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**Religion in *Mistborn: The Final Empire*. A cognitive
stylistic analysis of its discourse and text-worlds**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the discourse elements as well as text-worlds present in the book *Mistborn: The Final Empire* by author Brandon Sanderson, focusing primarily on the religious aspects of the narrative. The main objective is to show evidence of religion being more than just a set piece for the story, or a simple background element. Instead, being key for the advancement of the narrative and a driving force for the characters. The methodology in this dissertation employs cognitive stylistics, with a focus on text-world theory to analyze chosen fragments from the novel in order to demonstrate how discourse is interpreted by the readers. This is done via the analysis of elements such as frames of knowledge, the activation of these frames, world-building elements and function-advancing propositions. The results show that religion does indeed move the plot while appealing to the reader's background knowledge.

Keywords: Text-World Theory, Cognitive Stylistics, Frames of Knowledge, World-Building Elements, Function-Advancing Propositions, Frame Activation

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza los elementos discursivos, así como text-worlds (mundos de texto) presentes en el libro *Mistborn: El Imperio Final* del autor Brandon Sanderson, centrándose principalmente en aspectos los religiosos de la narrativa. El objetivo principal es mostrar evidencias de que la religión es más que un elemento decorativo o de fondo. Sino que es clave para el avance de la narrativa y una fuerza que impulsa a los personajes. La metodología de esta tesis utiliza la estilística cognitiva, centrándose en text-world theory para analizar fragmentos de la novela para demostrar cómo los lectores interpretan el discurso. Esto se hace mediante el análisis de elementos como marcos de conocimiento, la activación de dichos marcos, los elementos que construyen el mundo y las proposiciones de avance. Los resultados muestran que la religión sí mueve la historia apoyándose en los conocimientos de los lectores.

Palabras clave: Text-World Theory, Estilística Cognitiva, Marcos de Conocimiento, Elementos de Construcción de Mundos, Proposiciones de Avance, Activación de Marcos

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1. Introduction

Fantasy fiction has been used as a vehicle to create worlds filled with political, social and cultural ideologies since the 19th century, when early fantasy authors stepped forth. Some notable authors, who influenced fantasy as we know it today, are: Mary Shelly, Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert Jordan, Ray Bradbury and C. S. Lewis, to name a few and varied writers. As a genre, fantasy offers more than simple entertainment, as it can serve as a complex narrative space where cultural influences, ideological conflicts or social structures are reflected, questioned or reimaged. Some scholars, like Attebery (1992) and Mendlesohn (2008) argue that fantasy functions as a means which allows readers to confront real-world issues through these fictional worlds. Brandon Sanderson's: *Mistborn: The Final Empire* is one of those worlds, where questions of power, belief and identity come into play. In Sanderson's world, religious ideology and political control are not only thematic concerns but are essential to world-building and are engrained in the language and structure of the narrative itself. These themes can be explored and driven to a degree which a more realist type of fiction would not allow, such as the incorporation of various fantastical races, magical powers and other such elements. This 'elasticity' that fantasy allows for enables authors to mirror and critique real-world structures, such as extreme authority, religions, social hierarchies and racial conflicts, while maintaining the freedom of speculation. Thus, this dissertation aims to analyze how religious structures are constructed and the knowledge frames they activate in the reader in Sanderson's world.

The framework of this study is situated within the field of stylistics, defined by Simpson (2004) as a method of textual interpretation where the primacy of language is emphasized as the gateway of meaning. According to him, while linguistic features such as structures, pattern, and form do not in themselves determine a text's meaning, they provide a necessary foundation for any interpretive account, grounding analysis in observable textual evidence. In stylistics, language thus serves not just as a means to tell what happens in the plot, but it signals how the text is supposed to work as communication. That is to say, language guides the reader on how it should be read or

understood, no matter if the text is a classic work of literature or a piece of popular fiction.

Building on this linguistic foundation, this dissertation applies Text-World Theory (TWT), a discourse model developed by Paul Werth (1999), and the further development of it with Joanna Gavins' (2007) research and studies. TWT offers a method for examining how readers construct mental representations, or text-worlds, based on linguistic cues provided by the author. Some of these cues come in the form of world-building elements, such as time, setting and enactors, and function-advancing propositions, which guide the readers' cognitive processing of the narrative. Furthermore, the reader also applies their background knowledge, be it cultural, experience based or ideological, through frame activation. This allows for a richer interpretation of the text depending on the readers' personal knowledge.

While TWT provides the core methodological tools for this study, the analysis can be enhanced by the inclusion of Cognitive Poetics (Stockwell, 2020) and Cognitive Grammar (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2018). Cognitive poetics contributes to the understanding of how texts trigger schematic knowledge structures, such as religious and mythological frames, which are relevant to our target novel. While Cognitive Grammar offers information about the role of viewpoints and subjectivity in guiding the readers' interpretations. Thus, by using these branches of stylistics we can analyze how Sanderson's work is constructed, and how the religious context of the narrative shapes its development.

The aim of this study is to look at how the novel *Mistborn: The Final Empire* uses linguistic structures to construct, re-construct text-worlds and how these are meaningful by relying on the reader's knowledge frames. This is done by questioning if the religious setting in the novel is just a simple setting or rather a core aspect of the narrative, so much so that its importance is imperative to the flow of the entire narrative. To answer this question, the analysis focuses on several key elements: the portrayal of the main antagonist as a divine figure; the use of memory and preservation through one of the character's role; and the emergence of a new, martyr-based faith at the end. These moments of the narrative are analyzed through text-world elements, frames and sub-

worlds, each carefully chosen by the author to influence how the reader interprets the moral and ideological tension of the narrative. The hypothesis being that, indeed, religion in this novel is key to the existence of the entire narrative instead of it just being a set piece.

Thus, this dissertation is organized as follows: First, an introduction to the author, the novel at hand and its plot. Then it is followed by a review of studies on TWT and aspects of Cognitive Grammar and Cognitive Poetics. Then, it moves on to the methodology used to analyze the novel and its different aspects in the creation of a coherent text-world. In section 4, the analysis is provided, in which I mainly focus on six examples or fragments chosen from the book that represent different parts in time and space of the narrative. Exemplifying the different activated frames, sub-worlds and more that come into play when guiding the reader. And finally, the conclusion will put an end to this dissertation and provide a justification for the hypothesis set before.

2. About *Mistborn: The Final Empire*

The author of this novel is Brandon Sanderson, who was born on December 19th, 1975, and who describes his writing as ‘hard fantasy’. He explains it as fantasy which uses science fiction’s styling to build its worlds. He studied at Brigham Young University, where he completed his Master’s degree in Creative Writing in 2004, and he’s been at work writing many fantasy worlds ever since. His most notable works are all part of the same universe called the ‘Cosmere’, where many of his books and stories take place, the *Mistborn* saga being one of them.

In *Mistborn: The Final Empire* we follow the story of Vin, a street urchin who has been living on the streets after her mother tried to kill her as she did with Vin’s baby sister. Now an orphan who also lost her brother, Vin becomes entangled with a group of rebels led by Kelsier, a charismatic man and a former prisoner of the Lord Ruler, who is also known as the Survivor of Hathsins. He discovers that Vin, just like him, is a Mistborn, a person born with the ability to access and use multiple magical powers which are granted by the ingestion or ‘burning’ of specific metals, this system is known as Allomancy.

The events unfold in a grim, ash-covered city called Luthadel, ruled by the Lord Ruler, an immortal tyrant who is worshipped as a god by society, and his Steel Ministry, which ensures that his will is upheld. This society is then divided between two notable groups, the oppressive nobility, who count with the highest structures in the city as well as powerful positions in the government. And the skaa, the majority of the population and who are often enslaved or oppressed by the nobles, living in unstable structures, where hygiene and comfort are nowhere to be found.

Kelsier, who was previously held in a mysterious and deadly prison called the Pits of Hathsins, forms a crew of Allomancers, each of them skilled in a certain field, with the goal of overthrowing the Final Empire. It received this name as the Lord Ruler considered it the final and only empire humanity will ever need.

All Mistborn are Allomancers, but not all Allomancers are Mistborn. Mistborn have access to all the powers provided by the different metals, such as copper, iron, steel, tin and pewter. However, an ordinary Allomancer is born with access to only one

power. That is why Vin is a central piece of Kelsier's plan, who trains the young girl to become a powerful Mistborn, skilled in both combat and espionage.

Another key figure in Kelsier's crew is Sazed, who is not an Allomancer, but a Feruchemist. He is from a tribe hailing from Terris, a mountainous region inhabited by the Feruchemists who fell under the oppressive rule of the Lord Ruler and almost disappeared completely. He is essential to the plot as his abilities allow him to store knowledge among other feats. This knowledge can be accessed at any time, making him incredibly educated in many fields. However, his specialty are religions which are now lost to everyone but him, as the Lord Ruler erased them when he rose to power. He dreams of these religions being available to everyone in the future.

As the story unfolds, Vin infiltrates the noble society in order to try to create distrust between the high noble families. Meanwhile, Kelsier is focused on carrying out acts of rebellion throughout Luthadel to incite rebellion. Their main goal being to infiltrate Kredik Shaw, the Lord Ruler's castle, and stealing the 11th metal which is supposed to be able to kill him.

When his plan starts to fail Kelsier ends up in direct confrontation with the Lord Ruler, who disposes of him with great ease, but this event ends up being a carefully staged martyrdom, intended to inspire hope among the skaa. After Kelsier's death, Vin confronts the Lord Ruler and learns the truth, that he is not a god, but a man who gained immense power through ancient magical artifacts.

The novel ends with the fall of the Lord Ruler and the emergence of a new religious ideology, called Survivorism, with Kelsier as a martyred prophet. But far from being saved, Luthadel will have to face the consequences of these actions as new issues arise, both religious and political.

As it is apparent, religion plays an important role in the entire story, driving it forward and giving the characters reason and hope to advance. As such, it is interesting to analyze the religious situation of the novel and find out why it works so well as a driving force.

3. Literature Review

This dissertation is based on the field of studies of TWT, which is situated within Stylistics. Originally, TWT was designed by Paul Werth who wanted to create a methodological approach taking into account cognitive processes of the production and interpretation of human communication. Although his research was interrupted by his death in 1995, other scholars of the academic community have taken his ideas and expanded on them arousing great interest overall (Gavins, 2007).

TWT is defined as a model of human language processing which is based on the notions of mental representation in line with Cognitive Psychology and which shares the experientialist principles of Cognitive Linguistics (Gavins, 2007). TWT is considered to be a discourse framework, meaning that its main goal is to analyze not only the methods of which a text is constructed, but also how the context enveloping the text affects its creation and reception (Gavins, 2007).

In TWT, a world is an event which occurs when two participants engage via the use of language, representing the combination of both the text and the context. There are various types of worlds in this theory, one of the first being the discourse-world, which involves discourse participants, albeit not necessarily face to face, as an author and a reader can also be considered as such. This world begins as the participants interact and it encapsulates the situation, which includes the text, and the surroundings. The discourse-world includes elements from both of the participants, meaning their beliefs, intentions, memories and so forth (Stockwell, 2020).

The notion of Discourse Worlds compares and unfolds from the idea of “text-world”. This is the mental image evoked by the linguistic cues in a text, and it is made up of world-building elements-the background in which the main elements of the text take place-and function-advancing propositions-which move the story forward within the text-world (Stockwell, 2020). Some of the most common world-builders are: time, which is inferred with the usage of verbs, temporal adverbs, and adverbial clauses; place or location, inferred through the use of locative adverbs and adverbial clauses, and noun phrases specifying a place; characters, referred to as enactors in TWT, who reside each world; and objects, inferred with noun phrases and pronominals. (Stockwell, 2020).

In contrast, function-advancing propositions refer to phrases or sentences that describe events, states, actions and processes that occur within the established text-world. While world-builders construct a static environment, the function-advancing propositions can be viewed as more dynamic, as they narrate what happens to whom, and when (Stockwell, 2020). For instance, in a sentence like “She ran through the park” appear both the world-building elements as well as function-advancing propositions. The park is used as a location and, as such it builds the world, while the verb “ran” indicates action and adds flow the narrative, no matter how small the sentence.

When we talk about the main text-world, we usually refer to it as the matrix text-world, meaning that there are sub-worlds which are different spaces in the minds of the discourse participants brought forth by what we call a world-switch. A world-switch is a contextual change that can be temporal, spatial or both. For example, flashbacks are a type of world-switch which prompts the reader, in the case of a text, to alter their attention from the matrix text-world. A common type of sub-world to switch to from the matrix text-world is a modal-world. This world usually comes about with the use of expressions of desires and wishes such as ‘I wish...’, ‘I want...’, ‘I hope...’ and so on (Stockwell, 2020). This implies that, for example, a character in a novel wishes to have a brand new sports car which they don’t currently possess. In the matrix text-world this character expresses their desire with: ‘I wish I had X car’, which then prompts the reader to create a mental image of a world where this character does own that particular car. This modal-world exists only for a short period of time and can be classified as a fleeting world, a sub-world that appears just for a moment and disappears, returning the reader’s focus to the matrix text-world. In contrast, a flashback, such as the memory of a childhood event, would be a more sustained sub-world. While a metaphor typically creates a fleeting world based on conceptual comparison, for example when a character is described as ‘sly as a fox’ (Stockwell, 2020).

Next, we have to shift our attention to how the discourse participants use their knowledge in the discourse-world in order to create a coherent mental frame of everything the matrix text-world is presenting. A way of classifying our knowledge in certain contexts is via the use of frames of understanding, often based on social and

cultural understanding which is what this dissertation will mainly work with. These frames are shared social settings and are used by the discourse participants to understand situations, concepts and utterances (Stockwell, 2020:109). There will be plenty of examples available in the ‘analysis’ section of this document, but for the sake of better understanding this concept let us take a look at an unrelated one. The phrase: ‘The dog ate at the park yesterday at noon’ will appeal to several frames concerning knowledge about animals, to resolve what a dog is; special, to resolve where and how a park looks like; and temporal, to resolve what temporal situation noon puts the dog in.

The imagined situation which comes about by reading a sentence like the one from the example mentioned before is referred to as image schemas. These are templates we use to structure the concepts and language we have gathered from texts in the discourse, and a schematic representation of activity that is built up from our everyday experiences (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2018). As Giovanelli and Harrison state, studies have shown that these image schemas come from one of our first interactions with the environment that surrounds us as children. It also helps us develop our understanding of our sensory capabilities and the physical world. An image schema differs from a mental image in that an image schema is a very basic and abstract representation of an expression (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2018). For example, when we read a sentence like “She went towards the forest” there is a Source-Path-Goal image schema. That is to say, the Goal in this case is unknown but we inherently know that the enactor has to start from somewhere. Then we know there is a Path that connects the Source with the Goal, and which the enactor took to then reach said Goal, in this case the “forest”. To create this image schema of movement, we rely on experiences of our own body moving through space and time (Giovanelli & Harrison, 2018). This idea helps us better understand how readers interact with and construct text-worlds, as the expressions that the author uses are deliberately chosen and placed to create certain sensations and appeal to our many personal experiences and frames of knowledge.

All language is inherently perspectivized, that is to say, it is always presented from a particular viewpoint, and within TWT this perspective is referred to as deictic

center or origo. It typically begins with the narrator or a character, and establishes where, when and who the story is experienced through. As the narrative progresses, this anchoring point may change through deictic projection which allows the reader to follow a character's point of view by taking on a mind-model, or image schema of that other point of perception (Stockwell, 2020).

The Language of Dystopia by Jessica Norledge (2022) analyses how dystopian novels create richly constructed text-worlds using elements we have discussed before, such as world-builders; be it enactors, locations or objects, and function-advancing propositions that drive the narrative forward by delving into the world of various dystopian books such as *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Road*. She draws from the connection that text-word and the discourse-world have as well as deixis to argue how the authors guide the readers towards the mental frames of the text-worlds they want us to have.

An important aspect of dystopian novels are the ethical responses the readers have to the narratives that guide them to align emotionally with movements often associated with resistance to authority. Thus, they activate frames of knowledge in the reader that have to do with instances such as totalitarianism, oppression and revolution to create conceptual coherence across the settings (Norledge, 2022).

These themes are key in *Mistborn: The Final Empire* as well, as they not only set the tone but also drive the plot. In this case, religion is written into the story of this novel in such a way that it encompasses the before mentioned themes of oppression and revolution. This happens because religion serves both as the oppressor, when wielded by the Lord Ruler to control the masses, and as the savior, when a new religion is born giving everyone hope. These instances are analyzed in section 5.

4. Methodology

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the different linguistic cues used by the author in *Mistborn: The Final Empire* to depict and guide the reader's mental image of the fictional world, particularly religious and historical ones. Doing so, I draw inspiration from Norledge's (2022) study in *The Language of Dystopia*, where she demonstrates how resisting the dystopian social mind propels the narrative forward. That is to say, that the enactor roles need to have a different view from that of the rest of society and go against what was established. In *Mistborn: The Final Empire* this idea is also present, and it is closely tied with religion and history, which further strengthens the hypothesis of religion being a key piece in the narrative instead of just a setting. This work intends to approach this question via a qualitative, text-based methodology making use of the concepts that characterize text-world theory (Gavins, 2007), cognitive grammar (Giovannelli & Harrison, 2018) and cognitive poetics (Stockwell, 2020).

Thus, this study applies cognitive stylistic tools introduced in the literature review section, to a series of selected passages from *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, using them for a textual analysis. The primary analytical method I have chosen to use is TWT, which is used to identify linguistic cues that enable the construction of the text-world in the reader's mind. In practice, this involves mapping out world-building elements, such as spatial and temporal settings, enactors, and objects, and function-advancing propositions, which drive the narrative forward and develop the plot.

The analysis, then, pays attention to world-switches, which produce modal-subworlds that represent past histories, religions and ideologies or hypothetical futures. These are important in order to follow the development of the main enactors and the narrative itself. To analyze these, the concept of frame activation also comes into play, as it is necessary in order to examine how readers connect what they read to their cultural and background knowledge, such as theological or historical frames. For example, when analyzing the portrayal of the Lord Ruler as a divine figure, the procedure looks at the uses of metaphors, deixis and linguistic choices. These elements activate religious frames early in the narrative and later subvert them as part of the plot. This method, as mentioned before, follows the example of Norledge's (2022) application of TWT to dystopian fiction

and takes into consideration both the reader's cognitive engagement and the textual elements of the novel. As such, in the analysis there are chosen examples, in which linguistic structures, shifts in worlds and perspectives and the reader's construction of the text-world are found.

The chosen examples represent key moments where the text lays out social and theological frames, which aid the reader in the construction of their own mental images and drive the narrative forward. The selection process followed two main criteria: passages where linguistic features actively contribute to text-world construction, such as belief systems, the oppressive nature of the governing powers and social structures. And their narrative function, that is to say, whether religious discourse motivates character choices, alters world-structure, or have direct impact on the story.

5. Analysis

Analyzing the world of *Mistborn: The Final Empire* can be a gargantuan task as it is made up of a plethora of elements that change over time and its pieces are placed slowly throughout the books. However, for the purpose of this dissertation we have focused on the first book, analyzing coherence, world-building and the readers own role in it. That is to say, how they interpret and create their mental image of the world the author is presenting in the book, while concentrating on the linguistic cues which activate the reader's background knowledge aiding in the comprehension and mental representation of the world.

We begin with what TWT calls the Discourse World. In this frame the writer and the reader start to communicate, and each participant brings to the discussion their own background knowledge, experiences and intentions to the discourse, influencing how the text is interpreted, (Gavins, 2007). This interpretative process is key because it transforms the text-world, a mental representation constructed with linguistic cues, into the Discourse World, where that representation gathers meaning through the reader's contextual and experiential knowledge. In other words, it is within this Discourse World that this representation gains deeper meaning. Even though the author and the reader may be separated in time, and they might not have a direct connection, the reader actively engages with the text, while bringing their own experiences, as stated before, and this interaction is considered to occur in the Discourse World too. Let us illustrate this with an example: If two people are reading the same poem about death, but person A has never experienced the passing of a loved one, and person B has, this experience will shape their understanding of the text, and it will evoke different feelings based on what experiences each person has had. This simple example can be used for any other experience, be it cultural or personal and it showcases the frame of mind we have to use while analyzing this novel.

The main 'world' which is linguistically enacted by the text is the text-world, whose main components are the function-advancing propositions, enactors, locations, and objects. This means that those experiences we have discussed before come into play not only for the creation but also for the understanding and personalization of the narrative. Gavins (2007) emphasizes that these mental representations are not static, but dynamic

constructs that evolve as the discourse unfolds, influenced by the texts contents and features and the reader's cognitive framework. In her book 'Text World Theory: An Introduction', she describes it as follows: "Text World Theory is a discourse framework. This means that it is concerned not just with how a particular text is constructed but how the context surrounding that text influences its production and reception" (Gavins, 2007). In order not to confuse Discourse World with text-world, we can highlight some key differences to make it clearer. First, Discourse World is the real-life interaction between the author and the reader and provides the framework for interpreting the text and it is the place where the mental image of the reader resides. While the text-world is the mental construct derived from that text and is the product of that interpretation, that is to say, the place where the reader takes the stimuli from and applies their knowledge to.

Understanding the distinction between Discourse world and text-world is important to approach the analysis of this novel, as it allows for a clearer view of some of the main concepts used in the analysis. And before I begin analyzing the examples, I created table 1, which sums up the relationship between the discourse world, the text-world, sub-worlds, and frames of knowledge for a clearer view.

Matrix Text-world Elements	Frames of knowledge	Main Enactors	Text-world Role	Discourse World Role
Description of Luthadel	Industrial oppression, decay, separation of classes	Kelsier, skaa population, noble population	Establishes special and social settings of the narrative	Activates reader's knowledge on poverty and class disparity
The Lord Ruler	Divine Power, monarchic	Lord Ruler,	Establishes the dominant	Activates knowledge on different

	rule/dictatorship, false divinity	Steel Ministry	ideology of the text- world	theological and political ideologies
Sazed and Forgotten Religions	Cultural history, lost religions, resistance/rebellion against oppression	Sazed, erased cultures	Introduces sub-worlds contrasting the matrix text- world's oppressive nature	Activates knowledge on historical cultural erasure
Kelsier's Martyrdom	Martyrdom, creation of a new religion	Kelsier	Substitutes the established ideology and religion of the matrix text-world	Activates knowledge on theology and history

To illustrate how these function, we begin by examining the portrayal of the Lord Ruler, a figure whose divine status is important to the initial construction of the text-world:

(1) "He was...well, he was the Lord. He ruled all of the world. He was the creator, protector, and punisher of mankind. He had saved them from the Deepness, then had brought the ash and the mists as a punishment for the people's lack of faith."
(Sanderson 112)

Example number (1) establishes the Lord Ruler as ‘creator’, ‘protector’ and ‘punisher’, which functions as world-building elements that define this character within the text-world, as they align with familiar archetypes of deities and gods across various cultures and religions, activating the reader’s background knowledge related to divinity and authority. The portrayal of the Lord Ruler as a divine figure is a central element that shapes the narrative’s text-world. The title “The Lord Ruler” is a concise but already establishes both power and divine authority, presented with a definite article and capitalized nouns which activate religious and monarchical frames in the Discourse World. In this case, “Lord” evokes religious authority, as that noun is often associated with the Christian God and thus it activates that background knowledge the reader may have about theological beliefs, while “Ruler” evokes a more political type of power. The linguistic choice in this case guides the readers to conceptualize the Lord Ruler as a powerful individual and as an omnipotent entity who has both divine and political authority over the main enactors of the story even before his actions or narrative function are established. This conceptualization influences how the subsequent text-world content is interpreted.

Conceptual metaphors help shape readers’ understanding by layering abstract concepts onto familiar experiences (Stockwell, 2020), and in this fragment, although there are no explicit metaphors, there are certain actions brought forward by the character that are associated with known religious metaphors such as the ‘God is a Parent’, where God is considered the Father of all and everything, nurturing and disciplining humanity. We can see the reflection of that metaphor where it says:

(2) “He had saved them from the Deepness, then had brought the ash
and the mists as a punishment for the people’s lack of faith.”
(Sanderson 112)

Thus bringing into life that exact statement of caregiver, one who protects his children, but also a figure of authority-that even if he protects and nurtures, he also punishes. Although these events are factual in the text-world, rather than metaphorical, it

still resonates with the readers' cultural and religious backgrounds, facilitating the engagement with the narrative. Moreover, 'the Deepness' as it is mentioned, refers to a past threat that can evoke the knowledge on apocalyptic imagery common in religious texts, activating frames related to divine retribution and moral order, making this fantastical world more similar to our own and enhancing the text-world's plausibility. Furthermore, what Lakoff & Johnson (1980) call 'Orientational Metaphor' is also present, that is to say that 'the Deepness' represents something that is 'down' or the contrary of 'high' which we often associate with growth and other positive thoughts, while 'down' is generally negative and undesirable.

While the Final Empire is presented as a primary and unified setting, we can distinguish two different sub-worlds corresponding to the nobility and the skaa, the skaa being the commoners of this world, the ones who are oppressed and forced to work in appalling conditions and live in subpar homes. Having established this we can now turn our attention to how these social categories are textually represented through shifts in location, social behavior, and enactor roles. The nobility's world is defined by grand keeps and extravagant fashion, while the skaa live in crowded houses, wear drab clothing, and are subject to harsh labor conditions, as mentioned before. Throughout the narrative, these sub-worlds emerge through changes in referential expressions of space and time, shifting between viewpoints, time and space. For example, we have an instance with Vin, one of the main enactors of the narrative, experiencing the life of a skaa and then switch to Elend, who is part of the nobility where we are given his perspective. Thus, both sub-worlds coexist within the matrix text-world of the Final Empire, but they remain ideologically and experientially distinct. In the next fragment we are given descriptions of both of these sides:

(3) "Most of the buildings had been built from stone blocks, with tile roofs for the wealthy, and simple, peaked wooden roofs for the rest. The structures were packed closely together, making them seem squat despite the fact that they were generally three stories high.

The tenements and shops were uniform in appearance; this was not a place to draw attention to oneself. Unless, of course, you were a member of the high nobility.”

(Sanderson 28)

(4) “Interspersed throughout the city were a dozen or so monolithic keeps. Intricate, with rows of spearlike spires or deep archways, these were the homes of the high nobility. In fact, they were the mark of a high noble family...

Black mountains. Like the rest of the city, the keeps were stained by countless years of ashfalls... the darkness seemed to creep down the sides of buildings in an uneven gradient.”

(Sanderson 28)

These world-building elements, especially referential expressions of space and materiality, are what allow readers to construct a coherent mental model. That is to say, for example, that ‘tile roofs’ and ‘peaked wooden roofs’ activate readers’ knowledge on urban frames and the difference that causes wealth and poverty in the different types of architecture. Someone with a greater financial status can afford better materials, thus the tile roofs, and those who do not have the same capabilities have to make do with wooden roofs that are more affordable.

This type of architecture alone activates readers’ frames for feudal and aristocratic societies-where the nobles are physically and metaphorically above the commoners, going back to what Lakoff & Johnson refer to as orientational metaphors, where elevation is synonymous with control and power (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). And so, the reader is guided into constructing an image of Luthadel (the capital of the Final Empire) as a hierarchical society with an urban landscape. The closely packed, squat buildings create a cognitive sense of containment and compression for the lower class, which is then contrasted with the spatial expansion and elaboration associated with the nobility’s keeps as seen in example number (4). These vertical structures are not just physical, but social markers too, as the city is physically and ideologically divided, where nobility literally

rises above the lower class, making use of the metaphor that ‘up’ means ‘power’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), common to conceptual framing (Stockwell, 2020). This metaphor is key as the literal elevation of the nobility’s homes correlates with the idea of class, which works in favor of the text-world’s coherence, as the readers are guided to create a mental image of the architecture along with societal status meanings. Other parts of this fragment also support the coherence of the narrative with the repeated imagery of ash and darkness.

(5) “Like the rest of the city, the keeps were stained by countless years of ashfalls.”

(Sanderson 28)

(6) “Like paint running down a canvas, the darkness seemed to creep down the sides of buildings in an uneven gradient.”

(Sanderson 28)

Examples number (5) and (6) serve as a metaphor where the ‘ash falls’ represent the moral decay, oppression and the omnipresence of the Lord Ruler, while it also darkens the buildings “Like paint running down a canvas” where the metaphor of paint running down a canvas serves the purpose of activating the readers’ knowledge or appealing to past experiences where they may have seen this happen and thus helping them construct a more accurate mental representation of the world the author is creating. This foregrounding, which according to Stockwell (2020) is an attractor that draws the attention of the reader towards something that is presented in close proximity, in this case the slow yet inescapable pollution of the world and links the setting to emotional value, where a city suffocates beneath centuries of authority and suffering.

To further aid the reader in the mental framing of Luthadel as a city, the author heavily relies on the reader’s knowledge, meaning the social inequalities, feudal systems and dirty industrial cities. This process represents the distinction between the text-world, which consists of the fictional city as described through linguistic cues, and the Discourse World, where the reader integrates their experience, knowledge and understandings of different topics, and it is within this Discourse World that the text-world elements gain

true meaning for the reader. As such, Luthadel goes from being a setting to a symbol of social inequalities and authoritarian rule. The use of the metaphor of ‘Black Mountains’ to talk about the nobility’s keeps carries with it a symbolic meaning as in many mythologies mountains are considered isolated, unreachable or even sacred. These associations are not explicitly stated in the text but are interpretations the author intends the readers to achieve via the activation of specific religious mental frames. As a result, the keeps are not only architectural structures within the city, but they assume a more important role as ideological symbols of elevation, be it social or divine.

(7) “They didn’t complain, of course; they knew better than that. Instead, they simply worked with bowed heads, moving about their work with quiet apathy. The passing whip of a taskmaster would force them into dedicated motion for a few moments, but as soon as the taskmaster passed, they would return to their languor.”

(Sanderson 2)

Example number (7) describes how the skaa are oppressed and subjugated by the nobles who assert control over them by any means necessary, further illustrated in example number (8):

(8) “I had a few runaways—but I executed their families.”

(Sanderson 2).

The language used by Sanderson in fragments (7) and (8) build the oppressive sub-world of the skaa but at the same time, it appeals to the readers’ frame of knowledge of social justice, prompting an ethical response rooted in the Discourse World knowledge of social inequality and historical slavery.

Thus, it is established that this world is set with social inequalities and oppression, where the deity the inhabitants worship is someone tangible and who, so far, has established himself as God and the actual creator of this world. However, there is much more to the notion of religion than the Lord Ruler alone. Sazed, one of the protagonists of

the story, has a critical role in the narrative serving as someone through whom readers encounter a vast number of lost religious traditions. His ability to preserve hundreds of faiths contrasts with the Lord Ruler's authoritarian position of being the only God. In the following fragments of dialogue Sazed talks about these lost beliefs:

(9) "Five hundred and sixty-two," Sazed said. "That is the number of belief systems I know... The Steel Ministry forbids the worship of anyone but the Lord Ruler... We shall return to mankind his forgotten truths."

(Sanderson 179)

Linguistic cues in passage number (9) create a modal-sub-world, which is separate from its originating text-world, and it describes a yet unrealized situation at the time of their creation thus generating narrative coherence across temporal frames, while contacting the readers' knowledge and experiences of real-world incidents of cultural erasure or religious overtaking in our own history. For example, the colonialization of Indigenous belief systems such as the Aztecs by European colonizers who forced Christianity upon them and destroyed religious symbols and temples. These events are parallel to what the Steel Ministry did by orders of the Lord Ruler with the destruction of ancient religious systems and replacing it with his own. This activates discourse-world frames related to oppression and resistance, making the readers empathize with Sazed's will to preserve the now forgotten beliefs which can also be seen as a form of rebellion against authority.

According to Gavins, the aforementioned modal-world is constructed with the use of, as the name suggests, modal verbs and adverbs (Gavins, 2007:94). This type of sub-world reflect imagined, desired or hypothetical realities withing the narrative, as stated before, and when Sazed says:

(10) "We shall return to mankind his forgotten truths."

(Sanderson 179)

The modal verb ‘shall’, in example number (10), projects a modal-world in which Keepers, people who are trusted with the safekeeping of knowledge, fulfill their role to restore the cultures that have been erased by the Lord Ruler. This is not yet part of the text-world’s reality, but it adds more information to it so that the readers’ can create an even more accurate mental image of it. However, that is not only its sole purpose, as this modal-world represents an opposition to the dominant text-world of the Lord Ruler’s enforced authority, where religion is a state controlled belief system, thus granting the readers with a different version of the text-world they are familiar with.

Moreover, Sazed as a character can be said to represent the very function of TWT. While he is an enactor in the main text-world, his main function is that of a world-builder as he brings forth these forgotten beliefs which then the reader interprets as separate from the main text-world. Gavins talks about world-switches (Gavins, 2007:48) which occur whenever the temporal situation of the text-world shifts. This is the perfect analogy for Sazed, as he often introduces these switches through the quotations of religious texts, prayers and mythologies he has stored, thus creating sub-worlds that represent the past or alternative belief systems.

(11) “It is called ‘Trelagism,’ after the god Trell. Trell was worshipped by a group known as the Nelazan, a people who lived far to the north. In their land, the day and night cycle was very odd. During some months of the year, it was dark for most of the day. During the summer, however, it only grew dark for a few hours at a time.

“The Nelazan believed that there was beauty in darkness, and that the daylight was more profane. They saw the stars as the Thousand Eyes of Trell watching them. The sun was the single, jealous eye of Trell’s brother, Nalt. Since Nalt only had one eye, he made it blaze brightly to outshine his brother. The Nelazan, however, were not impressed, and preferred to worship the quiet Trell, who watched over them even when Nalt obscured the sky.”

(Sanderson 178)

Fragment number (11) perfectly exemplifies this statement. Sazed describes ‘Trelagism’ with seriousness and respect, as if telling a story, inciting the readers to create a mental frame of what that religion should have looked like. Not only that, but we can consider the entirety of this fragment as a metaphor to explain why the ‘Nelazan’ believed that night was longer than daylight. This description of day and night cycle being unequal aims to activate in the reader background knowledge about our own planet, as this is an occurrence that can be seen in the extreme regions of the northern and southern poles. This is why Sazed can be considered an important enactor who links the matrix text-world with the sub-world. These beliefs, which were part of the text-world and were then erased by the Lord Ruler, are now stored within Sazed’s Feruchemical memory waiting to be shared again. Each time Sazed introduces a new belief with phrases such as “they believed,” “this religion taught,” or “I have studied,” he triggers a world-switch into a modal-world that captures a lost religious system. This, in turn, activates the knowledge of multiple religious systems in the reader, not unlike our real-world. Thus creating two different text-worlds, one where multiple belief systems and religions exist, and another, the current, where only the Lord Ruler’s mono-religious ideology prevails. These linguistic expressions help the reader construct a separate mental frame made up of the new information about the religions that is presented. Then, readers can interpret Sazed’s mission of sharing this knowledge through more activated knowledge, as they are not dissimilar to the preservation of scriptures during wartime, with the burning of the Library of Alexandria, for example. These frames of knowledge not only help the readers in understanding the narrative, but they also help create an emotional link between his words and these real-world examples as they add layers of meaning which serve as evaluative frames for these actions. In cognitive poetics, Stockwell (2020) talks about the prototypical scale of empathy, where even if we are speaking about a fantastical world we can still relate to their characters, and we can address the high degree of empathy that readers can feel towards Sazed as they not only understand the character’s perspective but feel aligned with his struggle. This is further emphasized by the number of lost traditions he mentions he has in fragment (9) from before, “Five hundred and sixty-two,” is not only used to give

information to the reader, but also to affect them by making them think about the sheer number of that which has been lost and the responsibility of their preservation.

Thus, Sazed inhabits multiple worlds which are accessed through shifts and transformations. As Gavins explains, in TWT terms this process is part of what is called function-advancing propositions (Gavins, 2007:56) contrasted against the background already constructed by the world-building elements of the text, and they can be seen as the means by which a discourse is propelled forward. Often bringing with them changes and modifications to the established relationships between the text-world elements. Furthermore, there is also the presence of what Stockwell calls defamiliarization (Stockwell, 2020:33), which, as he states, is not the exclusive effect of making something completely foreign or strange, but also the effect of making the reader notice what is being described as something different in some way or another from what they have experienced prior to this new information. This is exactly what happens in this fragment, as Sazed lays the grounds of a completely new religion, contrasted with what the reader knew about the Lord Ruler's theocratic rule and having them realize that religion is not only what the God of this world has imposed, but that there are many and with opposing beliefs to what has been set in the text-world.

At the end of the novel, there is an important shift that alters the already established frames and even the matrix text-world. Kelsier, who has functioned throughout the narrative as a leader and has driven the narrative forward through frames of idea of resistance, is killed. This event triggers a new ideological movement which will resonate with the reader with frames of knowledge about our own history and, it can even draw parallels from Christianity.

(12) "The skaa think differently—their legends about him are growing quickly. I shall have to return here soon and collect them."

Vin frowned. "You would gather stories about Kelsier?"

"Of course," Sazed said. "I collect all religions." Vin snorted. "This is no religion we're talking about, Sazed. This is Kelsier."

"I disagree. He is certainly a religious figure to the skaa."

“But, we knew him,” Vin said. “He was no prophet or god. He was just a man.”

“So many of them are, I think,” Sazed said quietly.
(Sanderson 579-80)

In this fragment, Sazed talks to Vin about how he will record this new religion, but Vin is not convinced that it should be as such. The idea of a new religion being born right in front of her eyes is foreign to her but, as I mentioned before, this is not unlike our own world and Christianity. This new event in the matrix text-world does not shift it from being mono-religious, but it does change the belief system, as the new God or prophet is now Kelsier, and he represents hope and survival, hence its name ‘Survivorism’. This event activates frames of knowledge of martyrdom, again, not unlike Jesus Christ when Christianity was formed. Faith formation, or how a new religion is born as well as myth-building, where one who once was an ordinary person is now mystified as a savior throughout history.

Thus, from a cognitive perspective, this moment makes the reader restructure previously activated frames, a process which Stockwell refers to as schema refreshment (Stockwell, 2020:107) a schema change that is not as much of defamiliarization as ‘refamiliarization’. The readers need to, once again, ‘refamiliarize’ themselves with the text-world using the same frames of knowledge but applied to new functional propositions. Initially, the Lord Ruler activates religious and authoritarian frames associated with absolute control and negative moral ideas. After the reveal, these frames are no longer coherent with the new information, requiring the reader to revise their already established mental image of both the character and the world.

This realignment also deeply affects the ideological coherence of the narrative, as the Lord Ruler’s divinity is exposed to be nothing more than human manipulation. This invites the reader to consider not only the fall of a tyrant, but the collapse of a belief system. Thus, the text-world has shifted, the frames have been changed, and the story comes to an end.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to analyze how religious belief systems and ideological structures are constructed, challenged and interpreted in *Mistborn: The Final Empire*. It argued that religion in this novel is not just a narrative background, but a central piece to the narrative's progression and the character's drive to move forward. Not only that, but it also engages the reader's cultural frames of knowledge on various real-world experiences and historical events. This is apparent in example (12) on Kelsier's martyrdom, which draws parallels from Christianity, or Sazed's knowledge on lost religions in example (9) which drew elements from colonization and imposition of authority. As hypothesized, religion functions in the novel not as a static world-building element, rather as a function-advancing element, which causes shifts in the matrix text-world as well as the enactors who are part of it. The Lord Ruler's appointed godhood points towards an obvious religious reference, the existence of a God, as well as it being a fact in the story helps the antagonist maintain political control. This then being challenged by the protagonists reshapes the established roles set in the reader's mind, changing up the matrix text-world. A fact that, again, shows how religion and faith are central to why nobody questioned his authority until the very end. In that view, faith is a double-edged sword, as it both stops society from moving on while under the grasp of the Lord Ruler, but it also ends up being the driving force behind the skaa's desire for resistance and up-rising.

These findings can be linked to the work of Norledge (2020), who argues that a language-centered analysis of dystopian fiction which considers linguistic creativity, reader subjectivity and personal experience and frames is important. In her studies, she makes use of cognitive psychology and TWT to discuss the construal of these dystopian worlds where the readers engage with multiple frames of knowledge. Like the dystopias in her study, Sanderson's (2009) novel uses linguistic cues to guide the reader's alignment and provoke ideological questioning sparking revolutions, which are central to dystopian stories. This is directly linked to dystopian ethics, where reader's often make use of emotional experiences in response to characters' actions and perceptions. Just as in *Mistborn: The Final Empire*, where the main event which sparks this revolution is a

religious one, Kelsier's death. Again, as already stated, further strengthening the idea of religion in this novel being a driving force not only for the narrative but for society as a whole as well.

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