulf. Beowulf's competence comes in the form of combat prowess, as is demonstrated when he defeats the monster known as Grendel. Grendel was known for his might, but Beowulf defeated him all the same, and forced the creature to flee and leave one hand behind ("Beowulf" pp. 84-85). The desire to be competent has also influenced the fantasy genre. One story that reflects this is *Mistborn: the Final Empire*, written by the American author Brandon Sanderson. *Mistborn: the Final Empire* is a fantasy book that shows literature's capacity to bring the reader face to face with aspects of themselves, in this case their desire to be competent, giving them tools with which to improve themselves as a person, as is evidenced by how some of the characters are more cunning than others, by how some of the characters are better fighters than others, by how some of the characters are better at using Allomancy than others, and by how some of the characters are more charismatic than others.

There are several characters throughout the book that demonstrate an aptitude with Allomancy, that can invoke a desire to be competent in some field. First, there is Breeze, who
displays the true depth of his skill at Soothing when he teaches Vin the secret to becoming a better Soother (Sanderson pp. 209-212). Second, there is Marsh, who shows his proficiency at burning bronze when he teaches Vin to become a better Seeker (Sanderson pp. 351). Third, there is Ham, who teaches Vin to become better at fighting while burning pewter (Sanderson pp. 422). And fourth of all there is the Lord Ruler, who demonstrates his incredible power when he pushes on the metal inside Vin's body, and the traces of metal that are in some shards of glass on the floor (Sanderson pp. 641-643). There are indeed several characters in the book that show an amazing aptitude with Allomancy, which can make the reader feel a desire be competent in some field.

There are several characters throughout the book that demonstrate incredible cunning that can invoke a desire to be cunning in some field. First, there is the time when Vin fights Shan Elariel, where Vin tricks Shan and subsequently wins the fight (Sanderson pp. 528). Second, there is the way Shan pretends to be a misting, to hide the fact that in reality she is a full Mistborn (Sanderson pp. 523). Third, there is how Marsh manages to infiltrate the Ministry of Inquisition by becoming an Inquisitor, then find the secret to killing the creatures (Sanderson pp. 639-640). And fourth, there is Kelsier's grand design, where so much of what he had been doing throughout the book comes together (Sanderson pp. 596-604). There are indeed many characters in the book that demonstrate a level of cunning that can invoke a desire to be cunning in some field.

There are several characters throughout the book that demonstrate an aptitude for fighting that can invoke a desire to be a capable fighter. First, there is the time when Kelsier defeats the guards in Keep Venture, even though he is vastly outnumbered (Sanderson pp. 111-116). Second, there is the time when Vin fights and kills a number of palace guards in Kredik Shaw (Sanderson pp. 632). Third, there is the time when Kelsier kills Lord Tresting and all his soldiers single-handed, then burns down the manor the nobleman lived in (Sanderson pp. 28). And fourth, there is the time when Kelsier defeats the Inquisitor, by pounding the spikes protruding from the back of its head into the bottom of a cart, then cut its head off (Sanderson pp. 585). There are many characters throughout the book that are incredibly good at fighting that can make one feel a desire to be good at fighting.

There are several instances of a character being incredibly charismatic in the book, which can invoke a desire to be charismatic. First, there is the scene where Kelsier is recruiting for the
underground, and he gets several men to join (Sanderson pp. 209-212). Second, there is the scene where Kelsier is inspecting the rebel troops in the caverns, and inspires the men (Sanderson pp. 371). Third, there is the scene where it is said that Yeden has been won over by the charismatic personality of Kelsier (Sanderson pp. 296). And last but not least, there is the scene where Kelsier manages to dominate the thieves in Camon's lair with his personality (Sanderson pp. 67). There are indeed several instances in the book where a character displays a charisma that can make the reader desire to be charismatic.

_Mistborn: the Final Empire's_ focus on competence can show the reader new ways of looking at the world, hence giving them the tools with which they can gain a more rounded view of the world and become better as a person, as is evidenced by how much more cunning some of the characters are than others, by how much better than others some of the characters are at fighting, by how much better some of the characters are at using Allomancy than others, and by how much more charismatic some of the characters are than others. The types of competence in _Mistborn: the Final Empire_ can be organized into three groups, with the largest one being competence on a physical level. A character's extraordinary fighting ability is an example of competence on a physical level. A character's ability to use Allomancy is also an example of physical competence, for Allomancy is passed down through genes (Sanderson pp. 74). This focus on physical competence can raise the question of to what extent innate physicality contributes to physical competence. The second group is competence on a mental level. Cunning is an example of mental competence. This focus on mental competence can raise the question of to what extent experiences contribute to mental competence. The third group is competence on a social level. Charisma is an example of social competence. This focus on social competence can raise the question of to what extent upbringing has on social competence. Mulling over these points can help the reader learn what kind of competence they have, and can encourage them to cultivate their competence. _Mistborn: the Final Empire_ does indeed use the desire to be competent to help the reader to become better as a person.

**Conclusion**

Fantasy literature increases the reader's self-awareness by reflecting certain human desires, and in so doing can help the reader grow as a person, as is evidenced by how _The Hobbit_ focuses on order, by how _The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe_ focuses on relevance, by how _The Eye of
the World focuses on wonder, by how "The Highwayman" focuses on overcoming adversity, by how A Game of Thrones focuses on danger, and by how Mistborn: the Final Empire focuses on competence. A Game of Thrones focuses on danger, but The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe also features its fair share of danger as well, particularly in the form of the White Witch, which is somewhat of a Devil figure. Mistborn: the Final Empire focuses on competence, but "The Highwayman" also features competence in the form of overcoming obstacles. The Hobbit, which focuses on order, is similar to The Eye of the World, which focuses on wonder, in that both books focus on adventure. The Hobbit does this by taking the character out of the daily routine which he values so greatly, and forces him to go to new places, see new cultures, meet new creatures and so on, which is also what The Eye of the World does. It is safe to say that fantasy literature helps the reader improve themselves by reflecting certain human desires.
Works Cited


