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**ASPECTS OF WORLDBUILDING:
A STUDY OF PATRICK ROTHFUSS' SECONDARY WORLD**

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**ASPECTS OF WORLDBUILDING:
A STUDY OF PATRICK ROTHFUSS' SECONDARY WORLD**

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I would like to dedicate this work to the one who was by my side whenever I (re)read a fantasy book during the last few years. The one that saw the seeds of this work being planted, helped me take care of it while it germinated, but was deprived of seeing it in its full bloom. The one that kept the bravest of hearts I have ever seen in the face of sheer pain and hopelessness, that fought valiantly against all odds with fiercest determination, and having taken the last breath in my arms, is now free from the toils and sorrows of this world. You healed my broken heart countless times and I wish I could have done the same to you. I would like to thank you for being the most loyal and loving companion you were to me during your brief stay this side of the veil. This work was only concluded because of you and everything you taught me about resilience, perseverance, and unconditional love. This work was written as we fought your ultimate battle and, as we stumbled along the path, hurt, tired, and holding on to one another, I was reminded that no feeling is final. Thus, if our moments of joy together eventually came to an end, so would your pain. And it did. There are going to be, of course, further moments of joy as well as of sorrow, for such is life: it goes on despite the pain. Despite the fact that since you died, the part of me that was for you also died. Despite the fact that every missing part of you makes me want to cry and reach for you wherever you may be. Life must go on. Our love survives through all the memories we made along the way, through the hollow spaces your absence has left, both inside and outside. Still, I would have loved to have had more time with you. I wish you could have been with me as I typed the final words of this work. I know you would have looked at me with your loving eyes and, in your special manner of conveying meaning, would have told me that you knew we could do it. There is very little chance that we will ever meet again, but still, I hope. Thank you!

*“We are the Edema Ruh.
We know the songs the sirens sang.
See us dream every tale true.
The verse we leave with you will take you
home.”*

(Tuomas Holopainen, Edema Ruh)

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RESUMO

Esta tese analisa aspectos dos romances *O Nome do Vento* (2007) e *O Temor do Sábio* (2011), do autor norte americano Patrick Rothfuss, para verificar como o escritor constrói seu universo ficcional e sua narrativa para criar um mundo secundário internamente consistente. A discussão parte da premissa de Brian Attebery (1992) de que a publicação de *O Senhor dos Anéis* (1954-1955), de J. R. R. Tolkien, estabeleceu uma espécie de fórmula para a literatura de fantasia, resultando em uma tendência literária da nossa contemporaneidade. A presente pesquisa investiga em que medida as narrativas de Rothfuss se enquadram nessa fórmula, discutindo pontos de convergência e também de divergência. As semelhanças e diferenças encontradas são exploradas na tentativa de explicar por que elas ocorrem. Ao longo da análise, elementos como expectativas de gênero, contexto histórico, técnicas narrativas, são observados. Compreender e explicar por que as mudanças no padrão surgem, bem como a possível relação delas com o contexto das obras, é o foco deste estudo. O lastro teórico utilizado engloba trabalhos de especialistas da área como J. R. R. Tolkien (2001), Brian Attebery (1992, 2004, 2022) e Farah Mendlesohn (2008), que abordam questões tanto de aspectos intrínsecos quanto extrínsecos à literatura de fantasia.

Palavras-chave: 1 Literaturas de língua inglesa. 2 Literatura estadunidense. 3 Literatura de fantasia contemporânea. 4 Patrick Rothfuss. 5 Mundos secundários. 6 *Worldbuilding*.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses aspects of the novels *The Name of the Wind* (2007) and *The Wise Man's Fear* (2011), written by the North American author Patrick Rothfuss. It focuses on an analysis of how the writer builds his fictional universe and frames his narrative to create an internally consistent secondary world. The discussion starts from Brian Attebery's (1992) premise that the publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) has established a sort of formula for fantasy literature, resulting in a contemporary literary tendency. Therefore, this work investigates to what extent Rothfuss' narratives fits such formula, discussing points of convergence as well as of divergence. Similarities and differences found are discussed in an attempt to explain why they occur. Throughout the discussion, elements such as genre expectations, historical context, and narrative techniques are used as parameters of analysis. Understanding and explaining why changes in the pattern arise, as well as their possible relation to their context, are the focus of this study. The chosen scholarly approach encompasses works by field experts such as J. R. R. Tolkien (2001), Brian Attebery (1992, 2004, 2022), and Farah Mendlesohn (2008), which address matters both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of fantasy literature.

Keywords: 1 English literature. 2 North American literature. 3 Contemporary fantasy literature. 4 Patrick Rothfuss. 5 Secondary worlds. 6 Worldbuilding.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this section of the work is to offer an overview of the main themes, concepts and theories that are discussed in it. I start by justifying the internal and external reasons I had for opting for the specific primary sources presented in this dissertation; then, I move to a brief introduction of such sources and their author. After that, I present the theories chosen and how they aid me in attaining the objective of this work. Finally, I talk about how this work is divided as well as the function of each of its parts.

This is a work about fantasy literature, and it focuses on the fantasy works *The Name of the Wind* (2007) and *The Wise Man's Fear* (2011), both written by the North American author Patrick Rothfuss. The reasons why I have chosen Patrick Rothfuss' novels concern the fact that these are recent fantasy works that have reached considerable public acclaim and also because there has been an increase in academic works debating the author's narrative. Therefore, investigating this author's literary productions is an opportunity of, at the same time, contributing to the studies about the writer and of expanding on the academic works that verse about the fantasy narratives of the twenty-first century. In addition to that, Rothfuss' narratives dialogue, to a considerable extent, with what I worked with during my undergraduate years as well as in my master's thesis. For the last ten years, the focus of my research has been on the works of the English author J. R. R. Tolkien, mainly on his three most popular fictions, *The Hobbit* (1933), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954 – 1955), and *The Silmarillion* (1977) and on his prominent essay "On Fairy Stories" (2001). In this sense, I have written extensively about the importance of his fantasy to his own time and to the present days.

It is understood by prominent scholars, such as Brian Attebery (1992, 2014), Farah Mendlesohn (2008, 2009), Edward James (2012), Tom Shippey (2001), among others, that Tolkien's works, mainly *The Lord of the Rings*, have played a central role in popularizing fantasy fiction (Tolkien is often regarded as the "father" of modern fantasy) and in creating a model for fantasy authors writing after him. *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* follow, to a considerable extent, said model, mainly where world building is concerned. However, Rothfuss' narratives also diverge from the Tolkienian model in several aspects, which has largely to do with the fact that Rothfuss writes many decades after Tolkien, in a different place and in a different historical moment. The crises and anxieties of the 21st

century are, to a considerable extent, not the same as the ones of the previous century, during which Tolkien wrote. Tolkien, and a considerable number of his contemporary (fantasy) writers from Great Britain and the U.S.A., such as C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, among others, address, in specific texts¹, the problems and consequences of the wars of their century. As Jane Tompkins proposes “[...] the text is engaged in solving a problem or a set of problems specific to the time in which it was written [...]” (Tompkins, 1985, p. 38). Rather than saying that a text attempts to solve a problem intrinsic to its time, however, I would say that it is engaged in addressing and discussing it, putting it in evidence, so that it can be better understood and then, perhaps, worked on and solved. In this sense, if one of the problems largely addressed in the first half of the 20th century was the problem of war, it may be asked which issues are being addressed by specific 21st century authors. In this dissertation, I work towards an understanding of the central themes approached by fantasy writers of the present century so as to possibly find a pattern that may indicate a tendency. As previously stated, my focus is on the fantasy novels of Patrick Rothfuss; however, I will also discuss, even if briefly, other authors that are part of the fantasy literature canon, such as J. K. Rowling, Neil Gaiman and Andrzej Sapkowski. It is worth mentioning that this research encompasses Rothfuss’ works as well as the context in which they were written since, as Edgar de Decca proposes, understanding and analysing the historical-social moment a text is written from can help one broaden their comprehension of a literary work:

[...] when analysed alongside with the social tensions of the time in which the author was involved, the works may reveal an imaginary construction in which criticism is made possible. Besides that, an investigation of the meaning of the work as well as of its discursive motivations showcases the close relation between literature and the historic doing². (Decca, IN Cristelli, 2013, p. 22).

Therefore, if on one hand the discussion throughout this dissertation will be guided by Tolkien’s model and understanding of fantasy, on the other, it will also follow Rothfuss’ perception of the genre as well as the way he appropriates and modifies Tolkienian motifs and tropes to address specific issues and needs of his own time.

Rothfuss started writing his *The Name of the Wind* in 1994, as he states in the author’s note to the ten-year anniversary edition of his work. It was a long and arduous process until

¹ For further information, see Rocha (2019b).

² My translation to the original, in Portuguese. [...] *as obras analisadas em conjunto com as tensões sociais da época, nas quais o autor se encontrava envolvido, podem revelar uma construção imaginária na qual a crítica é possível e, ao mesmo tempo, a investigação do sentido da obra e de suas motivações discursivas evidencia a estreita relação entre a construção literária e o fazer histórico.*

the book was published, over a decade later, in 2007. A possible reason for the author having taken so long to complete the first volume of his fantasy novel may be connected, to a large extent, to the author's aims concerning his narrative, which he describes as follows:

When I started writing *The Name of the Wind*, I knew I wanted the world to feel real. More than that, I wanted it to feel rich and complex and deep and...It's hard to describe what I wanted, but I knew what I *didn't want*. I didn't want it to feel like a movie set, where if you turned the wrong way, you'd see the city was nothing more than painted canvas and plywood. I wanted my readers to feel like no matter which way they turned, they would be greeted with cobblestones, the smell of coalsmoke, and people gently bustling about, living their lives. Ultimately, I wanted was a world that felt as real to my readers as Middle Earth felt to me when I was twelve. I wanted it my world to feel *true*. (Rothfuss, 2017, p. 708. Italics in the original).

Basically, what Rothfuss wanted was to create a narrative that took place in what Ronald Kyrmse (2003) calls a three-dimensional world³; a world that possesses depth, diversity, and a sense of diachrony, of historical depth. It is interesting to notice that Kyrmse creates his concept based on the works of Tolkien, who also had his own desire of making his fictional world feel real and who proposes, in the essay "On Fairy Stories" (first published in 1947), even if unconsciously, a model for fantasy writers that want to give such sense of depth and reality to their works.⁴ Basically, the 20th century scholar proposes a treatise on how to write fantasy. However, Tolkien writes his treatise using, to a considerable extent, his own fictional narrative, *The Lord of the Rings*, as a model. Tolkien's essay derives from a lecture given by the theorist in March 1939 at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. As the scholar Verlyn Flieger (2017) points out, the essay can be read as an explanation of the author's creative process regarding his novel; in other words, it is possible to identify several elements present in *The Lord of the Rings* in it. It is important to highlight, however, as theorists such as Tom Shippey (2001) and Humphrey Carpenter (2000) propose, that Tolkien began work on his novel in December 1937, just over a year before the author gave the lecture that originated the essay. It can be said, therefore, that the production of "On Fairy Stories" accompanied the development of the novel. In this sense, as proposed by Flieger (2017), it is possible to see "On Fairy Stories" as a type of formula used by the author in the creation of his novel.

It may be argued, then, that Tolkien believed that his own novel contained all the fundamental elements and characteristics attributed to what he calls a successful fantasy, mainly where the creation of an internally consistent and realistic fictional universe is

³ The concept will be deepened further on the work.

⁴ Tolkien's theory will also be given further attention ahead on this work.

concerned.⁵ Therefore, it is possible to connect Tolkien's and Rothfuss' ideas as quoted above with Terry Eagleton's belief that "[e]very literary work harks back, if only unconsciously, to other works." (Eagleton, 2013, p. 8). In the case of Rothfuss, he seems to be conscious of his "harking back" to Tolkien, so much so that he points out that there are elements from Tolkien's worldbuilding that he considers problematic and that he intended to make different when he wrote his own fantasy novel:

But here's the problem: realistic worlds are really inconvenient for epic storytelling. For example, if you travelled 200 miles in Europe in the 1500s, odds were good you wouldn't be able to understand the locals. [...] even these days there are small towns 50 miles from London where you'll have a hard time understanding their dialect. The more I grew up, the more history I learned, the more I realized that language was just the tip of the iceberg. Back before we had the homogenizing effects of fast travel, cheap communication, and broadcast media, the world was a vasty, varied place. They had different systems of measurement. Different calendars. Ways of telling time. Different monetary systems. Religions. Systems of government. Titles and laws. Rules of etiquette. So I started to fret, how could I create a cool, realistic world where I didn't have to create 80 distinct cultures and then have my characters fumble awkwardly through them like the worst montage ever? A lot of stereotypical fantasy storytelling shortcuts obviously came about for these reasons. The concept of a common language that everyone speaks is pretty much a given. The best, most heavy-handed version of these is the D&D language that is just straight up called "Common". Even folks who take their worldbuilding seriously lean on this. Even Tolkien, a linguist who actually created several fully-formed fictional languages, did it. Bilbo travels from one end of the world to the other, and when he gets there, the folks in Laketown don't even have an accent. Two different nations of elves, a skinchanger, dwarves, goblins, even the spiders in Mirkwood, they all conveniently speak the same language Bilbo grew up with in the shire. (Rothfuss, 2017, p. 707-708).

It is interesting to notice that at the same time Rothfuss acknowledges that he wants his own fictional universe to aspire to Tolkien's, he also admits that there are aspects of the Tolkienian narrative that he is not willing to incorporate into his own fantasy novels. This idea is intrinsically connected to the aim of this dissertation: analysing which elements of the Tolkienian model for fantasy narratives resonate in the fantasy fictions of the 21st century (namely the novels by Rothfuss) and which do not. I also investigate why some elements are incorporated and others are not. To do so, I rely mainly on the studies concerning fantasy fiction proposed by Brian Attebery (2014, 1982, 1980), Farah Mendlesohn (2009, 2008), and Tolkien (2001, 1997). Before I discuss the theoretical sources at the foundation of my analysis, however, I would like to offer a brief background on Rothfuss' novels since they are considerably recent works that may not be known to some people reading this work.

⁵ Tolkien believed that a successful fantasy should be able, among other things, to provide readers four things: fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. These concepts, as well as the scholar's theory, are discussed in the next sections of this work.

Both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* are part of the still unfinished trilogy *The Kingkiller Chronicle*⁶. The novels comprise the story of its protagonist, Kvothe, and his struggles to survive in a society that offers very little sympathy or reassurance towards outcasts and those living in the margins. The narrative is told almost entirely in first person and in analepsis by the protagonist as an adult. It is told to a scribe, Chronicler, who is interested in learning the “truth” behind the numerous stories that are told about the protagonist and that describe him not only as a legend, but also as a highly pursued assassin. Kvothe seeks, then, to tell Chronicler his own account of these stories, his perspective of his own history and of all the events that brought him to his present situation: an innkeeper known by the name of Kote, who lives an uneventful life with his apprentice, Bast, in a secluded part of Temerant, Rothfuss’ fictional universe. The narrative shifts, from time to time, between the story of the protagonist as an adult and the events taking place at his inn and its surroundings (the frame story), and the story of his youth and the hardships he had to face growing up as an orphan (the framed story). The first is told by a third person narrator that does not take part in the story, while the latter, as already stated, is told in the first person by the protagonist himself.

Central to Rothfuss’ narrative is the conflict between social classes, above all the prejudice and wrongfulness of the upper classes towards the lower ones, mainly the Edema Ruh, to which the protagonist belongs. The Edema Ruh are described as a wandering folk with remarkable artistic skills, mainly where storytelling, stage performance and music are concerned. This nomadic people earn their living by traveling from town to town offering entertainment in the form of their artistic performances. It is interesting to notice that even though the prejudice towards the Ruh is largely widespread in Temerant, Kvothe’s troupe benefits from a certain type of renown, as the protagonist explains in the eighth chapter of the work:

We were court performers, Lord Greyfallow’s Men. Our arrival in most towns was more of an event than the Midwinter Pageantry and Solinade Games rolled together. There were usually at least eight wagons in our troupe and well over two dozen performers: actors and acrobats, musicians and hand magicians, jugglers and jesters: My family. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 59).

It is worth mentioning that most of the renown of Kvothe’s troupe comes from the patronage of a noble, Baron Greyfallow, whose name, the protagonist affirms, “[...] opened many doors that would ordinarily be closed to the Edema Ruh” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 60). Much

⁶ The third installment of the trilogy, *The Doors of Stone*, is yet to be released.

due to such patronage, Kvothe and his troupe benefited from a considerable amount of respect. However, bearing the Baron's writ of patronage did not prevent them from being wrongly accused or from being seen with contempt from time to time:

That was the hardest part of growing up Edema Ruh. We are strangers everywhere. Many folk view us as vagabonds and beggars, while others deem us little more than thieves, heretics, and whores. It's hard to be wrongfully accused, but it's worse when the people looking down on you are clods who have never read a book or traveled more than twenty miles from the place they were born. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 63).

Putting the hardest part aside, the protagonist claims that his was a happy childhood: he enjoyed growing up among the artistry of his troupe, learning about the intricate craft that lay behind stage performing, singing, playing musical instruments and several other artistic expressions he learned from his parents and the other members of his caravan. When Abenthy, an elderly Arcanist⁷, joins the troupe, he starts instructing the protagonist in a series of subjects that are taught at The University, making Kvothe eager to further his education there. When he is only eleven, however, his pleasant youth takes a tragic and unexpected downturn: one evening, after running a couple of errands in the woods, he returns to the camp where his troupe, his family, had settled and finds the caravan ablaze and the bodies of its members strewn around the area, murdered. As he wanders through the wreckage and torn bodies, in shock, he realizes the perpetrators of the foul deed are still there: seven sinister figures that, prior to that moment, Kvothe believed only existed in legends and folklore: the Chandrian. From that day on, the protagonist is forced to survive a miserable life of orphanhood in a cruel world that cares little about the poor and homeless. *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Men's Fear* tell the story of how the protagonist withstood the dreary reality he unexpectedly found himself in, of his restless attempt to fulfil his dream of studying at The University, and of unveiling the mystery surrounding the murder of his family by the legendary Chandrian. It is, among other things, a survivor's tale.

Considering the main plot of the narrative and bringing back Tompkins' (1985) previously quoted proposition, it may be argued that one of the problems Rothfuss addresses and discusses in his narrative is that of prejudice and social indifference towards the less favoured classes. If one considers the author's inclination towards social projects, this idea is corroborated. Rothfuss' mother, Marge Rothfuss (deceased in 2007), was an active supporter

⁷ Title given to people who graduate at The University, which is the most prominent educational center in Rothfuss' fictional universe. More information about the subject will be given further on in this work.

of Heifer International, a North American non-profit charity organization⁸. In this sense, the author grew up aware of the impact one's actions can have in someone else's life. Therefore, after the success of his debut novel, *The Name of the Wind*, the author realized he could use his rapidly growing fame to help people in need all around the world. He started by holding a simple contest: to inspire people to donate to Heifer International, he proposed a raffle in which the donors taking part in it had a chance to win some of the books from his own collection. To encourage his fanbase even further, he proposed to double the final amount of money donated by using his own funds. The result was considerably striking: he was able to raise over \$50,000 and, after he doubled it, he had the amount of over \$100,000. Inspired by the positive result, he invited a group of friends and, together, they founded Worldbuilders, a non-profit organization that raises funds to help charity organizations worldwide. Since its establishment, in 2008, Worldbuilders has raised over \$10 million to support charities such as Heifer International, Mercy Corps⁹, Global Giving¹⁰, First Book¹¹, among others. In this sense, I argue that if a series of pressing issues of the author's time, such as poverty and prejudice, are put in evidence in his fictional works, it may be an attempt to raise awareness amongst the (implied) readers towards the dreary reality many people around the world face and sensitise. Therefore, a part of this work is concerned with addressing how Rothfuss approaches these issues through his narratives.

As previously stated, this work also analyses the presence or absence of Tolkienian concepts of fantasy in Rothfuss' narratives. To do so, I perform an analysis of the novels *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* in light of Tolkien's theory as proposed in his essay "On Fairy Stories" and its application in his *The Lord of the Rings*. Scholarly works of two other theorists from the area of Fantasy Studies, namely Brian Attebery and Farah Mendlesohn are also used. The propositions of each of these theorists are approached and their applicability and limitations are discussed. Attebery contributes with his theories concerning the adaptability, applicability, and structures of fantasy narratives as presented in his *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) and *Stories about Stories* (2014), while Mendlesohn adds to this research with her considerations about the literary techniques employed by fantasy writers to reach intended effects and cause specific impacts, presented in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008).

⁸ For further information, check <https://www.heifer.org/>

⁹ For further information, check <https://www.mercycorps.org/>

¹⁰ For further information, check <https://www.globalgiving.org/>

¹¹ For further information, check <https://firstbook.org/>

Brian Attebery, in his *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), approaches literature through the concept of fuzzy sets arguing that literary genres are defined by a centre, rather than by boundaries. To clarify how such sets work, the theorist resorts to linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003) who propose, in their book *Metaphors we live by*, that human beings categorize the world in terms of prototypes and similarities. Therefore, the category “fantasy” consists of central prototypical texts that are surrounded by other texts that share more or fewer elements with those situated in the centre. In this sense, Attebery proposes, a book can be considered a classic example of fantasy, more or less fantasy, or even be seen as fantasy in a certain way: “[t]he category has a clear center but boundaries that shade off imperceptibly, so that a book on the fringes may be considered as belonging or not, depending on one's interests” (Attebery, 1992, p. 12). Therefore, Attebery's conception presupposes the existence of a central model of what is meant by fantasy, a model that guides debates and dictates parameters about what fits the genre (and to which extent) and what does not.

To discover from what centre the fantasy genre is perceived to be radiating, the scholar conducted the following experiment: he selected forty literary texts and asked a group of scholars who had written about fantasy to rank them on a scale from one to seven. As shown in the table below, the lower the score obtained, the more in the centre of the fuzzy set the text is located:

Table 1: **Categorization of fantasy texts**

Score given	Meaning
1	Quintessentially fantasy
2	Basically fantasy
3	Technically fantasy
4	Fantasy in some respects
5	Like fantasy
6	Not really fantasy
7	By no means fantasy

Source: the author

Among the texts chosen by Attebery are productions by authors such as Mary Shelley, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury, Gabriel García Marquez, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, among others. Of the 14 responses collected (including Attebery's own), the work that got the lowest score and, consequently, was defined, almost unanimously,

as the central model of the fantasy literature fuzzy set was Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Regarding the results of the study conducted, Attebery makes the following considerations:

[...] [My experiment] has no scientific validity. However, it does reinforce my own impression that with the publication and popular acceptance of Tolkien's version of the fantastic, a new coherence was given to the genre. [...] Tolkien's form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception. One way to characterize the genre of fantasy is the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*. (Attebery, 1992, p. 14).

Having defined the core of the fantasy genre, Attebery analysed *The Lord of the Rings* alongside with other fantasies published after Tolkien's work in order to investigate in which ways the latter resembled the first, reaching the conclusion that their resemblance concern three fundamental features: content, structure, and reader response. Therefore, based on Attebery's theory I discuss how and to what extent Patrick Rothfuss' *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* partake of the elements at the core of the fantasy genre and how the author displaces these elements to fit the demands of the twenty-first century.

Alongside my reading of Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy*, I will also rely on his *Stories about Stories* (2014) which discusses the connection of fantasy stories with mythical narratives and the cultural and social functions of fantasy. Central to his thinking is the belief that fantasy narratives are concerned with, but not limited to, solving problems specific to the context in which they are inserted. Through his claim that fantasy is inescapably metaphoric, in opposition to most kinds of fiction that are largely metonymic, the author proposes that this characteristic allows the genre to address and respond to a variety of issues, such as social (in)justice and matters of race, gender, and identity, more powerfully as it brings the strange, the magical, and the numinous to modern life. These claims, along with his belief that the everlasting appeal of fantasy is largely connected to its adaptability to the changing intellectual trends and its applicability to a range of social needs, aid me in my investigation of how Patrick Rothfuss' narratives voice the cultural anxieties of the writer's time.

Farah Mendlesohn, in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), discusses the language of fantasy narratives. The scholar argues that an understanding of the recurrent metaphorical and thematic elements present in the genre are of considerable importance to better compare and analyse fantasy texts and to reach a broader understanding of how authors employ different writing techniques to achieve specific literary effects. For the author, the construction of a sense of “wonder” is highly dependent on the dialectic involving (implicit) author and (implicit) reader in the fantasy genre, and that such dialectic is conditioned by the genre

expectations circling certain writing techniques. To illustrate her idea, Mendlesohn resorts to Wayne C. Booth's proposition that, "[...] a sonnet begun calls for a sonnet concluded; an elegy begun in blank verse calls for an elegy completed in blank verse" (Booth, p. 127, 1983). To connect Booth's idea with her own theory, Mendlesohn proposes four categories within fantasy stories: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal fantasy. The scholar, then, argues that the construction of a sense of wonder in fantasy texts, in their vast diversity, is the most powerful when "[...] the literary techniques employed are most appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xiii). In other words, the more appropriate to the readers' expectations regarding a specific category of fantasy the literary techniques employed by the author are, the more successful their fantasy may be.

Central to Mendlesohn's argument is Attebery's proposition that fantasy authors work with well-defined structures, using narrative strategies that, while establishing a relationship between the Primary World and the Secondary World, also separate them (Attebery, 1992). Based on this idea, Mendlesohn investigates how such narrative techniques work and what their literary impact is. In other words, Mendlesohn analyses how fantasy writers use different literary techniques to meet the expectations of the genre. In the portal-quest fantasy, as the name indicates, the fantastic enters the narrated world through a portal which separates the characters' real world from the fantasy world; in the immersive fantasy, writers construct a fantasy world which has its own inner consistency of reality, which means that the fantastic is perceived by the characters as normal and belonging to that universe; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic elements intrude or are hosted in the characters' world, which is not a fantasy world per se; finally, in the liminal fantasy, the key element is dissonance: both readers and characters see fantasy, but it is seen and interpreted differently. Readers place the fantastic in different moments, but doubt arises because the characters seem to question if anything fantastical has happened. Taking into consideration Mendlesohn's categories, I investigate which one(s) resemble(s) the structure of Patrick Rothfuss' novels the most. Then, I briefly apply the scholar's theory to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and compare my findings. Finally, I discuss the problems and limitations of Mendlesohn's theory.

This dissertation is structured in two parts. Part one, "On Worldbuilding" explores Rothfuss' fictional universe, Temerant, and analyses the techniques he applies to his narratives as a means to create what he calls a world that feels real, rich, complex and deep (Rothfuss, 2017). Since the author hoped, as he states in the 10th anniversary edition of his *The Name of the Wind*, to create a fictional world that felt as real to his readers as Tolkien's

Middle-earth felt to him, I rely on Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories", in which the scholar exposes his beliefs concerning the craft of worldbuilding, to conduct my investigation. I also apply Ronald Kyrmse's (2003) theory on three-dimensional fictional universes to see to what extent Rothfuss' fantasy world fits into it.

Having analysed Rothfuss' narrative techniques, the second chapter of the work, "(New) Tendencies on Fantasy Fiction", draws a parallel between *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* and other (fantasy) narratives produced in this century to identify patterns that may indicate a tendency. This chapter also focuses on the social aspect of Rothfuss' works. In it, I investigate how the author creates a frame of narrative that establishes a relationship between his fantasy universe and the real world and, at the same time, separates them. I examine the social issues raised in the narrative, connect them with current matters of the twenty-first century, such as social injustice and inequalities, and discuss how they are addressed, as well as how the author uses fantasy to comment on them. The theoretical tools for this part of the work come, mainly, from Attebery (2014) and Tolkien (2001).

The final part, entitled "some (further) considerations", looks back at the issues raised throughout the work, connecting, summarizing, and weaving them together. It also raises points that could be further explored in future works, pointing to the idea that any literary study is ever final, for as long as humanity lasts, stories and the need for them will remain.

2 WHAT'S IN A STORY? CONCEPTS OF WORLD BUILDING AND ROTHFUSS' FICTIONAL UNIVERSE

"I do not wish to evade the world. Yet, I will forever build my own."

(Tuomas Holopainen, *My Walden*)

Literature, similar to other forms of art, is subject to conventions. In other words, when one reads a specific type of text, there are generally several expectations involved. To illustrate such notion, the following example can be used: a literature student has been learning about sonnets, Shakespearean sonnets to be more specific. In this sense, he is already aware of how such texts are structured, he knows that there should be three quatrains followed by a concluding couplet and that the rhyming scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*. More than that, he also expects to find a very specific meter, the iambic pentameter. For the present analysis, such expectations will be referred to as genre conventions: a group of features that a given reader expects to find when they read a given type of text (or enjoy other sorts of artistic expression). However, the Shakespearean sonnet is only one among many varieties of sonnets. In this sense, if the same student, who at present has only learned about Shakespearean sonnets, is given a set of Petrarchan ones to read, he will still find the fourteen lines, but he may be amazed to see a rather distinct structure: an octave following the rhyme scheme *abba abba* and a sestet with either a *cde cde* pattern or, though more rarely, a *cdc cdc* one. The student may be disconcerted for a moment; however, it is probable that after a while he will rejoice with the notion that the Petrarchan sonnet also works well. He realises, then, that even though a given literary (sub) genre is connected to a set of conventions, some of them may be altered at times. It is interesting to think that such expectations are not exclusive to the experienced reader (such as the student above), but also to the common reader; an average person who enjoys reading scientific fiction, for example, may expect to find spaceships, aliens, time and space travel and the like when they start reading a new sci-fi work. They may, naturally, find all of these; on the other hand, it is also possible that they find none of them and still enjoy the work as much as if their expectations were met. In other words, there may be formulas and elements inherent to the different literary (sub) genres; however, these may (and often are) played with, altered, and subverted to fit a writer's purpose, whatever it may be. Talking specifically about fantasy literature, Attebery (2022) proposes the following:

The nature of fantasy literature keeps changing. New voices come into the field, new traditions are drawn upon, innovations from other genres cross over, markets shift, social and philosophical concerns are different. A comprehensive survey from a decade or two ago now feels like a threadbare blanket covering some spots but leaving others exposed. And theories of fantasy developed to fit the eras of George MacDonald and William Morris or, more recently, Diana Wynne Jones and Terry Pratchett must be reformulated to fit Marlon James, Ken Liu, Aliette de Bodard, and Nnedi Okorafor. Yet the newer writers are also responding to their predecessors; there is continuity as well as change. (Attebery, 2022, p. 1).

As the scholar proposes, the literary traditions and formulas are often reinvented. However, there is also continuity, which means that core elements and motifs part of a given literary genre in a given historic period may still be central in works published years, or even centuries, ahead of such period. In this sense, in this chapter it is analysed how Patrick Rothfuss builds the fictional universe he created for his *Kingkiller Chronicle*. The discussions in this part of the work take into consideration what J. R. R. Tolkien proposes about how, on his “On Fairy Stories”, works of fantasy should be structured as well as to what extent Rothfuss draws on such propositions. It is also investigated how and to what purposes the author alters and subverts the Tolkienian formula.

2.1 On Worldbuilding

When Patrick Rothfuss started writing, at the end of the twentieth century, the first installment of his trilogy, one of his aims was to make his fictional universe feel as complex, rich, deep, and “real” as Tolkien’s Middle-earth had felt to him when he read the novels as he was a young boy (Rothfuss, 2017). In this sense, taking into consideration that most of Tolkien’s views on worldbuilding were written down by the author and published in the format of an essay, his “On Fairy Stories”, I deem of considerable pertinence to start the analysis of Rothfuss’ fictional universe by first approaching what the core elements of the Tolkienian formula for fantasy writing are and, then, moving on to investigate to what extent and which of them are present in Rothfuss’ fantasy world. For the purpose of this section, I focus on the concepts of *Faërie*, arresting strangeness and internal consistency of reality.

Starting by what Tolkien calls *Faërie*, it is the realm where fantasy stories take place, the world in which wonderful creatures have their being and where impossible events seem to make sense. This is only a simplified notion, of course. The concept of *Faërie*, as the scholar states, is much more complex than that:

The realm of fairy-story ¹²is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost. (Tolkien, 2001, p. 3)

Faërie is, then, a multi-faceted and manifold realm whose complexity renders it difficult to be described. For the present analysis, however, knowing that it refers to a place other than our factual world should suffice. That said, it is interesting to call attention to the fact that Tolkien's concept of *Faërie* is connected to his concept of secondary world, which is a world apart from what he calls primary world (our factual world). A secondary world is a fictional universe which a writer may create for his fantasy stories¹³ to take place. It should be, Tolkien proposes, a complex and intricate universe which inspires credibility and wonder at the same time, a fictional world "[...] which your mind can enter. Inside it, what [the writer] relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside." (Tolkien, 2001, p.37). It is referred, again, to the complexity of *Faërie*. However, this time it is disclosed that such realm may be tangible through the craft of a skilled writer. In other words, to make a secondary world which feels rich, complex, and deep, thus inspiring belief, its creator (or sub-creator, as Tolkien proposes) should give it what he refers to as internal consistency of reality: a quality of strangeness and wonder that however incredible it may seem, inside the fictional universe, it makes sense.

Such depth deriving from the internal consistency of reality is largely discussed by Ronald Kyrmse (2003) in his work *Explicando Tolkien*. In it the scholar argues that the richness and complexity of Tolkien's fictional universe, which makes it internally consistent, are intrinsically connected to its tridimensionality, which means that his universe has a sense of diversity, profundity, and historical time. Such three-dimensional aspect proposed by Kyrmse is, however, not particular to Tolkien's fantasy world; in fact, several post-Tolkien fantasy writers have achieved such quality in their fictional universes, and Patrick Rothfuss is one of them. However, before I offer further explanation of these concepts and apply them to Rothfuss' secondary-world, I would like to discuss one more aspect at the foundation of Tolkien's views on world-building, namely his concept of arresting strangeness. The writer himself offers little explanation concerning what he means by the term:

¹² By fairy-story Tolkien refers to fantasy stories.

¹³ As it is discussed further in this work, not all fantasy stories take place in a secondary world.

Fantasy, of course, starts out with an advantage: arresting strangeness. But that advantage has been turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute. Many people dislike being “arrested.” They dislike any meddling with the Primary World, or such small glimpses of it as are familiar to them. (Tolkien, 2001, p.48).

As it may be argued from the excerpt above, this arresting strangeness is supposed to be an advantageous aspect inherent to fantasy narratives in comparison to, for example, more realistic fiction. However, the North American scholar Verlyn Flieger discusses such concept in her book *There Would Always be a Fairy-Tale* (2017), in which she defines it as follows:

[...] the element that gives fantasy the advantage over more realistic texts, that at the same time alienates and captures the attention of the reader. [Tolkien] called such an element a “green sun” [...] and applauded its paradoxical ability to build a strange new world that readers could accept on its own terms. (Flieger, 2017, p.127).

According to Flieger, the arresting strangeness of fantasy has to do with its quality of making readers aware that the narrative being read does not take place in the primary world, and at the same time making them feel that such strangeness has such a level of cohesion inside the secondary world that it renders the narrative internally consistent. This said strangeness that should arrest readers is often present on the first lines of fantasy narratives that take place in a secondary world, which can be noticed in the following examples, first from *The Hobbit* and then from *The Name of the Wind*:

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with panelled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats—the hobbit was fond of visitors. (Tolkien, 2007, p. 3).

The word “hobbit” on the first line of the narrative informs readers that the story about to unfold is unlikely to take place in the primary world. It automatically arrests one to a world which is not the factual. After getting the reader’s attention, the narrator goes on and starts giving more details about the fictional universe: it is a secondary world in which creatures named hobbits exist and they live in holes in the ground. It is interesting to notice, however, that while the text evokes the arresting strangeness, it also establishes a connection between the primary and the secondary world: the magical creatures named hobbits live comfortably in houses furnished with several items that may be found in the homes of several people in the factual world. Such narrative devices that separate and, at the same time, approach the

primary and the secondary worlds are, according to Attebery (1992), typical in fantasy narratives and they elucidate a very important aspect of Tolkien's theory on worldbuilding:

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: "inner consistency of reality," it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. (Tolkien, 2001, pp. 70-71).

In this sense, besides its arresting strangeness, the secondary world idealised by Tolkien should also be somehow grounded in the primary world. Having discussed these characteristics and definitions, I would like to discuss an excerpt from the first chapter of *The Name of the Wind* in which they may be observed:

It was Felling night, and the usual crowd had gathered at the Waystone Inn. Five wasn't much of a crowd, but five was as many as the Waystone ever saw these days, times being what they were. Old Cob was filling his role as storyteller and advice dispensary. The men at the bar sipped their drinks and listened. In the back room a young innkeeper stood out of sight behind the door, smiling as he listened to the details of a familiar story. "When he awoke, Taborlin the Great found himself locked in a high tower. They had taken his sword and stripped him of his tools: key, coin, and candle were all gone. But that weren't even the worst of it, you see..." Cob paused for effect, "...cause the lamps on the wall were burning blue! (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 3).

Similarly to what could be observed in the opening of *The Hobbit*, already in the first lines of the first chapter of *The Name of the Wind* there are elements that alienate and capture the attention of the reader. The word "Felling", which readers learn later in the story, refers to one of the eleven days of the week of that fictional world and is likely to cause readers some estrangement. If such word is not enough to trigger the arresting strangeness, the name "Taborlin the Great" is likely to do so. On the other hand, the fact that the scene, set with men drinking and telling stories at an inn, is considerably familiar serves to breach the gap between the fictional world of the story and our factual world. There are, as it will be seen, several other elements in the narrative that evoke the arresting strangeness; however, the example above already serves to demonstrate that Rothfuss' narrative takes place in a secondary world which is able to arrest its readers with its strangeness. In the following paragraphs I demonstrate how the author's fictional universe is also internally consistent.

As mentioned above, Kyrmse (2003) associates the concept of internal consistence of reality with three aspects of Tolkien's fictional universe: its diversity, profundity, and historical time. These three elements, when well explored in a secondary world, are likely to

make it internally consistent, or, to use Kyrmse words, make it feel as if it had three dimensions. For the purpose of this work, the concept of “dimension” will comply with Kyrmse’s definition of the term:

Dimensions [...] must possess both mutual extension and independence. That means: a point has no dimension; that which I refer to as dimension must present several distinct points, being each of them individualized. From each of these points one must be able to move in a different direction, keeping some coordinates while varying others. It is so with the length, the width, and the height, which we intuitively take as the three special coordinates. Each of them may be varied at will. However, once the length (for example) has been determined, we should have the freedom to travel along height and width, potentially reaching every point in the space.¹⁴ (Kyrmse, 2003, p. 24).

Therefore, every dimension in a secondary world should be independent of the others and possess several explorable aspects within it. The dimensions, once defined, should interact with one another, thus providing a sense of depth to the fictional world, giving it its internal consistence of reality. While analysing Tolkien’s Middle-earth, Kyrmse (2003) proposes “diversity”, “profundity”, and (historical) “time” as the dimensions of reference; for this reason, I use these three as parameter to analyse Rothfuss’ secondary world.

Starting by the dimension “diversity”, Temerant has not only a calendar of its own, but also eight different languages, four currencies, different religions, holidays, celebrations, a complex educational system, and several other aspects that make Rothfuss’ secondary world feel as much alive as possible. Besides that, each of these aspects of the “diversity” dimension may be deeply explored, which means that Temerant is not only diverse, but that its diversity has depth to it, there is profundity to each of its aspects. The following excerpt, in which the protagonist of the novel explains the origin of the main currency of that secondary world, is an example of Temerant’s diversity and depth:

“Until this point barter was the most common method of trade. Some larger cities coined their own currency, but outside those cities the money was only worth the weight of the metal. Bars of metal were better for bartering, but full bars of metal were inconvenient to carry.” Ben gave me his best bored-student face. The effect was only slightly inhibited by the fact that he had burned his eyebrows off again about two days ago. “You’re not going to go into the merits of representational

¹⁴ My translation to the original, in Portuguese. *Dimensões [...] têm de possuir extensão e independência mútua. Explicando: um ponto não tem dimensão; Aquilo que chamo de dimensão tem de apresentar muitos pontos distintos, cada um individualizado em si. E de cada um desses pontos deve ser possível mover-se em outra direção, mantendo algumas coordenadas e variando outras. É assim com o comprimento, a largura e a altura que tomamos intuitivamente como as três coordenadas espaciais. Cada uma delas pode ser variada à vontade, mas, uma vez fixado (digamos) o comprimento, temos a liberdade de nos deslocar ao longo da altura e da largura, atingindo potencialmente cada ponto do espaço.*

currency, are you?” I took a deep breath and resolved not to pester Ben so much when he was lecturing me. “The no-longer-nomads, called the CealDIM by now, were the first to establish a standardized currency. By cutting one of these smaller bars into five pieces you get five drabs.” I began to piece two rows of five drabs each together to illustrate my point. They resembled little ingots of metal. “Ten drabs are the same as a copper jot; ten jots—” “Good enough,” Ben broke in, startling me. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 82-83).

As they read Rothfuss’ novels, readers discover, little by little, the wealth of the author’s secondary world. In a sense, the way the elements are presented may make one feel not only that they are reading a fantasy story, but also that, at the same time, they are discovering the history of Temerant. Besides that, like what Tolkien presents in the appendixes of his *The Lord of the Rings*, in the ten-year anniversary edition of *The Name of the Wind* Rothfuss added sections which provide readers with systematized information about Temerant’s calendar, currencies, languages, and also a brief reasoning concerning the *rationale* behind his creative process and a pronunciation guide. The following table, adapted from Rothfuss (2017), helps to illustrate the diversity of Temerant’s currency:

Table 2: Currencies of Temerant pt. 1

Currencies and Equivalences		
Aturan	Cealdish	Commonwealth
3 Rasteurs – 1 Iron Link	11 Shims – 1 Iron Drab	5 Pennies – 1 Copper Penny
3 Iron Links – 1 Soft Penny	10 Iron Drabs – 1 Copper Jots	10 Copper Pennies – 1 Silver Penny
3 Soft Pennies – 1 Hard Penny	10 Copper Jots – 1 Silver Talent	12 Silver Pennies – 1 Common
7 Hard Pennies – 1 Bellum	10 Silver Talents – 1 Gold Mark	-
12 Bellums – 1 Lord Rose	-	-

Adapted from Rothfuss (2017) by the author

Apart from the three currencies above, Temerant has also the Vintish currency, which is presented separately due to its level of detail and for matters of organization:

Table 3: Currencies of Temerant pt. 2

The Vintish Currency	
2 Halfpennies	1 Penny
2 ½ Pennies	1 Bit
2 Bits	1 Quarter Bit
10 Bits	1 Halft
2 Halfts	1 Noble
5 Halfts	1 Reel
5 Reels	1 Five Reel Piece
4 Quarter Bits	1 Round
10 Rounds	1 Royal

Adapted from Rothfuss (2017) by the author

As for the historical time of Rothfuss' secondary world, it may be witnessed, for example, through the history behind the development of the Aturan empire and its calendar. The idea to create an empire to his fictional world was, according to what the author states in the appendix of the ten-year anniversary edition of *The Name of the Wind*, a way to solve a linguistic issue that he found problematic in many of the fantasy works he read, namely the fact that characters inhabiting different regions of a vast continent normally travel around it and are still able to understand each other due to the existence of a common language. The author wanted to resort to this common motif, largely used by prominent fantasy authors (such as Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and George Martin, for example); however, he wanted to make it in a way that it could make sense inside his secondary world, as he explains in the excerpt below:

How could I have a world that fit together sensibly, and still would let a young hero travel without having to stumble through an incomprehensible language, clock, calendar, currency, and set of social conventions every 75 miles? The answer? Empire. When Atur expanded they did so slowly and methodically. They would conquer a small province, and in the middle of each town they'd erect a stone building. Half of that building was a Tehlin Church which contained the Book of the Path. The other half was a courthouse which contained the Book of the Iron Law. (Rothfuss, 2017, p. 708).

With the expansion of the Aturan empire, the cities that fell under its rule had their languages, culture and beliefs increasingly supplanted by those of the empire, as the author explains: “[w]ithin two generations, whatever religion or language the town originally used was generally viewed as embarrassing and backward. Two generations after that? It was rarely remembered at all.” (Rothfuss, 2017, p. 708). Even after the fall of the Aturan empire, which ruled for nearly 400 years, the places that were dominated by it maintained the cultural aspects that were imposed to them. It is important to highlight, however, that the cities that did not fall under the imperial rule possess a culture of their own; in Ademre, for example, which is in the Northeast of Temerant, Ademic and Adem Sign Language are spoken as official languages, while in the Ceald, in the Northwest, Siaru is the mother tongue. Among the languages that were acculturated by the Aturan empire, there is Eld Vintish, which was spoken in Vintas, in the Southeast, and also Yllish, which used to be spoken in Yll, in the Southwest. Apart from these, there are also ancient languages, such as Tema, spoken by the Amyr, an order of Knights of the Aturan empire church, and Temic a form of elder Tema.

Apart from a set of languages and all the other features described above, Rothfuss' secondary world has also a mythology of its own, which is based on the beliefs presented in *The Book of the Path*, which is the crucial religious book of the Tehlin Church. The Tehlin Church was the most important religious institution of the Aturan empire, which means that the beliefs it professed were dominant¹⁵ through all the empire's territories. Interesting insights to Temerant's mythology are presented in chapter twenty-three, "The Burning Wheel", of *The Name of the Wind*, through a story told by Trapis, an elderly man who helps the protagonist during the years he was a homeless child:

It was a bad time in the world. People were hungry and sick. There were famines and great plagues. There were many wars and other bad things in this time, because there was no one to stop them. But the worst thing in this time was that there were demons walking the land. Some of them were small and troublesome, creatures who lamed horses and spoiled milk. But there were many worse than those. There were demons who hid in men's bodies and made them sick or mad, but those were not the worst. There were demons like great beasts that would catch and eat men while they were still alive and screaming, but they were not the worst. Some demons stole the skins of men and wore them like clothes, but even they were not the worst. There was one demon that stood above the others. Encanis, the swallowing darkness. No matter where he walked, shadows hid his face, and scorpions that stung him died of the corruption they had touched. Now Tehlu, who made the world and who is lord over all, watched the world of men. He saw that demons made sport of us and killed us and ate our bodies. Some men he saved, but only a few. For Tehlu is just and saves only the worthy, and in these times few men acted even for their own good, let alone the good of others. Because of this, Tehlu was unhappy. For he had made the world to be a good place for men to live (Rothfuss, 2017, pp. 172-173).

The entire chapter, to which the excerpt above refers, is the story of how Tehlu, the almighty god of that secondary world, defeated the incarnate evil Encanis. According to Trapis' story, one night Tehlu came to the good-hearted and unmarried Perial in a dream and told her he was going to help her do what her heart longed to: aid her neighbours, who had been facing several hardships due to the reign of terror imposed by the demons inhabiting the world. Soon after the dream, the woman discovers she is pregnant and after only three months she gives birth to a boy, who she names Menda. Perial is surprised by the unnaturally fast development of her child; however, she was not worried, "[...] for she knew the child was a gift from God." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 175). Her neighbours, though, become suspicious and, thinking her child might be a demon's child, confront her by gathering in front of her house demanding that she presents her son to them, otherwise they would burn her home. It is Menda, who even though was no more than 3 months old already looked like 17, who presents himself to the crowd and demands that they explain the purpose of their gathering.

¹⁵ The Tehlin Church kept exerting its influence even after the fall of the Aturan empire. At the time the narrative takes place, it still exists and has a considerable number of followers.

The crowd's leader, then, tells him they suspect he is a demon and that they are there to judge him. At this point, Menda reveals his true identity and purpose: "I am not Menda, though that is what my mother called me. I am Tehlu, lord above all. I have come to free you from demons and the wickedness of your own hearts. I am Tehlu, son of myself. Let the wicked hear my voice and tremble." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 176).

Thus, Tehlu starts the purging of the demons by going to every town, asking the citizens to repent for their sins and bidding them to start following his path. However, one demon, Encanis, proves elusive to catch, making Tehlu hunt him for seven days before finally reaching and trapping him. Tehlu, then, offers Encanis mercy if he would only repent for his misdeeds. The demon refuses the offer and is, then, cast into a fiery pit, bound with chains to an iron wheel. In a final, desperate attempt to escape, Encanis breaks his bounds; however, Tehlu surprises him by jumping into the pit to prevent the demon's escape. The account closes dramatically with Tehlu sacrificing himself to free the world from the terror of Encanis:

"To ash all things return, so too this flesh will burn. But I am Tehlu. Son of myself. Father of myself. I was before, and I will be after. If I am a sacrifice then it is to myself alone. And if I am needed and called in the proper ways then I will come again to judge and punish." So Tehlu held him to the burning wheel, and none of the demon's threats or screaming moved him the least part of an inch. So it was that Encanis passed from the world, and with him went Tehlu who was Menda. Both of them burned to ash in the pit in Atur. That is why the Tehlin priests wear robes of ashen grey. And that is how we know Tehlu cares for us, and watches us [...]. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 182-183).

It is interesting to notice that the days of the week in Rothfuss' secondary world bear religious significance. Each week in Temerant is called a "span" and has 11 days. The first seven days are simply cardinal numbers in Temic: Luten, Shuden, Theden, Feochen, Orden, and Hepten. They allude to the seven days Tehlu spent hunting Encanis. The remaining 4 days, on the other hand, refer to separate events regarding Encanis' demise and Tehlu's sacrifice: Felling is the day Tehlu finally captured Encanis; Reaving refers to the day Encanis was chained to the iron wheel; Cendling alludes to the day the fire that would burn the demon was lit; finally, Mourning is the day Tehlins mourn the death of their god. The Aturan calendar has several other specificities; those will, however, not be discussed in this work.

Taking all the examples from Rothfuss' novels above into consideration, it may be argued that the elements analysed so far may be explored to a considerable level of depth, making it a secondary world, to use Tolkien's (2001) words, in which your mind can enter and in which the accounts and rules make sense. In other words, his fictional world possesses not only the arresting strangeness and internal consistence of reality as proposed by Tolkien,

but also the characteristic elements of what Kyrmse (2003) defines as a three-dimensional world. In this sense, the following table offers a summary of some of Temerant's central features fitting into Tolkien's and Kyrmse's theories on worldbuilding:

Table 4: **The three dimensions dialoguing in Rothfuss' narratives**

Diversity	Profundity	Time
Different languages	Aturan Siaru Eld Vintish	Either developed or vanished over time due to imperial rule
Different currencies	Aturan Cealdish Commonwealth	Developed over time according to the necessity of the peoples
Temerant has a calendar of its own	Each year has eight months. Each month is composed of 44 days (4 spans)	Calendar was reformed over time to fit the empire's beliefs

Source: the author

This section discussed, among other things, the similarities between Rothfuss' worldbuilding and what is proposed in the essay "On Fairy Stories". Besides that, the theories of Tolkien (2001) and Kyrmse (2003) were applied to Rothfuss' narratives to verify to what extent the latter complies to the first. Apart from the elements discussed in this section, there are several others that corroborate the idea that Temerant is an internally consistent three-dimensional secondary world. These are, however, addressed in the next sections.

2.2 Theorising Fantasy: some possibilities, their merits, and their limitations

This section approaches Rothfuss' novels through Mendlesohn's (2008) scholarship. The aim is to analyse the literary techniques the novelist applies to construct his narrative and to discuss the limitations of an approach of fantasy based on Mendelsohn's theory. For her theory to work, the scholar argues that a set of issues should be taken into consideration, such as the dialectic between (implied) reader and (implied) author, the way the fantastic enters the narrative, namely how it is presented to the reader, and how the characters (mainly the protagonist) perceive and interact with the fictional world they inhabit or explore. Throughout her analysis, Mendlesohn focuses, mostly, on how fantasy authors present information, how the form of presentation may affect the way the work is read, and how the narrative devices

applied may work as to anticipate readers' expectations and reading strategies. To use the scholar's own words, these are the critical questions used in her analysis:

How do we get [to the fantasy world]? How do we meet the fantastic? In what ways does this meeting affect the narrative and rhetorical choices? How does this affect the choice of language and in what way does the choice of language affect the construction of the fantastic and the position of the reader? What ideological consequences emerge from the rhetorical structures? Perhaps the most crucial question is, Where are we asked to stand in relationship to the fantastic? (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xviii).

As it may be argued from the excerpt above, Mendelsohn's theory focuses mostly on how a given fantasy text tries to convey meaning, rather than on what the text is trying to say. Although a literary analysis focused on form is possible and at times even desirable, as many an enthusiast of stylistics and narratology could claim, I argue that prioritising form over content may lead to a somehow impoverished study of fantasy. To illustrate my claim, I would like to resort to an excerpt from the Tolkienian essay "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics", in which the author discusses the problems of the excessive scrutiny of literature:

A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: 'This tower is most interesting.' But they also said (after pushing it over): 'What a muddle it is in!' And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: 'He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion.' But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea. (Tolkien, 2006, pp.7-8)

In the allegory above, Tolkien claims that some are so immersed in the discussion of the structure and the history at the foundation of the tower that rather than looking at it as what it is, they decide to put it down, completely ignoring the beautiful view at its top. Likewise, an excessive attempt to analyse how fantasy may be built seems to be greatly disregarding some central characteristics of the genre, namely what its use allows us to do and what it does to (and for) us. Thus, the analysis in this section focuses on discussing how Mendlesohn's theory may be applied to Rothfuss' narrative and the implications and limitations of adopting her method.

As mentioned above, Mendlesohn proposes that the fantastic may appear in fictional works in four different ways: it can be part of the world in which it appears (immersive

fantasy), after the protagonist crosses a portal, it can be accessible after the protagonist crosses a portal (portal-quest fantasy), it can invade the world of the protagonist (intrusive fantasy), or it can be implied, but not confirmed (liminal fantasy). The language, tone and reader position in the narrative tend to vary, Mendlesohn argues, according to the way the fantastic element is presented. Therefore, my aim during the rest of this section is to present the characteristics of each of these types of fantasy and then discuss which of them appear in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*.

Starting with the immersive fantasy, it is well represented by works like *The Silmarillion* (J. R. R. Tolkien) and the series *The Witcher* (Andrzej Sapkowski). In this type of fantasy, information is provided assuming that the (implied) reader understands the rules, beliefs, and history of the secondary world as much as its protagonist. Therefore, readers must attempt to grasp the workings of that universe as they progress in the narrative, for explanations, if present, appear normally in the form of dialogues between characters. Taking the following excerpt into consideration, it is noticeable that this type of fantasy resembles, considerably, Tolkien's (2001) propositions concerning internally consistent secondary worlds:

The immersive fantasy is a fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world. In order to do this, the world must act as if it is impervious to external influence; this immunity is most essential in its relationship with the reader. The immersive fantasy must take no quarter: it must assume that the reader is as much a part of the world as are those being read about. It should construct an irony of mimesis in which ornamental speech and persuasive speech¹⁶ become inseparable [...]. (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 59).

Therefore, it may be argued that the immersive fantasy develops in a secondary world which has its own set of rules. The stories, accounts, and events in it accord with its laws, making that universe internally consistent and, thus, believable. Readers should be arrested by its strangeness while they are offered no direct explanation concerning the events they are reading about, because “[i]f a character has to explain to a reader what is happening then the world is not fully real.” (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 62). The reader is positioned “on the protagonist's shoulders”, having access to what they hear and sees; however, the information presented should be often interpreted since it is rarely explained. To illustrate such notion, I chose two excerpts from the first book of the series *The Witcher*. In the first, information is

¹⁶ According to Frye (2000, p. 245), ornamental speech is intrinsically connected to the verbal structure and is dissociated from persuasion. Persuasive speech, on the other hand, is the use of literary art to substantiate the power of argument. The first articulates emotion while the latter manipulates it.

given without explanation, assuming the reader is part of the secondary world; the latter presents information which is explained in the form of dialogue between the characters:

[“] You’ve had a fair amount of experience, I dare presume?” “Yes, your Majesty.” “I would love to hear about it.” Geralt bowed even lower. “Your Majesty, you know our code of practice forbids us to speak of our work.” “A convenient code, witcher, very convenient. But tell me, have you had anything to do with spriggans?” “Yes.” “Vampires, leshys?” “Those too.” Foltest hesitated. “Strigas?” Geralt raised his head, looking the king in the eyes. “Yes.” (Sapkowski, 2008, p. 18).

Above, a set of creatures that inhabit Sapkowski’s fictional world is listed. There is no explanation of what “spriggans”, “leshys”, or “striggas” should be. It is assumed that the reader partakes of the information shared by the inhabitants of that secondary world. Further on in the narrative, however, a description of one of them, the striga, is presented:

“I would like to hear a description of the... the princess.” Velerad leapt up from his chair. “The princess looks like a striga!” he yelled. “Like the most strigish striga I have heard of! Her Royal Highness, the cursed royal bastard, is four cubits high, shaped like a barrel of beer, has a maw which stretches from ear to ear and is full of dagger-like teeth, has red eyes and a red mop of hair! Her paws, with claws like a wild cat’s, hang down to the ground! [...]” (Sapkowski, 2018, p. 20).

Further information about the striga is provided in the story, but always in the form of dialogue, never as direct explanation to the reader. These things considered, I would like to address the remaining three types of fantasy proposed by Mendlesohn, starting by the portal-quest fantasy.

If in the immersive fantasy protagonist and reader are out of tune on what knowledge of the secondary world is concerned, the same is not true about the portal-quest fantasy. In this type of narrative, Mendlesohn (2008) argues, the reader assumes the position of companion-audience, tied to the main character and knowing as much as they do. Given information is rarely taken for granted, for both main character and reader are positioned as naïve. Such positioning is firmly grounded on the way the fantastic comes into the text. Since this type of narrative rely strongly on entry, transition, and exploration, the main characters go from a world in which the fantastic element is unavailable to them or is inexistent, into one in which it is abundant. Central to this type of fiction is the transition between these two worlds, which happens when characters cross a portal. Therefore, main character and reader explore and decode the secondary world together as the narrative progresses, going from unknowledgeable and unable to negotiate with it, to a more comfortable position which allows them to transit in it with ease and confidence. Classic examples of this type of fantasy are *The Chronicle of Narnia: the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (C. S. Lewis), *The Wizard*

of Oz (L. Frank Baum), the *Harry Potter* saga (J. K. Rowling), *The Neverending Story* (Michael Ende) among others.

Interestingly enough, even though readers of portal-quest fantasy seem to have access to more information than the ones of immersive fantasy, the information given is subject to a series of control mechanisms, which means that authors are able to manipulate how the text is read through reader positioning, leaving little (if any) room for interpretations different than the ones desired. As Mendlesohn proposes, such characteristic “[...] serve[s] to structure the ideology of a narrative that is directive and coercive, and that narrows the possibilities for a subversive reading.” (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 3). Since in this type of fantasy the perception and interpretation of events are tied to the ones of the protagonist, it often happens that readers accept the main characters’ beliefs and rationale without much questioning. In this sense, speculation by part of the reader rarely takes place.

The first *Harry Potter* novel provides great insight into the characteristics presented above. Early in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* suspicion concerning the character of Professor Severus Snape is raised. Besides thinking Snape was responsible for most of the bad events in the novel, the protagonist, Harry, firmly believes that it is he who is attempting to steal the Sorcerer’s stone from the castle. At the end of the novel, however, he is taken aback when the truth is finally disclosed:

It was Quirrell. ‘You!’ gasped Harry. Quirrell smiled. His face wasn’t twitching at all. ‘Me,’ he said calmly. ‘I wondered whether I’d be meeting you here, Potter.’ ‘But I thought – Snape –’ ‘Severus?’ Quirrell laughed and it wasn’t his usual quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp. ‘Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn’t he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor ststuttering P-Professor Quirrell?’ Harry couldn’t take it in. This couldn’t be true, it couldn’t. ‘But Snape tried to kill me!’ ‘No, no, no. I tried to kill you. Your friend Miss Granger accidentally knocked me over as she rushed to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She broke my eye contact with you. Another few seconds and I’d have got you off that broom. I’d have managed it before then if Snape hadn’t been muttering a countercurse, trying to save you.’ ‘Snape was trying to save me?’ ‘Of course,’ said Quirrell coolly. ‘Why do you think he wanted to referee your next match? He was trying to make sure I didn’t do it again. Funny, really ... he needn’t have bothered. I couldn’t do anything with Dumbledore watching. All the other teachers thought Snape was trying to stop Gryffindor winning, he did make himself unpopular ... and what a waste of time, when after all that, I’m going to kill you tonight.’ (Rowling, 2013, pp. 288-289)

At this point in the narrative, it is likely that the (implied) reader feel as surprised as the protagonist, which is due to the way the narrative is constructed. The image the reader and the main character have of Professor Snape is highly influenced by that of other characters in Rowling’s fictional universe. Harry, who knows very little about the wizarding world, often believes the information its inhabitants give him. It is important to highlight, however, that in

portal-quest fantasies most relevant information concerning the fantasy world the protagonists cross into is brought to them by characters that already know how it works (they are often part of that universe). Besides that, they frequently assume the function of guide¹⁷ to the protagonists, explaining to them how that world works, solving their doubts until the moment they know enough to be able to negotiate with that universe. Since the protagonists tend to fully trust their guides, it is common to see the first believe the latter unquestioningly, even to the point of making the guides' biases and prejudices their own, which is what can be noticed in the first *Harry Potter* novel, in which Harry assumes a prejudicious posture towards Snape before even getting to know him personally¹⁸.

If in the portal-quest fantasy it is the protagonist who crosses to the secondary-world, in the intrusion fantasy the opposite happens: it is the fantastic element that steps into the main characters' universe. As Mendlesohn (2008) proposes, the intruding element tends to disrupt the said "normality" of the primary world and must be either dealt with, defeated, sent back to its place of origin, or controlled. Among the works that present such characteristics figure Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and C. S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*. Different from the portal-quest fantasy movement (entry – transition – exploration), the trajectory of the intrusion fantasy goes from denial of the disruption of normality to its acceptance, which often results in the protagonist attempting to defeat the disruption to restore the typical *modus operandi* of their universe. The construction of this type of fantasy "[...] appears to depend both on the naïveté of the protagonist and her awareness of the permeability of the world—a distrust of what is known in favor of what is sensed. This lack of trust sets up an interesting dynamic around the issue of what is known." (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 116).

To set the mechanism of the intrusion fantasy into motion, it is vital that the writer construct a consensual notion of what is real, so that both the protagonist and the implied reader share the feeling of surprise and disbelief when the fantastic element arises. Considering that belief is easier to construct the more similar the fictional world is to the primary one, the fact that several intrusion fantasies tend to take place in the actual world is understandable. Such feature is evident in the novel *Neverwhere* (1996), which takes place in London, during the last decade of the twentieth century. After a brief prologue, the first chapter of the narrative offers insight into the protagonist's views of the city he had been living for the last three years:

¹⁷ The first, and perhaps the most important, guide to Harry in Rowling's novels is Rubeus Hagrid. Other important guides include Ron Weasley as well as his brothers Fred and George.

¹⁸ For further insight into this matter, refer to Rocha (2021).

Three years in London had not changed Richard, although it had changed the way he perceived the city. Richard had originally imagined London as a gray city, even a black city, from pictures he had seen, and he was surprised to find it filled with color. It was a city of red brick and white stone, red buses and large black taxis, bright red mailboxes and green grassy parks and cemeteries. It was a city in which the very old and the awkwardly new jostled each other, not uncomfortably, but without respect; a city of shops and offices and restaurants and homes, of parks and churches, of ignored monuments and remarkably unpalatial palaces; a city of hundreds of districts with strange names—Crouch End, Chalk Farm, Earl's Court, Marble Arch—and oddly distinct identities; a noisy, dirty, cheerful, troubled city, which fed on tourists, needed them as it despised them, in which the average speed of transportation through the city had not increased in three hundred years, following five hundred years of fitful road-widening and unskillful compromises between the needs of traffic, whether horse-drawn, or, more recently, motorized, and the needs of pedestrians; a city inhabited by and teeming with people of every color and manner and kind. (Gaiman, 2001, p.8).

Considering the excerpt above, it may be argued that the abundant and detailed descriptions of London seem to be an attempt to highlight the mundane aspect of the city. Based on such descriptions, the implied reader may easily identify with it; the connections between the reader's actual world and the narrated world are surely made, constructing a consensus reality with a well-established notion of normality. As it is typical of intrusion fantasies, such notion is soon disrupted. Still in the first chapter, the protagonist helps an injured young girl that he encounters in the street. At this point, he does not know that the girl comes from a different world. When he finds out, however, it is already too late, for his mere interaction with the girl was enough to make his life change drastically. At first, the protagonist refuses to accept the changes (denial), but then he decides he must do something to change the course of things (acceptance) and, due to his actions, at the end of the narrative he manages to regain his normal life (restoration).

Finally, there is the liminal fantasy, which is, according to Mendlesohn, the most uncommon one among the four types she proposes. Central to its style is how the fantastic element is perceived by both implied reader and the main characters. Like what happens in the immersive fantasy, the protagonist demonstrates no surprise towards the fantastic. It is important to highlight, however, that since this fantasy (like it often happens in the intrusion fantasy) tends to take place in the actual world, the fact that the main character sees the fantastic with naturality often raises estrangement in the implied reader. As Mendlesohn states:

In the liminal fantasy we are given to understand, through cues to the familiar, that this is our world. When the fantastic appears, it should be intrusive, disruptive of expectation; instead, while the events themselves might be noteworthy and/or disruptive, their magical origins barely raise an eyebrow. We are disoriented. The enclosed nature of the immersive fantasy is absent: the hints and cues are missing.

Yet, as in immersive fantasy, the protagonist demonstrates no surprise. It is the reaction to the fantastic that shapes this category, as well as the context of the fantasy. (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xxiii)

Therefore, it may be argued that the liminal fantasy mixes elements of both the immersive fantasy (concerning how the fantastic is perceived by the implied reader and the main character) and the intrusion fantasy (concerning where the story is set and how the fantastic comes into the narrative). In this sense, a literary work that seems to fit well into what this type of fantasy proposes is Neil Gaiman's novella, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. In it, the normal and peaceful life of the protagonist is disrupted by a series of sudden and fantastic events. The main character, a 7-year-old boy, however, does not seem to be impressed by the nature of the events; at most, he feels distressed by what they cause, which means that what bothers him (if it bothers him) is not the source, but the consequences they bring. The following excerpt shows how the protagonist reacts to the first time the fantastic arises in the text: "I wondered why they were all called Hempstock, those women, but I did not ask, any more than I dared to ask how they knew about the suicide note or what the opal miner had thought as he died. They were perfectly matter-of-fact about it." (Gaiman, 2019, p. 37). These women, the Hempstocks, seem to possess some sort of omniscience, being aware of events without having actually witnessed them. The youngster, however, is not unnerved by their supernatural skills; the women's posture makes the boy take the fantastic for granted. A series of further fantastic events take place in the narrative, but they are rarely seen with disbelief; they may, however, instil fear on the protagonist, but that has to do more with the fact that he is a child than with the nature of the events itself.

Another central characteristic of the liminal fantasy is its quality of allowing different readings. Different from the portal-quest fantasy, which works as to limit interpretations different from the ones it points the implied readers to, the liminal fantasy seems to invite them to consider the different interpretative paths it offers, for this type of fantasy does not provide a final answer. In this sense, as Rocha (2019a) proposes, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* may be interpreted in at least two ways: as a fantasy text *per se*, or as the story of a very imaginative youngster who resorts to fantastic explanations to try to go through a difficult childhood.

Having discussed the central characteristics of the fantasy types proposed by Mendlesohn (2008), it is also important to highlight that a single text may possess elements of more than one type of fantasy. A portal-quest fantasy, or even an immersive fantasy for example, may host an intrusion, as it is the case of both *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's*

Stone and *The Magician's Nephew* (portal-quest fantasies hosting intrusive elements) and *The Witcher* (an immersive fantasy which also presents aspects of the intrusive fantasy). Finally, taking into consideration the characteristics of each type of fantasy Mendlesohn discusses, the following chart may be proposed:

Table 5: Core elements of Mendlesohn's categories

Element/Type of fantasy	Immersive	Portal-Quest	Intrusive	Liminal
Takes place in a secondary world	x			
Takes place mostly in the primary world			x	x
Characters transit between worlds		x		
Fantastic element is presented without comment	x			x
Relies heavily on explanation		x	x	
Reader knows as much as the protagonist		x	x	x
Protagonist knows more than the reader	x			
Protagonist and readers react to the fantastic differently	x			x
Limits interpretation		x		
Allows different readings				x

Source: the author

After these theoretical considerations, the source text can be properly addressed. The first topic I would like to approach is that of how both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* are narrated. First and foremost, it is important to highlight that there are two main narrators in the novel and their narrations do not overlap one another; when one takes over, the other fades into the background. The first is a third-person omniscient narrator, who reports the events of the story of the protagonist's present life, the frame narrative. In comparison to the other narrator, its voice is active during considerably short periods in the

story, appearing only when the events are taking place in the Waystone Inn or its surroundings. Its narration assumes that the implied reader is part of that fictional world and understands how it works, thus offering no direct explanation of its cultural, historical, or geographical aspects, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Looking into the fire, Kote tried to assume a stern face and failed. [...] There was a moment of silence. “Carter was attacked by a scraeling tonight.” Bast’s easy smile fell away like a cracked mask, leaving his face stricken and pale. “The scrael?” He came halfway to his feet as if he would bolt from the room, then gave an embarrassed frown and forced himself back down into his chair. “How do you know? Who found his body?” “He’s still alive, Bast. He brought it back. There was only one.” “There’s no such thing as one scraeling,” Bast said flatly. “You know that.” “I know,” Kote said. “The fact remains there was only one.” “And he killed it?” Bast said. “It couldn’t have been a scraeling. Maybe—” “Bast, it was one of the scrael. I saw it.” Kote gave him a serious look. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 13).

As it can be seen, the narrator assumes that readers are acquainted with scraelings, dangerous, fierce spider-like creatures that inhabit Rothfuss’ secondary world. While the implied reader has no clue about the spidery creatures, to the protagonist and Bast, his apprentice, they seem to be well known, so much so that they engage in an extensive conversation concerning the improbability of one of the villagers being attacked by a scrael and surviving the encounter.

As for the other narrator, it only comes to the foreground in chapter seven, “Of Beginning and the Names of Things”, when the framed narrative starts to be told. It is the protagonist of the story, Kvothe, himself. His narration concerns, mostly, events of the past, the story of how he came to be who he presently is. His tale begins to be told after the famous scribe Devan Lochees, mainly known as Chronicler, accidentally finds the whereabouts of the protagonist, who had been hiding in a secluded town called Newarre. The reasons the protagonist decided to live in such an isolated place are only hinted at: the protagonist is said to have killed someone important. Chronicler, however, is interested in hearing (and writing) Kvothe’s own account of the events. Therefore, he convinces the reluctant protagonist to tell him his life story. It is important to highlight that like the account in the frame narrative, Kvothe’s story also assumes that the implied reader partakes of the knowledge of that universe. This characteristic, however, is intrinsically connected to the fact that the protagonist is telling his story directly to a person that is part of that universe. Therefore, the narrative often assumes a conversational tone and descriptions appear much more frequently than explanations:

If this story is to be something resembling my book of deeds, we must begin at the beginning. At the heart of who I truly am. To do this, you must remember that

before I was anything else, I was one of the Edema Ruh. Contrary to popular belief, not all traveling performers are of the Ruh. My troupe was not some poor batch of mummers, japing at crossroads for pennies, singing for our suppers. We were court performers, Lord Greyfallow's Men. [...] My father was a better actor and musician than any you have ever seen. My mother had a natural gift for words. They were both beautiful, with dark hair and easy laughter. They were Ruh down to their bones, and that, really, is all that needs to be said. Save perhaps that my mother was a noble before she was a trouper. She told me my father had lured her away from "a miserable dreary hell" with sweet music and sweeter words. I could only assume she meant Three Crossings, where we went to visit relatives when I was very young. Once. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 59).

It is worth noting that the way the author decided to frame his narrative, using the story within a story technique, allows the first-person narrator, the protagonist, to tell his story as if he was talking directly to the reader, constantly resorting to the pronoun "you". This feature seems to be an attempt to pull the readers into the secondary world, making the story being told more vivid and closer to them. Besides that, this technique also allows the author to convey information about his fictional universe to the reader without making the descriptive tone of the narrative feel leaden, pedantic, or unnatural. It may feel as if one is experiencing the secondary world smoothly, because even though both narrators possess much more knowledge of that universe than readers, the way information is conveyed seems to breach the gap.

Considering the arguments presented thus far, it may be anticipated that both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* possess the characteristics of what Mendlesohn (2008) refers to as immersive fantasy: the characters (and narrators) possess more information about the secondary world than the implied reader; characters are integrated with that universe while readers are not; readers are positioned on the protagonist's shoulders; and, more importantly, the story takes place in a universe that is internally consistent. It is true that in the immersive fantasy the fantastic is presented without comment, which in the novels being discussed happens mainly during the moments the third-person narrator comes to fore; however, as argued above, the descriptive tone the narrative assumes during Kvothe's narration is connected to the way the narrative is framed, which, I believe, does not estrange the works from the tone of the immersive fantasy, but rather reinforces its sense of depth and cohesiveness. The following excerpt, in which the protagonist offers Chronicler, the scribe, the account of the day he was asked by one of the professors at the university to conduct a lecture on the laws of sympathy, offers insight into my argument:

"The concepts of sympathy are not entirely easy to grasp. But underneath everything there remain three simple laws." "First is the Doctrine of Correspondence which says, 'similarity enhances sympathy.' Second is the Principle of Consanguinity, which says, 'a piece of a thing can represent the whole of a thing.' Third is the Law

of Conservation, which says ‘energy cannot be destroyed nor created.’ Correspondence, Consanguinity, and Conservation. The three C’s.” I paused and listened to the sound of a half hundred pens scratching down my words. Beside me, Basil pumped industriously at the bellows. I realized I could grow to enjoy this. “Don’t worry if it doesn’t make sense yet. The demonstration should make everything abundantly clear.” Looking down, I saw the brazier was warming nicely. I thanked Basil and hung a shallow metal pan above the coals and dropped two of the candles in to melt. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 281-282).

As it can be seen, due to the way the narrative is framed, readers learn about one of the key elements of Rothfuss’ secondary world, the concept of how sympathy works, not in a dull and explanatory fashion, but rather through an amusing account of a significant event in the protagonist’s life. At the same time, the feeling that that fictional universe has cohesiveness is aroused: it is not simply a world in which there is a science called sympathy, but a world in which that science makes sense.

Taking into consideration that the aim of this chapter is to trace points of convergence and divergence between Rothfuss’ novels and Tolkien’s (2001) propositions concerning world-building, I will now briefly address the traits of Mendelsohn’s theory present in *The Lord of the Rings*. First and foremost, it is important to highlight that before *The Lord of the Rings* was published, the universe in which it takes place had already been idealized in *The Silmarillion*¹⁹ and presented to readers in *The Hobbit*. Therefore, considering that the implied reader would, ideally, have read at least *The Hobbit* before reading *The Lord of the Rings*, they would be somehow familiar to that secondary world and its rules. Therefore, it is unlikely that they would be surprised when they read the first lines of the prologue:

This book is largely concerned with Hobbits, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history. Further information will also be found in the selection from the Red Book of Westmarch that has already been published, under the title of *The Hobbit*. That story was derived from the earlier chapters of the Red Book, composed by Bilbo himself, the first Hobbit to become famous in the world at large, and called by him *There and Back Again*, since they told of his journey into the East and his return: an adventure which later involved all the Hobbits in the great events of that Age that are here related. (Tolkien, 2007, p. 1).

The word “Hobbits” and the name “Bilbo” probably do not arouse the feeling of estrangement that the phrase “It was Felling night [...]” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 3) do in the person reading *The Name of the Wind* for the first time. Interestingly enough, even if the implied readers had not read *The Hobbit*, the feeling of estrangement would quickly fade away, for soon after the aforementioned excerpt from *The Lord of the Rings*, the narrator seems to want to make sure that one is acquainted with the basics about these creatures he

¹⁹ Even though the work was only published posthumously, in 1977, several sources confirm that the author had been working on it as early as 1925.

calls Hobbits, thus offering extensive information about them: “[m]any, however, may wish to know more about this remarkable people from the outset, while some may not possess the earlier book. For such readers a few notes on the more important points are here collected from Hobbit-lore, and the first adventure is briefly recalled.” (Tolkien, 2007, p. 1). After that, twenty more pages about Hobbit lore are offered. Thus, when the first chapter is reached, the implied reader is probably not in such a disadvantage point as they would be if they were reading a typical immersive fantasy. This is not to say, however, that moments in which the implied reader might feel at a loss due to the lack of explanation are not present in the narrative; these tend to take place, mostly, when the hobbits are outside their homeland, the Shire.

The first chapters in *The Lord of the Rings* work as to make the point clear that hobbits know very little about the world beyond the borders of the Shire, as if to give readers the impression that the world outside it is a completely different universe, as if there was a secondary world within another one. So much so that the passage which describes the exact moment the hobbits leave their homeland is marked by an eerie and foreboding tone:

It was dark and damp. At the far end it was closed by a gate of thick-set iron bars. Merry got down and unlocked the gate, and when they had all passed through he pushed it to again. It shut with a clang, and the lock clicked. The sound was ominous. ‘There!’ said Merry. ‘You have left the Shire, and are now outside, and on the edge of the Old Forest.’ ‘Are the stories about it true?’ asked Pippin. ‘I don’t know what stories you mean,’ Merry answered. ‘If you mean the old bogey-stories Fatty’s nurses used to tell him, about goblins and wolves and things of that sort, I should say no. At any rate I don’t believe them. But the Forest is queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire. And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you. They are usually content merely to watch you, as long as daylight lasts, and don’t do much. Occasionally the most unfriendly ones may drop a branch, or stick a root out, or grasp at you with a long trailer. But at night things can be most alarming, or so I am told. (Tolkien, 2007, p. 144).

From that moment in the narrative on, the feeling of familiarity is replaced by that of estrangement and wonder. Interestingly enough, those feelings are not restricted to the implied reader, but shared with the protagonists. As the hobbits walk into unknown territory, both them and the reader assume the position of strangers in a strange land, exploring and decoding that secondary world as they travel further into it. Such feature, as it was argued above, is typical of portal-quest fantasies, in which the protagonists transit into an unknown world and share their feeling of amazement towards the fantastic with the implied reader. This is not to say, however, that *The Lord of the Rings* possesses only the characteristics of the portal-quest fantasy (just as *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* are not tied to the immersive fantasy), but rather that such traits are predominant in the work.

Based on the considerations an analysis conducted thus far, it is possible to argue that Rothfuss achieves his aim of producing a secondary world that has a sense of depth and is internally consistent. His desire, he argued, was to produce a fictional universe that felt as real as Middle Earth had felt to him as he first read it. However, even though the author manages to build a world that feels true, the main resemblance between Temerant and Middle Earth is the fact that both are three dimensional universes. Apart from that, they are built distinctively in several aspects: how information is presented, the way the main characters perceive and react to the fantastic, how the narrative is framed, and the way readers are positioned. If Attebery's (1992) proposition that fantasy as a genre may be seen as a fuzzy set is taken into consideration, both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* would probably be placed far from its centre. As it was mentioned in the introduction of this work, Attebery argues that if one uses the theory of fuzzy sets to categorize fantasy works, its centre would be *The Lord of the Rings*, which means that the more elements a literary work has in common with Tolkien's novel, the more it would feel like a fantasy text. In other words, "[...] the works we recognize as fantasy tend to resemble *The Lord of the Rings* in three fundamental ways. One of these has to do with content, another with structure, and the third with reader response." (Attebery, 1992, p.15). Rothfuss' novels resemble *The Lord of the Rings* in only one of these matters, *videlicet* the content.

According to Attebery (1992), at the core of the content of fantasy texts, there should be some type of sharp break with reality. Different scholars refer to this break differently: Kathryn Hume (1984), calls it a departure from consensus reality, while Colin Manlin (1983) refers to the presence of a supernatural element. Tolkien (2001), as it was already argued, calls it arresting strangeness. Such quality is present and well developed, as discussed above, in Rothfuss' novels and it is intrinsically connected to the way the author builds his secondary world and frames his narratives. As for the second and third element Attebery proposes should be present in texts that resemble fantasy, one is absent while the other is only partly present in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*.

Attebery's argument concerning the structure of fantasy texts is based on Vladimir Propp's (1968) morphology, which the American scholar argues is at the core of *The Lord of the Rings*: "[t]he structure of *The Lord of the Rings* is that of the traditional fairy tale [...]: a round-trip journey to the marvelous, complete with testing of the hero, crossing of a threshold, supernatural assistance, confrontation, flight, and establishment of a new order at home." (Attebery, 1992, p. 15). Such traditional structure is both denied and somehow made fun of in *The Name of the Wind*, as it may be argued from what happens in chapter 46, "The

ever-changing wind”, in which Kvothe attempts to convince Master Elodin, one of the professors at the University, to accept him as his pupil and teach him the legendary art of Naming. Even though Elodin attempts to dissuade the protagonist in different ways, Kvothe refuses to give up, thinking the professor is testing him, as if in a trial, to see whether the “young hero” is worth the “magical training”, as it often happens in what Propp (1968) calls the traditional fairy tale. The following excerpt corroborates this argument:

[...] part of me suspected that this might be a test of some sort. Perhaps Elodin was simply making sure that I was genuinely interested before he accepted me as a student. That is the way it usually goes in stories: the young man has to prove his dedication to the old hermit in the woods before he’s taken under his wing. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 335).

With that in mind, the main character keeps following Master Elodin, hoping that if he perseveres, he will pass the test he believes he is being subjected to. The chapter culminates with Kvothe jumping from a roof, a task he reckons is the ultimate part of Elodin’s trial:

I went to stand beside him on the edge of the roof. I knew what my third question had to be. “What do I have to do,” I asked, “to study naming under you?” He met my eye calmly, appraising me. “Jump,” he said. “Jump off this roof.” That’s when I realized that all of this had been a test. Elodin had been taking my measure ever since we met. He had a grudging respect for my tenacity, and he had been surprised that I noticed something odd about the air in his room. He was on the verge of accepting me as a student. But he needed more, proof of my dedication. A demonstration. A leap of faith. And as I stood there, a piece of story came to mind. So Taborlin fell, but he did not despair. For he knew the name of the wind, and so the wind obeyed him. It cradled and caressed him. It bore him to the ground as gently as a puff of thistledown. It set him on his feet softly as a mother’s kiss. Elodin knew the name of the wind. Still looking him in the eye, I stepped off the edge of the roof. Elodin’s expression was marvelous. I have never seen a man so astonished. I spun slightly as I fell, so he stayed in my line of vision. I saw him raise one hand slightly, as if making a belated attempt to grab hold of me. I felt weightless, like I was floating. Then I struck the ground. Not gently, like a feather settling down. Hard. Like a brick hitting a cobblestone street. I landed on my back with my left arm beneath me. My vision went dark as the back of my head struck the ground and all the air was driven from my body. I didn’t lose consciousness. I just lay there, breathless and unable to move. I remember thinking, quite earnestly, that I was dead. That I was blind. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 344).

The chapter closes with Elodin congratulating him by saying that that had been the stupidest thing he had ever seen, and Kvothe finally giving up, even if momentarily, wanting to study the art of naming. Therefore, considering the excerpts above, it seems clear that Rothfuss’ and Tolkien’s novels differ considerably regarding what Attebery (1992) considers the typical structure of fantasy texts.

The third feature chosen by Attebery (1992) as central in *The Lord of the Rings*, reader response, is intrinsically connected with what Tolkien (2001) claims to be the social function of fantasy. For Tolkien, it is fundamental that fantasy texts should provide readers with three

specific things, namely recovery, escape, and consolation. The first, as argued below, is present in Rothfuss' novels; the other two, however, are only partly there. Recovery has to do with the characteristic that, ideally, fantasy narratives have of taking elements from the primary world and presenting them in the secondary world in a different fashion, so that when the implied reader witness them in a new way, their vividness in the factual world is restored. Recovery works as to help readers regain a clear view of what was already there, in front of them, but seemed to have been forgotten, overlooked, or seen with disregard. To use the scholar own words, recovery

[...] (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves. We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness. (Tolkien, 2001, pp. 57-58).

One way to illustrate how recovery arises in Rothfuss' novels is addressing how Temerant's educational system is structured. As early as the first half of *The Name of the Wind* the implied reader learns that one of Kvothe's greatest wishes and ambitions is to study at the University. As he goes through the admission exam successfully, it is learned that as a member of that institution he will have to comply with a series of financial and academic responsibilities: there will be a tuition fee to be paid each term, a range of classes to attend, not to mention costs with accommodation and other basic needs to be covered. Even though the subjects taken and the way the term and syllabus are structured differ considerably from what is typically seen in the primary world, it is very likely that the connection between the educational system in the narrative and that in the factual world is made. In this sense, it is probable that readers who have faced some sort of struggle with the costs deriving from educational demands will identify with the following excerpt:

After the Chancellor managed to regain control of things, I was called forward and given my receipt. “E'lir Kvothe. Fall term. Tuition: 3 Tin. 9 Jt. 7 Fe.” Eight jots more than I had. As I walked out of the Masters' Hall, I ignored the sinking feeling in my gut and tried to think of a way I could lay hands on more money by tomorrow noon. I made a brief stop at the two Cealdish moneychangers on this side of the river. As I suspected, they wouldn't lend me a thin shim. While I wasn't surprised, the experience was sobering, reminding me again of how different I was from the other students. They had families paying their tuition, granting them allowances to cover their living expenses. They had reputable names they could borrow against in a pinch. They had possessions they could pawn or sell. If worse came to worst, they had homes to return to. I had none of these things. If I couldn't come up with eight more jots for tuition, I had nowhere in the world I could go. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 353-354).

It is important to highlight that even though the implied reader had not experienced a similar situation, the recovery should still have its effect, though differently: instead of identification, there may be regaining of awareness that a considerable number of people (locally and around the world) face that specific situation. Such regaining of awareness may lead, then, to compassion, sympathy and, ideally, to solidarity. Either way, the recovery proposed by Tolkien (2001) seems to work as to help implied readers regain a sense of collectiveness.²⁰

Finally, it is worth noting that Attebery's claims, above, were written down in 1992, still in the previous century. In this sense, they may encompass a considerable number of fantasy works published prior to the publication of his scholarly work. On the other hand, given the ever-changing nature of literature, it is natural that his propositions will not always (if at all) fit literary productions closer to the present time. *The Name of the Wind*, for example, was published in 2007, almost two decades after *Strategies of Fantasy* was first printed. Therefore, a text failing fitting Attebery's theory does not render it the status of "less" fantasy, but rather that it is a fantasy of a different kind, with characteristics that often match the time it was written and often approaching issues inherent to it. In this sense, in the following paragraphs I would like to discuss the limitations in the ways of looking at fantasy proposed by Attebery (1992) and Mendlesohn (2008).

The first issue arising from the two theories discussed in this section is that, to a lesser or greater extent, they attempt to define fantasy, something that many have tried and possibly none have fully succeeded. The problem with such attempt, as the celebrated playwright Oscar Wilde has hinted at in his *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is that "[t]o define is to limit." (Wilde, 2001, p. 187). Attebery (1992) claims that a text is either "more" or "less" fantasy according to a set of parameters of his own invention. If his theory is taken as a tool to analyse works such as *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, *The Poppy War* (R. F. Kuang, 2018), *The Bear and the Nightingale* (Katherine Arden, 2017), *Shadow and Bone* (Leigh Bardugo, 2012), and several other works of (contemporary) fantasy, many of them would be described as "less" fantasy or "no fantasy at all", mainly if compared to the role model of his theory, *The Lord of the Rings*. Three decades after the publication of his *Strategies of Fantasy*, however, Attebery seems to have realised the problems with his past claims, so much so that in his *Fantasy: How it Works* he proposes that any theory or survey formulated at a specific time to discuss the genre will probably have a series of limitations if

²⁰ A further way in which recovery arises in Rothfuss' narratives is discussed in the next chapter of this work.

used to approach works published a decade or two after their introduction. Such problem arises, the scholar claims, due to the ever-changing nature of fantasy.

As for Mendlesohn's theory (2008), she assures her readers that her intention is not to "[...] argue that there is only one possible taxonomic understanding of the genre [and that] the purpose of the book is not to offer a classification per se but to consider the genre in ways that open up new questions." (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xv). However, her claims are subject to the same limitations than Attebery's: to a lesser or greater extent, her scholarship tries to see fantasy as susceptible to fitting in different spectrums depending on how the text is built, on what characteristics it presents. In addition to that, the very name she chooses for her theory arguably presents some issues. Mendlesohn proposes that hers is a rhetorical analysis, probably using as a basis the definition of the term as an approach to writing as a means of persuasion. Although I understand what her attempt is, I argue that what she does in her book, with long debates concerning reader positioning and how the fantastic element is perceived, fits more in the fields of narratology and/or stylistics. Curiously enough, the scholar herself seems to realise that, so much so that in the introduction of her book she admits that when she began writing her theory, she believed "[...] the issue to be taxonomy. Halfway through, [she] was convinced that [she] was working within narratology. Later, rhetoric became my principal concern. In the concluding stages [she] realized [she] was working within what is described as poetics." (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. xvi). Therefore, as it may be argued, the scholar was not certain about what the (main) science and principles behind her theory were. Any of the theories she mentions above would fit her purpose better. Unfortunately, she opted for naming her book after the seemingly less appropriate one.

Finally, the greatest limitation concerning Mendlesohn's and Attebery's theory, as I hinted above, is that both scholars seem to put a great emphasis on defining fantasy and on how it works. Considering that the genre is frequently being adapted to fit the demands of the time and place the works are being written from and that such adaptability is often accompanied by change, attempts to encapsulate the genre tend to face a series of challenges. The problem with categorization is that there will often be works that will not fit the proposed rules, the called exceptions or, to use Mendlesohn's (2008) term, the irregulars that subvert the alleged characteristics of the genre. Such irregulars, as it happens in Attebery's (1992) theory, are put at the margins of the genre, and are labelled as "less fantasy", a title that may possibly be seen as depreciative. A possible solution, I argue, is to approach fantasy focusing on what a given text is doing, what fantasy is being used for, an approach similar to the one Joseph Campbell (1991) proposes for the study of mythology (for fantasy is akin to myth) in

his *The Masks of God: creative mythology*, focusing on the (social) functions of fantasy. Such a change in perspective, rather than limiting the genre, emphasizes what fantasy can do, highlighting its multifold social functions and possibilities. An approach based primarily on what a text can do rather than on how it does it seems to be more beneficial to the study of fantasy, for it puts the meaning being conveyed in the foreground, rather than how the text is built. Thus, it offers insight into the richness of the genre without necessarily imposing to it the restraints of definition and classification.

The arguments above considered, the next section and chapter of this work discuss *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* focusing on further deviations in the pattern proposed by Tolkien, Attebery, and Mendlsohn. In addition, the remainder of this work discusses possible reasons for the breaking with the pattern, and also addresses what issues of his time Rothfuss is approaching in his narratives.

2.3 *Faërie* explained: the reshaping of magic in Rothfuss' narratives

In this section I address the concepts of magic and *faërie* as they are presented in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*. The guiding argument is Tolkien's (2001) proposition concerning the tone of fantasy narratives, in which he claims that "if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away." (Tolkien, 2001, p. 11). As the scholar explains further on his essay, by magic he refers to enchantment, the ideal quality that fantasy narratives have of producing a sense of wonder, the arresting strangeness that sweeps readers into the secondary world. In Rothfuss' narratives, such claims are often contradicted: the presence of magic is often accompanied by scientific explanations, while the presence of *faërie* and *faërian* elements are either denied or regarded as folklore.

In Rothfuss' fictional universe, magic refers to a set of disciplines taught to the students at the University. Such disciplines, regarded as arcanist's arts, are divided in four areas: sympathy, which is the use of belief and strength of will to manipulate energy; sygaldry, which is the use of runes and metalwork to channel and manipulate energy, it is sympathy made solid; alchemy, which is the art of mixing principles to concoct potions to achieve a specific result; and naming, which is gaining profound knowledge of a specific thing so that one finds its "true" name, by which one obtains a certain sort of power upon it. Magic in Temerant is somehow elitist, for its knowledge is reserved only for the ones who

can afford to pay to learn it at the University. In this sense, it is similar to what students learn at Hogwarts, in the *Harry Potter* series, with the only difference that in Rothfuss' narratives anyone that possesses the financial means may learn it. It is important to mention that even though people outside the University benefit from the arcanist's arts, they often regard magic with suspicion, as some sort of evil witchcraft, so much so that there was a time in Temerant's history that it was common to burn arcanists alive.

Considering the arguments above, it may be said that the magic studied at the University is a type of science and, as such, not only does it have a set of rules inherent to it, but also that its proper application produces social well-being. The following excerpt, in which Kvothe fixes the iceless²¹ at Anker's inn, elucidates how the magic learned at the University has a scientific basis and may be used as to make daily life more practical:

I made my way around the corner of the bar and knelt to look at the iceless. It was a stone-lined box the size of a small traveling trunk. Anywhere other than the University it would have been a miracle of artificing, a luxury. Here, where such things were easy to come by, it was just another piece of needless God-bothering that wasn't working properly. It was about as simple a piece of artificing as could be made. No moving parts at all, just two flat bands of tin covered in sygaldry that moved heat from one end of the metal band to the other. It was really nothing more than a slow, inefficient heat siphon. I crouched down and rested my fingers on the tin bands. The right-hand one was warm, meaning the half on the inside would be correspondingly cool. But the one on the left was room temperature. I craned my neck to get a look at the sygaldry and spotted a deep scratch in the tin, scoring through two of the runes. That explained it. A piece of sygaldry is like a sentence in a lot of ways. If you remove a couple words, it simply doesn't make any sense. I should say it usually doesn't make sense. Sometimes a damaged piece of sygaldry can do something truly unpleasant. I frowned down at the band of tin. This was sloppy artificing. The runes should have been on the inside of the band where they couldn't be damaged. I rummaged around until I found a disused ice hammer in the back of a drawer, then carefully tapped the two damaged runes flat into the soft surface of the tin. Then I concentrated and used the tip of a paring knife to etch them back into the thick metal band. Anker emerged from the kitchen with a plateful of eggs and tomatoes. "It should work now," I said. I started eating out of politeness, then realized I was actually hungry. Anker looked over the box, lifting the lid. "That easy?" "Same as anything else," I said, my mouth half full. "Easy if you know what you're doing. It should work. Give it a day and see if it actually chills down." (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 84-85).

Considering the excerpt above, it may be argued that the way sygaldry functions resembles several technologies in the primary world, such as the ones involved in coding or even in some simpler electricity systems. It is also worth noticing that, as the protagonist states, some people in that secondary world, particularly the ones living close to the university, see such technological system as a mere trifle, something so common that may be even looked at with disregard. On the other hand, people living on the outskirts of the

²¹ A type of rustic refrigerator which cools products thanks to the use of applied sygaldry.

University and beyond, where such technology is difficult to afford or scarce, often see it as a luxury. Such notion is similar to what may be often witnessed in the actual world: some have easy access to science and technology that provide better living conditions, while others struggle daily for having little or none of it.

It is interesting to point out that this association of magic with science is not, of course, exclusive to *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, but it has appeared, to a greater or lesser extent, in a number of other prominent fantasy works, such as the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, *The Witcher* series, the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, among others. Even though the matter of magic is presented and dealt with differently in these works, there seems to be, though in different degrees, a tendency to dissociate magic of its otherworldly and numinous character and connect it to a matter-of-fact one, as if in an attempt to bring it closer to the implied reader, breaching the gap between secondary and primary world. In this sense, it is not surprising that a considerable number of fantasies of the last three decades take place in, or are connected to, educational environments. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see characters that happen to be outside these institutions having very little knowledge (if that much) about magic and regarding it with suspicion. An accurate example of such issue is presented in the chapter "Blood and Wine" of *The Wise Man's Fear*, in which Denna, a girl of humble origins and that has never attended the University, enquire Kvothe and his friends about the so-called magic that they learn at their educational institution:

"Right then," Denna said with a wide grin. "You first." Sim leaned forward in his chair. "Sympathy is probably the easiest to get a grip on," he said, then paused as if uncertain how to proceed. I stepped in. "You know how a block and tackle lets you lift something too heavy for you to lift by hand?" Denna nodded. "Sympathy lets us do things like that," I said. "But without all the awkward rope and pulleys." Wilem dropped a pair of iron drabs onto the table and muttered a binding. He pushed the right-hand one with a finger, and the left-hand one slid across the table at the same time, mimicking the motion. Denna's eyes went a little wide at this, and while she didn't gasp, she did draw a long breath through her nose. It only then occurred to me that she'd probably never seen anything like this before. Given my studies, it was easy to forget that someone could live mere miles from the University without ever having any exposure to even the most basic sympathy. To her credit, Denna recovered from her surprise without missing a beat. With only the slightest hesitation, she reached out a finger to touch one of the drabs. "This is how the bell in my room worked," she mused. I nodded. Wil slid his drab across the table, and Denna picked it up. The other drab rose off the table too, bobbing in midair. "It's heavy," she said, then nodded to herself. "Right, because it's like a pulley. I'm lifting both of them." "Heat, light, and motion are all just energy," I said. "We can't create energy or make it disappear. But sympathy lets us move it around or change it from one type into another." She put the drab back down on the table and the other followed suit. "And this is useful how?" Wil grunted with vague amusement. "Is a waterwheel useful?" he asked. "Is a windmill?" I reached into the pocket of my cloak. "Have you ever seen a sympathy lamp?" I asked. She nodded. I slid my hand lamp across the table to her. "They work under the same principle. They take a little bit of heat and turn it into light. It converts one type of energy into another." "Like a

moneychanger,” Wil said. Denna turned the lamp over in her hands curiously. “Where does it get the heat?” “The metal itself holds heat,” I explained. “If you leave it on, you’ll eventually feel the metal get chilly. If it gets too cold, it won’t work.” I pointed. “I made that one, so it’s pretty efficient. Just the heat from your hand should be enough to keep it working. (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 160-161).

Kvothe, Sim, and Wilem continue to describe all the minutia of how the “magic” taught at the University works until Dena, somehow disappointed, concludes that what she thought was magic, was, in fact, merely energy manipulation based on physical and chemical similarity and the use of one’s strength of will, making it something less supernatural and exclusive: doing magic is a matter of study and discipline. Their conversation turns slowly towards an end when Dena asks if there were a type of magic that did more than just that what they told her, a type of magic in which someone wrote something down and that something became true. Kvothe, then, answers her sceptically as follows: “‘Sounds like faerie-tale magic,’ I said. ‘Storybook stuff that doesn’t really exist. I certainly never heard about anything like that at the University.’” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 165). It is interesting to point out that the word “faerie” in the excerpt above is spelled almost identically to the one Tolkien uses in his “On Fairy-Stories” to refer to the realm where fantasy stories take place, the realm of *Faërie*. In both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* the word “faerie” appears 51 times (12 in the first and 39 in the second novel), frequently connected to, on one hand, with children’s stories, with little credibility to them, or, on the other hand, to mystical, supernatural, and numinous otherworldly creatures, which are called the “Fae”. The following paragraphs in this section discuss both these visions of the word.

The first allusion to something that points toward faerie stories and creatures appear already in the first chapter of *The Name of the Wind*, soon after one of the villagers of Newarre is attacked by a scrael. The sudden attack causes considerable commotion in the inhabitants, who argue that such creature could only be some sort of demon. Their shock, however, is also accompanied by a tinge of disbelief, for even though the villagers are somehow superstitious, they refuse to believe demons belong anywhere else than in stories, as the following excerpt demonstrates: “[c]ertainly there were demons in the world. But they were like Tehlu’s angels. They were like heroes and kings. They belonged in stories. They belonged out there. [...] Your childhood friend didn’t stomp one to death on the road to Baedn-Bryt. It was ridiculous.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 10). Even for these superstitious folk the idea of demons walking on earth sounds unlikely. In spite of that, they decide to take the dead creature to the local priest, who, as it is often believed of priests, should know how to deal

with the so-called demon. What the villagers assume to be a demon, however, is actually a fae, as evidence in the novels indicate.

Considering the affirmations above, it is important to highlight that, when referring to the creature that attacked one of the villagers, the name “scrael” is used exclusively by Kvothe and Bast (his apprentice); the villagers refer to it strictly as “demon”. Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that both the protagonist and his apprentice possess knowledge concerning a series of issues unknown by the other citizens of Newarre, as it is first hinted at in the first chapter of *The Name of the Wind*, “A Place for Demons”, in which they concernedly discuss the matter of the scrael attack, as if they, differently from the other villagers, were acquainted with that type of creature. The reasons Bast is familiar with faerie creatures are explained already in the first novel, while the case of Kvothe is only discussed in *The Wise Man’s Fear*. Bast, as it is revealed in chapters 13 and 88 of the first novel, is himself a fae. The implied reader starts to become aware of it by Chronicler’s careful observation of the character, punctuated by the first-person narrator’s comments:

As soon as Bast entered the room, Chronicler began to watch him curiously. As the conversation continued, Chronicler’s expression had grown by degrees more puzzled and more intent. In fairness, something ought to be said about Bast. At first glance, he looked to be an average, if attractive, young man. But there was something different about him. For instance, he wore soft black leather boots. At least, if you looked at him that’s what you saw. But if you happened to catch a glimpse of him from the corner of your eye, and if he were standing in the right type of shadow, you might see something else entirely. And if you had the right sort of mind, the sort of mind that actually sees what it looks at, you might notice that his eyes were odd. If your mind had the rare talent of not being fooled by its own expectations, you might notice something else about them, something strange and wonderful. Because of this, Chronicler had been staring at Kvothe’s young student, trying to decide what was different about him. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 100-101).

Soon after that, Chronicler, afraid that Bast might be dangerous, jumps into conclusions and attacks him, which would have resulted in disaster for both had Kvothe not interfered. Due to the attack suffered, Bast momentarily reveals his true form: a humanoid creature with ocean blue eyes with no sclera and a pair of cloven hooves instead of feet. Considering no longer possible to hide his apprentice identity, Kvothe explains that Bast is a one-hundred-an-fifty-year-old noble fae: “Chronicler, I would like you to meet Bastas, son of Remmen, Prince of Twilight and the Telwyth Mael. The brightest, which is to say the only student I’ve had the misfortune to teach. Glamourer, bartender, and, not last, my friend.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 103).

Considering the quote above, it is important to call attention to the fact that in his description of Bast, Kvothe mentions that his apprentice is a glamourer. The implied reader,

who is assumed to partake of the same knowledge as the main character's, is offered no explanation concerning the term. In fact, there is no explanation whatsoever concerning what a glamourer might be in *The Name of the Wind*; such information is first obtained in *The Wise Man's Fear*. However, the information provided is considerably scarce. For a vaster understanding of the term, it is better to turn to another, much shorter, work of the author: the novella "The Lightning Tree", first published in 2014 as a part of the anthology *Rogues*, edited by the authors George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois. Taking place around a month before the first events of the frame story in *The Name of the Wind*, it is an account of one day in Bast's life, focusing on how he helps several Newarre's children using fae magic.

At the beginning of the novella, it is curious to see that the first child coming to Bast for help address the matter in a curious way: the boy tells Bast that he needs a lie. The boy had cut himself while playing with his mother's knives and now is afraid she may beat him upon finding out. Bast then, tells him what to do and how to act so that the mother will not be angry. Basically, the main character tells him how to embellish the account of what he did so that it sounds different from what actually happened, thus avoiding punishment. In other words, Bast teaches the boy to disguise reality; he teaches him how to lie:

The boy swallowed nervously. "I need a lie." Bast nodded. "What sort of lie?" The boy gingerly opened his hand, revealing the wad of cloth to be a makeshift bandage, spattered with bright red. It stuck to his hand slightly. Bast nodded; that was what he'd smelled before. "I was playing with my mum's knives," Brann said. Bast examined the cut. It ran shallow along the meat near the thumb. Nothing serious. "Hurt much?" "Nothing like the birching I'll get if she finds out I was messing with her knives." Bast nodded sympathetically. "You clean the knife and put it back?" Brann nodded. Bast tapped his lips thoughtfully. "You thought you saw a big black rat. It scared you. You threw a knife at it and cut yourself. Yesterday one of the other children told you a story about rats chewing off soldiers' ears and toes while they slept. It gave you nightmares." Brann gave a shudder. "Who told me the story?" Bast shrugged. "Pick someone you don't like." The boy grinned viciously. Bast began to tick off things on his fingers. "Get some blood on the knife before you throw it." He pointed at the cloth the boy had wrapped his hand in. "Get rid of that too. The blood is dry, obviously old. Can you work up a good cry?" The boy shook his head, seeming a little embarrassed by the fact. "Put some salt in your eyes. Get all snotty and teary before you run to them. Howl and blubber. Then when they're asking you about your hand, tell your mum you're sorry if you broke her knife." Brann listened, nodding slowly at first, then faster. He smiled. "That's good." (Rothfuss, 2014a, pp. 714-715).

Apart from the fact that in the excerpt above an adult is teaching a kid how to lie, there is not anything too striking about it. However, if the same quote is considered alongside with a passage appearing further in the narrative, some interesting comparisons and assumptions can be made. Hours after helping Brann, Bast is visited by another youngster, Kostrel. The boy reaches out to the protagonist because he wants to make a trade: he has information he

believes Bast would be interested in. He has learned where a certain lady takes her bath. Bast, who is always eager and prone to interact with ladies in a variety of fashions, has his interest picked. Kostrel, then, proposes the following: he will supply Bast with the information he has as long as the protagonist gives him good answers to three questions on the subject the boy chooses. Bast agrees but is taken aback as the boy discloses the subject he wants to learn about. Kostrel wants to know about the Fae: ““Do you know enough about them?” ‘A fair amount,’ Bast said [...] ‘More than most folk, I imagine.’ Kostrel leaned forward, his thin face intent. ‘I thought you might. You aren’t from around here. You know things. You’ve seen what’s really out there in the world.’” (Rothfuss, 2014a, p. 722). The questions the boy asks focus mostly on the personal and physical characteristics of the fae, their origins and dwellings, and the nature of their magic. Bast argues that his questions are too general but attempts to satisfy the youngster curiosity the best he can: the term “fae” refers to any creature that live in the “Fae”. Among the several creatures residing in such place is the fair folk, the faeries. These, Bast argues, are very similar, physically, to regular people, so much so that they might even pass unnoticed among them. Some are, however, more powerful than regular people and with an evil tendency, being prone to trickery and harmful behaviour. Others are unable to lie or are not fond of the practice, while there are some who would never miss the opportunity to do so. Most Fae do not come to the actual world, for it makes them uncomfortable and uneasy. The ones that cross the veil between the Fae world and the actual world prefer to dwell in wild, secluded, even strange places. They favour, however, places that are connected to things in their raw, primordial state: rivers, forests, and the like. It is important to notice, however, that even though they resemble regular people to a considerable extent, “[m]ost have something about them that makes them different. Their eyes. Their ears. The color of their hair or skin. Sometimes they’re taller than normal, or shorter, or stronger, or more beautiful.” (Rothfuss, 2014a, p. 725). In this sense, to make sure they will not be singled out among regular people, when they come the primary world, they resort to two types of magic that, Bast argues, all the fair folk possess, namely glammourie and grammarie.

Interestingly enough, Bast discloses that the faerie folk do not think of glammourie and grammarie as magic, since such term is never used by them. They refer to them as art or craft, seeming or shaping. To use the character’s words, “[g]lammourie is the art of making something seem. Grammarie is the craft of making something be.” (Rothfuss, 2014a, p. 725). As it is argued below, glammourie and grammarie are intrinsically connected to illusionism and deceit, rather than with the numinous or the supernatural. They have, however, different levels of difficulty; glammourie, Bast claims, is easier than grammarie:

[The faerie folk] can make a thing seem other than it is. They could make a white shirt seem like it was blue. Or a torn shirt seem like it was whole. Most of the folk have at least a scrap of this art. Enough to hide themselves from mortal eyes. If their hair was all of silver-white, their glammourie could make it look as black as night. (Rothfuss, 2014a, pp. 725-726).

Therefore, when Kvothe, in *The Name of the Wind*, tells Chronicler that Bast is a glamourer, he means that his apprentice is a fae that can use illusions to disguise his uncommon appearance in order to pass unnoticed among the “common folk”. Grammarie, on the other hand, is more complex. Bast argues that he is not sure if he can fully understand it himself. According to the explanation given, though, grammarie works as to potentialize a characteristic that something or someone already possess. One of the examples given is that of making a fire hotter or hungrier than it already is. With that in mind, it is important to highlight that an example of grammarie appears in *The Wise Man’s Fear*, specifically between chapters 95 and 106, in which Kvothe crosses the veil between that fictional universe’s primary and secondary worlds and steps into the Fae, the faerie realm. During his stay in that realm, Kvothe makes his acquaintance with Felurian, a powerful fae that was believed to exist only in faerie stories. At first, the faerie is reluctant to let him return to the primary world, but when Kvothe finally convinces her to do so, she tells him she is going to give him a gift that would help keeping him safe from harm in his own world:

Felurian took hold of my hand and traced a pale line that ran along my forearm. “you are not good at keeping yourself safe, my kvothe.” [...] She looked up at me, her face intent. “would my sweet poet like a shaed?” “A what?” She paused as if considering her words. “a shadow.” I smiled. “I already have one.” Then I checked to make sure. I was in the Fae after all. Felurian frowned, shaking her head at my lack of understanding. “another I would give a shield, and it would keep him safe from harm. another I would gift with amber, bind a scabbard tight with glamour, or craft a crown so men might look on you with love.” She shook her head solemnly. “but not for you. you are a night walker. a moon follower. you must be safe from iron, from cold, from spite. you must be quiet. you must be light. you must move softly in the night. you must be quick and unafraid.” She nodded to herself. “this means I must make you a shaed.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p.731).

The protagonist is, at first, puzzled, for he does not know what a shaed is. However, when he watches Felurian sewing his gift, he concludes that the world shaed means “shadow” and that the faerie is making him a shadow cloak: “Was she sewing by starlight? Sewing with starlight. Realization came to me in a flood. Shaed meant shadow. She had somehow brought back an armful of shadow and was sewing it with starlight. Sewing me a cloak of shadow.” (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 736-737). Such cloak made of shadows has the effect of, among other things, making its wearer very difficult to be seen in the darkness. It is important to highlight, however, that it does not make one invisible; it serves as a very efficient type of camouflage.

Taking the information above into consideration, it may be argued that the craft that Felurian applies into the making of the shaed illustrates how grammarie works: a shadow has as one of its characteristics the fact that it may partly conceal someone or something. Therefore, a clock made of shadows and imbued with grammarie has the potential of concealment augmented.

Thus far, all instances in Rothfuss' narratives of what an implied reader reading a fantasy work would call magic are accompanied by an explanation of some sort; the numinous, the supernatural and the unexplainable are, to a considerable extent, often denied. However, there is at least one instance in the novels that seem to be in syntony with Tolkien's (2001) propositions, and it concerns the elusive characteristics of the *Faërie* realm. According to the scholar, the richness and strangeness of *Fäerie* are so difficult to grasp that if a traveller who had wandered through it attempted to describe it, they would be at a loss of words. Kvothe discusses such elusiveness in *The Wise Man's Fear*, first during his stay in that realm and after he returns from it. When giving his account, the protagonist focuses in two aspects in which the *Faërie* reaml differs from his factual world: first, the flow of time is different there and it is difficult to keep track of it, so much so that the protagonist cannot precise how long he spent in that realm, only that it seems to him that it had been a long time. However, when he returns to his factual world, he learns that only three days had passed since his incursion into *Faërie*. The second difference, Kvothe argues, is more subtle and difficult to notice; it has to do with that realm's environment: everything in it seems to be more solid and present, as if they were aware of the protagonist's presence there. These two characteristics are the central aspects of *Faërie* he can recall, everything else, as he states, seems to have left his memory:

Wherever it came from, my memory has always served me well. Sometimes it works much better than I'd like. That said, my memory is strangely patchy when I think of my time in the Fae. My conversations with Felurian are clear as glass. Her lessons may as well be written on my skin. The sight of her. The taste of her mouth. They are all fresh as yesterday. But other things I cannot bring to mind at all. For example, I remember Felurian in the purpling twilight. It dappled her through the trees, making her look as if she were underwater. I remember her in flickering candlelight, the teasing shadows of it concealing more than it revealed. And I remember her in the full, rich amber of lamplight. She basked in it like a cat, her skin warm and glowing. But I do not remember lamps. Or candles. There is a great deal of fuss when dealing with such things, but I cannot remember a single moment spent trimming a wick or wiping soot from the glass hood of a lamp. I do not remember the smell of oil or smoke or wax. I remember eating. Fruit and bread and honey. [...] My point is this: I can remember our eating. What I cannot remember is where the food came from. Did someone bring it? Did she gather it herself? I cannot bring it to mind to save my life. The thought of servants intruding on the privacy of her twilight glade seems impossible to me, but so is the thought of Felurian baking her own bread. (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 739-740).

As argued above, it is in how *Faërie* is described and felt that Rothfuss' narratives approach Tolkien's theory concerning magic. In this sense, it is interesting to notice that the closeness between the first and the latter may be even enhanced if the representation of *Fäerie* in *The Lord of the Rings*, one of Tolkien's major examples of his own theory put into practice, is taken into consideration: as mentioned previously in this work, in the chapter "The old forest" of Tolkien's novel, Merry describes the forest in the borders of the Shire as an eerie place where everything seems to be more alive and aware of its surroundings, a description that matches to a considerable extent what Kvothe relates in *The Wise Man's Fear*. Besides that, in the chapter "The great river" of *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam and Frodo discuss how time seems to have behaved differently during their stay in Lothlórien, giving an account that resembles Kvothe's description of his stay in the *Faërie* realm:

Sam sat tapping the hilt of his sword as if he were counting on his fingers, and looking up at the sky. 'It's very strange,' he murmured. 'The Moon's the same in the Shire and in Wilderland, or it ought to be. But either it's out of its running, or I'm all wrong in my reckoning. You'll remember, Mr. Frodo, the Moon was waning as we lay on the flet up in that tree: a week from the full, I reckon. And we'd been a week on the way last night, when up pops a New Moon as thin as a nail-paring, as if we had never stayed no time in the Elvish country. 'Well, I can remember three nights there for certain, and I seem to remember several more, but I would take my oath it was never a whole month. Anyone would think that time did not count in there!' 'And perhaps that was the way of it,' said Frodo. 'In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by. It was not, I think, until Silverlode bore us back to Anduin that we returned to the time that flows through mortal lands to the Great Sea. And I don't remember any moon, either new or old, in Caras Galadhon: only stars by night and sun by day.' (Tolkien, 2007, p. 506).

Arguably, considering the excerpts from Tolkien and Rothfuss above, it may be said that an echo of the Tolkienian *Faërie* magic can be glimpsed in the North American author's novels. Nonetheless, the fact that the treatment of magic is considerably different in the works of both authors should not be overlooked, for it offers insight into one of the core characteristics of fantasy literature, as Attebery (2014) highlights: it provides new contexts and, consequently, new meanings for recurrent (literary) motifs. It is noteworthy that Attebery's claims are directed to the relation between fantasy and myth, namely how the first appropriates the motifs in the latter. However, I argue that the same can be said concerning the engagement between fantasy narratives produced at different moments in history. Such argument may even be connected to Eagleton's claim (2013) mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation: consciously or unconsciously, literary works tend to harken to previously produced ones. If these claims are seen as valid, the fantasy scholar, as I argued previously in this work, should look not only at how the appropriation takes place, but also, more importantly, at what is being done with the appropriated elements and motifs. An approach to

fantasy thus directed gives insight both into how fantasy produces meaning as well as what new meanings are being produced, instigating the scholar to investigate why the changes occur and what they may represent. I address these considerations in the following chapter, while focusing on three elements in Rothfuss' works: the problems the narrative addresses, the changes in the figure of the hero, and the reformulation of the happy ending.

3 (NEW) TENDENCIES ON FANTASY FICTION

“‘Why tell a story if it’s not entertaining?’
‘To help us remember. To teach us.’”

(Rothfuss, *The Wise Man’s Fear*)

In opposition to the previous chapter, in which I focused mostly on how *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* are told (worldbuilding), the present section concentrates itself on what the novels tell (storytelling). Stories, as the quote above points out, are not merely a source of entertainment, but also a way of calling our attention to things that otherwise may have been forgotten or overlooked or that, for several different reasons, the ones claiming to be in power of history (and of stories) may want one to forget. Scholars and writers like Tolkien (2001), Attebery (2022), and MacDonald (1893) claim, though with slightly different words, that fantasy stories are powerful devices that are often used to convey the “truth” through the employment of the fantastic, the numinous, and the wonderful. To use Attebery (2022) words, fantasy use lies to speak truth. MacDonald (1893) goes even further and claims that the beauty and delight of fantasy stories are dependent of such “truth”; were it not present, the story would fall apart. Even though I am aware that what these authors mean by “truth” is the notion that what is narrated in the fantasy story should somehow resemble what is observable in the primary world, I find the term “truth” considerably problematic. Rather than simply telling the truth (which is rarely pure and never simple), I argue that fantasy narratives may be used to present points of view that are often disregarded or bypassed. Such notion is central to this chapter because it illustrates with precision what Rothfuss may be attempting to do when he allows his protagonist, Kvothe, to tell his own version of the story, his own account of the events that led him to where he was and that gave him the reputation that he has.

In addition to that, this part of the dissertation draws into Kvothe’s narrative while looking at the social issues it raises, such as the problem of social injustice and inequalities, as well as how they are addressed and how they are, to a considerable extent, connected to the changes in the figure of the hero as well as to the reformulation of the happy ending. Finally, this chapter presents patterns and traces parallels between *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* and other contemporary fantasy narratives as a means to identify similarities that may indicate a tendency in the genre at the current moment.

3.1 Problems of a different kind: what is at stake in Rothfuss' narratives

When looking at the two most celebrated fantasy series of the 20th century, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it is possible to argue that both address, even though differently, the problem of war. Such notion should not be surprising because both authors were surrounded by the devastating effects of the two Great Wars of that century. It is true that what these works address should not (and cannot) be reduced to just that; however, it is a major theme, and it plays a crucial role on the development of both narratives. On the other hand, when looking to several fantasy works produced and published at the end of the 20th and first decades of the 21st century, it may be argued that even though the problem of war still lurks from time to time in these narratives, they are often no longer the central issue being addressed. It is, I argue, themes like social injustice that have been approached more and more often in the fantasy works of the last three decades. Themes such as poverty, difficult access to education, violence against women, intolerance, prejudice, orphanhood, hunger, disregard for minorities, among many others have frequently been addressed in fantasy narratives of different parts of the world. Works like *The Witcher*, from the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski, *Harry Potter*, by the British J.K. Rowling, *Shadow and Bone*, by the Israeli Leigh Bardugo, *The Poppy War*, by the Chinese writer R. F. Kuang, *Children of Blood and Bone*, by the Nigerian-American Tomi Adeyemi, and the *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* by the North American Patrick Rothfuss are just some examples among many others that address current social problems. Such change of focus, as Attebery (2022) argues, is intrinsically connected to the ever-changing character of fantasy literature that tends to adapt itself to the social and philosophical concerns of its time. Such argument is central to understanding why specific changes of focus occur within the genre. To what Rothfuss' novels are concerned, the main themes being addressed, as I argue and demonstrate below, are those of prejudice, poverty, difficult access to education, and orphanhood.

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the plot of both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* unfold as Kvothe, the protagonist, is convinced by Chronicler, the well-known scribe, to give the account of the events that owed him his reputation. Claiming that his origins are at the heart of who he really is, the protagonist begins his story by reliving his childhood: from the time he travelled the world with his parents,

performing in different cities with his troupe, and living a happy-as-possible life until a tragedy struck him and changed the course of his life.

As it is presented in the chapter “Hope” of *The Name of the Wind*, one day Kvothe, still an eleven-year-old boy, left the place where his troupe had been camping at his mother’s bidding and went into the woods to collect an armload of wild sage. As he returned to the campsite he was confronted with a most dreadful sight: that of dead bodies strewn about like broken dolls amidst smoke, fire, ashes, and the smell of blood and burning hair (Rothfuss, 2007). Such moment bears such an importance to the main character that he reckons that it is “[...] the hinge upon which the story pivots like an opening door. In some ways, [it] is where the story begins.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 125). Such gruesome and dreary day in his life, he states, is the threshold that defines the end of his childhood and the beginning of his several toils and hardships. The protagonist’s account of how he, a young child, little by little found the dead bodies of his parents and of all the other members of his troupe is arguably one of the most shocking and heartbreaking of the narrative. It sets a hopeless tone for the events to come. Interestingly enough, an analysis of the word “hope”, as it is presented in the chapter, offers an intriguing insight into the meaning it carries, most of the time, in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear*. Such word, often imbued with a sense of positiveness, frequently carries an aura of pointless insistence in Rothfuss, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

I hope [my parents] spent those last few hours well. I hope they didn’t waste them on mindless tasks: kindling the evening fire and cutting vegetables for dinner. I hope they sang together, as they so often did. I hope they retired to our wagon and spent time in each other’s arms. I hope they lay near each other afterward and spoke softly of small things. I hope they were together, busy with loving each other, until the end came. It is a small hope, and pointless really. They are just as dead either way. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 124-125).

Differently from what the Tolkienian *Eucatastrophe* proposes, which tends to reward readers for their hopes with an as-happy-as-possible ending, the protagonist in Rothfuss’ novels seems to be telling his audience that if they keep any hope alive, they should do it at their own peril. Besides that, such sense of meaningless hopefulness seems to be reinforced by the fact that the one person telling the story is the protagonist himself, who is narrating the events of his life from a very specific advantage point: that of a person who already knows what has happened and knows how the story, to that point, ends.

It is also worth-mentioning that even though the protagonist tries to hide it, the effects of such a traumatic event still affect him as an adult, which can be observed in the following chapter, “Interlude-Autumn”, in which the story returns to its outer frame in the Waystone

Inn. As Kvothe signalises Chronicler to stop writing, he is confronted with the tearful expression of his apprentice, Bast, who, having not heard the details of such event of his tutor's life before, is deeply moved and willing to demonstrate compassion. Kvothe, however, insists that there is no reason his apprentice should feel sorry for him, since not even he himself feels that way. More than that, he concludes by diminishing the weight of the tragedy he had just narrated by arguing that it had happened long ago: "I appreciate your concern, but this is just a piece of the story, not even the worst piece, and I am not telling it to garner sympathy. [...] Besides, all of this happened long ago.' He made a dismissive gesture. 'Time is the great healer, and so on.'" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 132). The chapter concludes, however, with Kvothe breaking under the burden of his misfortunes and weeping, quietly and alone, in the woods at the back of his inn:

Not too far into the trees was the winter's wood supply. Cord on cord of oak and ash were stacked to make tall, crooked walls between the trunks of trees. Kvothe tossed two pieces of firewood into the wheelbarrow where they struck the bottom like a muted drum. Another two followed them. His motions were precise, his face blank, his eyes far away. As he continued to load the barrow, he moved slower and slower, like a machine winding down. Eventually he stopped completely and stood for a long minute, still as stone. Only then did his composure break. And even with no one there to see, he hid his face in his hands and wept quietly, his body wracked with wave on wave of heavy, silent sobs. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 134).

When, in the following chapter, Kvothe resumes his narrative, he starts telling Chronicler and Bast how, little by little, he started realising the dreary situation he found himself in: having lost his family, the protagonist is now not only in the condition of orphanhood, but also in that of extreme poverty. He has neither resources to maintain himself, nor a safe haven to which he might resort too. In addition to that, he is merely a child with little experience regarding the tricky workings of the society in which he lives. Before he offers further details about how he tried to cope with his misfortunes, however, he starts digressing about the different ways the human mind deals with pain. To do so, he recurs to the metaphor of the four doors. According to such metaphor, the mind of a person that undergoes a traumatic experience tends to move through one (or more) of four doors according to their need. The first door is that of sleep, which offers a momentaneous retreat from the world and all the possible pain it may cause by distancing oneself from painful and tragic experiences. Next is the door of forgetting, to which the mind may resort in case one's mind has suffered wounds that are too deep to heal or to heal quickly. It is also the door behind which the memories that cannot be healed usually hide. Third is the door of madness, which may be crossed when what one's reality offers is nothing but pain. In such cases, the mind may abdicate reality to escape the pain. Final is the door of death, the one that supposedly offers

the safest shelter against the toils of the world, for it is believed that the ones that go through it can no longer be hurt.

If taken for granted, the digressions above may sound trivial, or even matter of fact. I argue, however, that they offer insight into the complex psychological processes that the protagonist's mind went through to endure the abysmal situation he found himself in. Did he almost go mad while trying to overcome his grief? Did he consider death to evade the pain and solitude? Even though the answers to these questions are not explicitly presented in the narrative, the mere allusion to such possibilities combined with an as-thorough-as-possible description of the hardships he had to face may leave the implied reader heavy-hearted and pensive. The following excerpt, which describes the main character's first days in his new situation, corroborates my argument above:

In the beginning I was almost like an automaton, thoughtlessly performing the actions that would keep me alive. I ate the second rabbit I caught, and the third. I found a patch of wild strawberries. I dug for roots. [...] After I had taken care of immediate needs, I found I had nothing to do. I think this is when a small part of my mind started to slowly reawaken itself. Make no mistake, I was not myself. At least I was not the same person I had been a span of days before. Everything I did I attended to with my whole mind, leaving no part of me free for remembering. I grew thinner and more ragged. I slept in rain or sun, on soft grass, moist earth, or sharp stones with an intensity of indifference that only grief can promote. The only notice I took of my surroundings was when it rained, because then I could not bring out my lute to play, and that pained me. Of course I played. It was my only solace. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 140).

As the excerpt above demonstrates, Kvothe's situation is extremely dreary and has little chance of improving. It seems as if the pain and sheer poverty have taken not only his dignity, but also part of his humanity, so much so that all he does is much more automatic and instinctive than rational, as if he had become a cowered wild animal desperate to survive. It is interesting to notice, however, that even though he regains part of his rationality after having taken care of his most urgent needs, he is overcome by a different feeling: he moves from fear to indifference. The protagonist feels indifferent not only about his surroundings, but also about himself, so much so that it makes no difference to him if he slept under rain or sun, over soft surfaces, or harsh ones. It is worth highlighting, though, that there is one thing that he still cares about and that brings him some sort of comfort, namely art, which means, in his case, music.

Music plays a central role in Kvothe's life and in the narrative as whole. Right after he loses his family, music serves as the solace that prevents him crossing the line between sanity and madness, between life and death. Later in the narrative it represents his most reliable source of income, without which he would have no means to pay for his studies, for a place to

stay, not to mention the means to avert hunger. In other words, it is his music, his art, the one thing that helps him overcome the several adversities he faces. Such notion of surviving through and because of art is not only central in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, but it is also a cardinal argument in my belief concerning the social function of art, mainly the social function of fantasy literature. Not only, but mostly, in times of great individual or collective distress, fantasy literature rises in an attempt to provide some sort of comfort and relief. I will not go as far as to say, as I have done in previous works²², that fantasy literature can be the bringer of renewed hope, for it is not as often the case as it was with major fantasy works of the previous century (namely *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*). What most fantasy works seem to be doing, I argue, is to show their readers that they are not alone in their struggles, that more people around the world face (or have faced) the same (or similar) hardships and managed, somehow, to go through them. That does not mean, however, that they have emerged on the other side of the crisis unscathed, but rather that they have found the strength to carry on despite all the suffering and turmoil they had to endure. Such is the case with Kvothe: the implied reader has access not only to the protagonist account of his life as a young boy and teenager, but also to his present condition as an adult, showcasing not only that he rose above the hard times he had to face, but also the scars that they left in him. Something similar happens in other major contemporary fantasy works, such as, for example, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Neverwhere*, by Neil Gaiman, the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, by Leigh Bardugo, the *Harry Potter* saga, by J. K. Rowling, *The Witcher* collection, by Andrzej Sapkowski, among others. It seems, in this sense, that several contemporary fantasy works are concerned with the theme of making through adversity and carrying on despite the pain, rather than that of the firm belief in a happy ending.

Clutching to his music and to scavenging and hunting skills, Kvothe spends, as he states, six months living in the woods, in total isolation from civilisation, and it is only due to the need to obtain strings to his lute (one of the few belongings he salvaged from the debris of his family camp) and the approaching of a chilly winter that he decides to head towards some place that might offer him shelter from the harsh weather that was to come. He decides, then, to search for a road that could lead him to a town. He has, however, no clue whatsoever of his geographical location and to which direction he should head towards. Concluding that the cleverer idea was to walk southwards, where winter tends to be less aggressive, he packs his

²² See, for example, ROCHA, 2019b.

limited belongings and resources (a small dull knife, half a ball of string, his broken lute, a book, and a handful of foraged food) and starts his pilgrimage. He soon realises, though, that life on the road is no easier than life in the woods:

The next span was an ordeal. The little food I'd brought with me was soon gone, and I had to stop and forage when I was hungry. Some days I couldn't find water, and when I did I had nothing I could use to carry it. The small wagon track joined a bigger road, which joined a larger road yet. My feet chafed and blistered against the insides of my shoes. Some nights were bitter cold. There were inns, but aside from the occasional drink I stole from horse troughs, I gave them a wide berth. There were a few small towns as well, but I needed someplace larger. Farmers have no need for lute strings. At first, whenever I heard a wagon or a horse approaching I found myself limping off to hide by the side of the road. I had not spoken with another human since the night my family was killed. I was more akin to a wild animal than a boy of twelve. But eventually the road became too large and well traveled, and I found myself spending more time hiding than walking. I finally braved the traffic and was relieved when I was largely ignored. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 142).

After long days of toil, however, the protagonist is greeted by unexpected good luck. As he walks along the dirty roads leading to somewhere unknown to him, an old man and his son call to him and offer him a ride. Afraid as a wild animal, but exhausted and famished, he accepts the offer, hops onto the horse cart, and the three of them head towards the nearest city, Tarbean. It is important to highlight that even though the protagonist mentally welcomes the kindness bestowed upon him, he often reacts skittishly, regarding such blessing with fear of what memories such comfort may awaken in him, as it can be argued from the following excerpt from the chapter "Bloody hands into stinging fists" of *The Name of the Wind*, in which the protagonist is given the chance of having a new home, but denies it out of grief:

The older farmer grinned at me and held out a pair of the knobby squash we'd been unloading. "How would your mother like it if you brought home a couple of the finest orange butter squash this side of the Eld?" "No, I can't," I stammered, pushing away a memory of raw fingers digging in the mud and the smell of burning hair. "I m—mean, you've already..." I trailed off, clutching my lute closer to my chest and moving a couple of steps away. He looked at me more closely, as if seeing me for the first time. Suddenly self-conscious, I imagined how I must look: ragged and half-starved. I hugged the lute and backed farther away. The farmer's hands fell to his side and his smile faded. "Ah, lad," he said softly. He set the squash down, then turned back to me and spoke with a gentle seriousness. "Me and Jake will be here selling until round about sundown. If you find what you're looking for by then, you'd be welcome back on the farm with us. The missus and me could sure use an extra hand some days. You'd be more than welcome. Wouldn't he Jake?" Jake was looking at me too, pity written across his honest face. "Sure enough, Pa. She said so right afore we left." The old farmer continued to look at me with serious eyes. "This is Seaward Square." He said, pointing at his feet. "We'll be here till dark, maybe a little after. You come back if'n you want a ride." His eyes turned worried. "You hear me? You can come back with us." I continued to back away, step by step, not sure why I was doing it. Only knowing that if I went with him I would have to explain, would have to remember. Anything was better than opening that door.... "No. No.

thank you," I stammered. "You've helped so much. I'll be fine." I was jostled from behind by a man in a leather apron. Startled, I turned and ran. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 146).

Moments after running away from his benefactors, the protagonist realises his mistake in an extremely harsh way: Tarbean is such a big city that he soon got lost amidst the bustling crowd and the myriad of dirty streets and crooked alleys. To make matters worse, as he stops to try to recompose himself, he is surrounded by three street teenagers who accost him and attempt to steal his lute. As he tries to resist the robbery, he is savagely beaten and has his lute broken to pieces in the middle of the hassle. The violence he suffers is so extreme that is likely that he would have been killed, or at least crippled, were it not for the appearance of a drunk guard, who scares the aggressors away from him. Ironically, as the guard realises Kvothe has nothing with which he can pay for his rescue, he abandons the beaten, bleeding, and half-unconscious youngster where he had found him. As Kvothe recovers conscience, he learns he has a broken nose and several other injuries. Suddenly he remembers the old farmer's kind offer, the chance of a fresh start and a safer life and hurriedly gather his few remaining belongings and limps across the city, searching for the square he had last seen the old man and his son. As he finally reaches the place, it is already dark and his benefactors are already gone, as well as his hopes of a good life. Abashed and hopeless, he sinks into the ground and reckons the aftermath of a day of struggles:

When I finally found the bookstore Seth had parked beside, I was panting and staggering. Seth and his wagon were nowhere to be seen. I sank down into the empty space their wagon had left and felt the aches and pains of a dozen injuries that I had forced myself to ignore. I felt them out, one by one. I had several painful ribs, although I couldn't tell if they were broken or if the cartilage was torn. I was dizzy and nauseous when I moved my head too quickly, probably a concussion. My nose was broken, and I had more bruises and scrapes than I could conveniently count. I was also hungry. The last being the only thing I could do anything about, I took what was left of my piece of bread from earlier in the day and ate it. It wasn't enough, but it was better than nothing. I took a drink from a horse trough and was thirsty enough not to care that the water was brackish and sour. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 152).

Exhausted, cold, hungry, and defeated, the protagonist tries to find shelter from the wind in the doorway of a nearby bookshop. As he is almost falling asleep, he is once again harassed, this time by the owner of the store, who kicks at him and threatens to call the city guard if he finds the youngster attempting to sleep at his threshold again. The chapter concludes with Kvothe limping towards some empty crates he finds in an alley and curling up behind them to try to sleep. The weight of the protagonist burden is impressed even further into the implied reader as they read the chapter's final line: "That was the first night of nearly

three years [he] spent in Tarbean.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 153). Such line is the prelude of what is about to be presented in the next chapters: three years of facing dreary situations being shown almost no kindness or compassion whatsoever.

In respect to the aforementioned considerations, it seems relevant to discuss what exactly the implied author may be pointing at by bringing such problematics to his narrative. As the epigraph to this chapter highlights, the purposes of telling stories go beyond that of simply entertaining; a story may often be told to call attention to something. The terms used in the said epigraph are “remember” and “teach”: stories may be often told to remind the audience of something they might have forgotten or that is either alien or too far away from them. In this sense, stories may be often told to raise one’s awareness of something. In the case of Kvothe’s story, it is the awareness of the dreary and degrading reality that many a person faces around the world: the reality of extreme poverty and social neglect, of having neither a shelter nor nourishment to make it through the day, of feeling an outcast with little importance and perspective in life. In this sense, if on one hand literature may help one remember what might have been otherwise forgotten or overseen, on the other hand, as the North American writer Susan Sontag (2007) very well punctuates, it may teach one to sympathize with the pain that is not one’s own:

Literature can tell us what the world is like. Literature can give standards and pass on deep knowledge, incarnated in language, in narrative. Literature can train, and exercise, our ability to weep for those who are not us or ours. Who would we be if we could not sympathize with those who are not us or ours? Who would we be if we could not forget ourselves, at least some of the time? Who would we be if we could not learn? Forgive? Become something other than we are? (Sontag, 2007, p. 153).

Thus, awareness and sympathy are arguably key words to understanding the way fantasy literature is being shaped as well as the paths it seems to be taking. As argued above, rather than being the herald of hope, many fantasy fictions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries seem to be working as to bring people together by attempting to bring them closer, putting the (socially, financially, etc) privileged ones in contact with social issues they would possibly never pay attention to were it not through literature. More than that, fantasy works like *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* represent an effort of the genre to raise their implied readers’ sympathy towards the people who have their realities somehow represented by these narratives. Sympathy without action, however, is rarely the bringer of change. Therefore, Patrick Rothfuss decided to do something that could help mobilise his readers to do something concerning the social issues discussed in his novels. Worldbuilders, the nonprofit organisation idealised by Rothfuss, corroborate such argument. As mentioned in

the introduction to this work, such organization was founded in 2008, a year after the publication of *The Name of the Wind* and has the objective of uniting fantasy readers to raise money to fund not only education, but also opportunity and sustainable self-sufficiency for family and communities facing harsh realities worldwide. In this sense, it may be argued that if one of the focuses of the novels is to put specific social issues in evidence, the idealisation of the Worldbuilders was a way to try to give readers the opportunity to take a stand in the fight against such problems so that less people suffer from the same misfortunes Kvothe does in the novels. By doing so, such people who have their reality somehow represented by the protagonist's story, and that probably do not have access to Rothfuss' novels, may have their lives improved due to the existence of such fictional works.

Apart from the problem of poverty and social vulnerability discussed above, a further issue that often pervades contemporary fantasy works is that of prejudice, which can be seen playing a major role in well-known works like the *Harry Potter* and *The Witcher* series, as well as more recent fantasy fictions, such as the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy (Leigh Bardugo), the *Poppy War* trilogy (R. F. Kuang), and the *Legacy of Orïsha* trilogy (Tomi Adeyemi). Such issue is also central in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* and the protagonist narrator attempts to make it clear already in chapter 8 of the first novel, when Kvothe begins dictating his tale to Chronicler. As mentioned previously in this work, the protagonist belongs to a nomadic cultural group of entertainers called the Edema Ruh. Such group of people were historically stigmatized in that fictional world, being even victims of attempted genocide by the Aturan Empire in the past, which is made clear by the following excerpt from *The Wise Man's Fear*, in which Kvothe is exposing some historical facts to his friends:

“If I didn't know you,” I said hotly, “I'd be offended. Do you know Aturans used to kill people if they found them living on the road? One of your emperors declared them to be detrimental to the empire. Most were little more than beggars who had lost their homes because of the wars and taxes. Most were simply press-ganged into military service.” I tugged at the front of my shirt. “But the Edema were especially prized. They hunted us like foxes. For a hundred years Ruh-hunt was a favorite pastime among the Aturan upper crust.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 317).

Such hatred towards the Edema Ruh endured through the years, making the members of such group of people frequently suffer prejudice and be seen with contempt, suspiciousness, and unworthiness. It is interesting to point out that during the years Kvothe spends living in the streets of Tarbean his Ruh origins cause him no problems, as he is seen as just one more homeless Brat, a burden to the society. However, as he finally manages to enter the University and show he belongs to that place as much as any other person there, the matter

of his origin starts to play a significant role. Similar to what happens to Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* series as well as to Runin Fang in the *Poppy War* trilogy, and to Alina Starkov in the *Shadow and Bone* books, even though he is an extremely talented student, he often has to work thrice (or more) as much as the other students in order to prove his merits. Such challenge is imposed to him partly because of his origins and partly because of his social condition: as an orphan of Ruh origins and with no financial resources, he cannot allow himself to fail, at least not if he wants to thrive in that environment. In this sense, while the average students at the University can afford failing, Kvothe cannot. He must remind himself that according to the society he lives in, he does not belong there and his only way to attempt to assert the contrary is through academic merit. For that reason, he must make sure he excels on whatever he does from the very moment he sets his feet at the University. Such notion can be witnessed already in the chapter “Less Talents” of *The Name of the Wind*, in which the protagonist describes how he managed to be admitted to that academic institution even though he had no money to afford its tuition:

The Chancellor’s eyes had taken on a curious look by this point but he pushed it aside as he said, “Is there anything else you would like to say?” He had asked the question of the other applicants, but none of them had taken advantage of it. It seemed almost rhetorical, a ritual before the masters discussed the applicant’s tuition. “Yes, please,” I said, surprising him. “I have a favor to ask beyond mere admission.” I took a deep breath, letting their attention settle on me. “It has taken me nearly three years to get here. I may seem young, but I belong here as much, if not more, than some rich lordling who can’t tell salt from cyanide by tasting it.” I paused. “However, at this moment I have two jots in my purse and nowhere in the world to get more than that. I have nothing worth selling that I haven’t already sold. “Admit me for more than two jots and I will not be able to attend. Admit me for less and I will be here every day, while every night I will do what it takes to stay alive while I study here. I will sleep in alleys and stables, wash dishes for kitchen scraps, beg pennies to buy pens. I will do whatever it takes.” I said the last words fiercely, almost snarling them. “But admit me free, and give me three talents so I can live and buy what I need to learn properly, and I will be a student the likes of which you have never seen before.” There was a half-breath of silence, followed by a thunderclap of a laugh from Kilvin. “HA!” he roared. “If one student in ten had half his fire I’d teach with a whip and chair instead of chalk and slate.” He brought his hand down hard on the table in front of him. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 256-257)

The passage above is remarkable because it comments on a problem that many a person worldwide faces, that of the difficult access to education. The protagonist makes clear that all he needs is a chance. If he is given it, he will do whatever it takes to thrive and show that he can be an outstanding student worth the investment. Thus, after his discourse during his admission process, Kvothe manages to be accepted at the institution and have his wish granted: besides not having to pay for his first term’s tuition, he is also given three talents so that he can pay for his basic needs (a room in a university dorm, a meal chit, etc). His relief at

the end of the admission process is such, that he is taken over by a flood of emotions, sits on the floor and cries copiously. Kvothe's situation largely mirrors that of the (aspiring) university students that depends on governmental investment (or similar) to be able to continue their education. Many leave their hometown, their family members (when they have any) behind hoping for a chance to maybe have a better life through their academic efforts and merit. Unfortunately, many of those who try their luck are unsuccessful and often return, disheartened, to their old lives, which often offer little perspective of improvement. As for those who eventually manage to have their studies funded, it is not uncommon for them to have to face adverse situations, such as limited resources, prejudice coming from other students and, at times, even from the professors. Which is exactly what Kvothe goes through already in his first term at the University.

After being shown around the campus by Simmon, a fellow student who later in the narrative becomes one of his best friends, Kvothe decides to visit the Archives, a large library in the University with a vast collection of books, tomes, scrolls and the like which are used by the students to further their knowledge. The protagonist had been curious about the place since the day his first teacher, Abenthy, mentioned that it had "[t]en times ten thousand books. More than that. More books than you could ever read." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 73). After his family was murdered, Kvothe's desire to visit the Archives intensified, for he believed that there he could find information about the Chandrian and the reasons that could have led them to kill his troupe. Therefore, after having signed in at the school dorm, he goes straight to the Archives. As he gets there, however, he has his access to the place denied by the monitor on duty, who claims that the protagonist's name is still not on the list of students who can access the library. Kvothe tries to explain that it is probably because he had been admitted in the University earlier that day. The protagonist even shows him written proof that he is enrolled at the institution, but nonetheless, the monitor rudely refuses to allow him in. At this point, the protagonist loses his temper and tries to argue more fervently, which results, however, in him being humiliated by the monitor:

"Wasting your time?" I demanded, my temper finally wearing thin. "Do you have any idea what I've gone through to get here?" Ambrose looked up at me, his expression growing suddenly amused. "Wait, let me guess," he said, laying his hands flat on the table and pushing himself to his feet. "You were always smarter than the other children back in Clodhump, or whatever little one-whore town you're from. Your ability to read and count left the local villagers awestruck." I heard the outer door open and shut behind me, but Ambrose didn't pay it any attention as he walked around to lean against the front of the desk. "Your parents knew you were special so they saved up for a couple years, bought you a pair of shoes, and sewed the pig blanket into a shirt." He reached out to rub the fabric of my new clothes between his fingers. "It took months of walking, hundreds of miles bumping along

in the backs of mule carts. But in the end..." He made an expansive gesture with both hands. "Praise Tehlu and all his angels! Here you are! All bright-eyed and full of dreams!" I heard laughter and turned to see that two men and a young woman had come in during his tirade. "God's body, Ambrose. What's got you started?" "Goddamn first-termers," Ambrose groused as he headed back around to sit behind the desk. "Come in here dressed like rag piles and act like they own the place." The three newcomers walked toward the doors marked STACKS. I fought down a hot flush of embarrassment as they looked me up and down. "Are we still heading to the Eolian tonight?" Ambrose nodded. "Of course. Sixth bell." "Aren't you going to check to see if they're in the book?" I asked as the door closed behind them. Ambrose turned back to me, his smile bright, brittle, and by no means friendly. "Listen, I'm going to give you a little advice for free. Back home you were something special. Here you're just another kid with a big mouth. So address me as Re'lar, go back to your bunk, and thank whatever pagan God you pray to that we're not in Vintas. My father and I would chain you to a post like a rabid dog." He shrugged. "Or don't. Stay here. Make a scene. Start to cry. Better yet, take a swing at me." He smiled. "I'll give you a thrashing and get you thrown out on your ear." He picked up his pen and turned back to whatever he was writing. I left. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 269-271).

By reading such passage, the implied reader might suppose that Ambrose's hostility toward the protagonist would have shaken the protagonist's spirits, made him feel discouraged and out of place. However, as Kvothe asserts, such confrontation just made his desire to prove he belonged there even stronger than before. In addition, it made him aware that even though he found himself in a supposedly more civilised place, he should not expect people around him to behave much differently from the ones he had to deal with during his time as a street kid in Tarbean. Such idea is corroborated in the next chapters, when Hemme, one of the professors, attempts to make a fool of the main character in front of the whole class.

One day after the incident with Ambrose, Kvothe wakes up early and heads towards the Mains, the oldest building in the University, also the place where he would have his first class. As he enters the room and finds a place for himself, he is beaming with excitement: he was finally going to deepen what he had learned with Abenthy. Such feeling is, however, soon replaced by that of disappointment, for everything that was presented in class was already familiar to him. To try to find a solution for the problem, he politely approaches the Professor at the end of the lesson and is greeted with mockery and disregard:

After Hemme dismissed the class I ran down the stairs and caught him just as he was leaving through a lower door. "Master Hemme?" He turned to face me. "Oh yes, our boy prodigy. I wasn't aware you were in my class. I didn't go too fast for you, did I?" I knew better than to answer that honestly. "You covered the basics very clearly, sir. The principles you mentioned today will lay a good foundation for the other students in the class." Diplomacy is a large part of being a trouper. He puffed up a bit at my perceived compliment, then looked more closely at me. "Other students?" He asked. "I'm afraid I'm already familiar with the basics, sir. I know the three laws and the fourteen corollaries. As well as the first ninety—" "Yes, yes. I see," he cut me off. "I'm rather busy right at the moment. We can speak of this tomorrow, before

class.” He turned and walked briskly away. Half a loaf being better than none, I shrugged and headed for the Archives. If I wasn’t going to learn anything from Hemme’s lectures, I might as well start educating myself. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 274).

Partly satisfied, Kvothe returns to the Archives and is, this time, greeted by another, much gentler monitor, who is solicit and helpful towards him. After checking his name on the list of students who can access the library, she explains the rules of the place to him and accompanies him to the main reading area. He spends the rest of the day there, researching about topics of his interest and, to his surprise, is even helped by Master Lorren, the Professor responsible for the management of the Archives. The next day, however, he is once again reminded that kindness is the exception, not the rule. Expecting to talk to Professor Hemme before he started the sympathy class, the main character arrives ten minutes earlier in the classroom. His hope was to avoid having to attend one more lecture which would probably be below his knowledge of the subject. Hemme, however, has different plans and arrives precisely at the time the class was supposed to start. Besides that, similar to what Ambrose did, the Master attempts to disconcert and embarrass him in front of other students. Despite Hemme’s efforts, though, Kvothe manages to keep his composure and trick the professor instead, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Unfortunately, [Hemme] did not appear early. The lecture hall was full when he entered by the hall’s lower door and climbed the three steps onto the raised wooden stage. He looked around the hall, eyes searching me out. “Ah yes, our young prodigy. Stand up, would you?” Uncertain as to what was going on, I stood. “I have pleasant news for everyone,” he said. “Mr. Kvothe here has assured me as to his complete grasp of the principles of sympathy. In doing so, he has offered to give today’s lecture.” He made an expansive gesture for me to join him on the stage. He smiled at me with hard eyes. “Mr. Kvothe?” He was mocking me, of course, expecting me to slink down into my seat, cowed and ashamed. But I had had enough of bullies in my life. So I climbed onto the stage and shook his hand. Using a good stage voice I spoke to the students, “I thank Master Hemme for this opportunity. I only hope that I can help him shed some light on this most important subject.” Having started this little game, Hemme was unable to stop it without looking foolish. As he shook my hand he gave me the look a wolf gives a treed cat. Smiling to himself, he left the stage to assume my recently vacated seat in the front row. Confident of my ignorance, he was willing to let the charade continue. I would never have gotten away with it if not for two of Hemme’s numerous flaws. First, his general stupidity in not believing what I had told him the day before. Second, his desire to see me embarrassed as thoroughly as possible. Plainly said, he was giving me enough rope to hang myself with. Apparently he didn’t realize that once a noose is tied, it will fit one neck as easily as another. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 282-281).

To Hemme’s astonishment, not only does Kvothe accept his offer, but he also conducts the class masterfully, which renders the student a round of applause from the audience at the end of the lecture. The Professor, on the other hand, is far from amused: in his

attempt at tricking the protagonist, it was him who was made a fool of. Besides that, his cockiness also granted him an injury. Therefore, not wanting to allow the student to escape unscathed from such confrontation, the Master decides to bring the matter to Herma, the University Chancellor, who summons a gathering with the other Professors to discuss what measures should be taken. During the gathering, Kvothe learns that Hemme has accused him of unauthorized use of sympathy and malfeasance. According to the University rules, any student charged with such offenses is to be punished by being bound to a pole, being publicly lashed across the back and then, by being expelled from the institution. By hearing the consequences of his deeds, the protagonist feels momentarily dismayed, fearing he would soon lose the place he had just achieved at the University. However, as the Chancellor asks him if he has something to say concerning the accusations, the memory of Abenthy, his first tutor, telling him that any student of his should be able to defend his ideas against an attack comes to him and Kvothe is prompted to action. He presents his account of the events to the gathering and is amazed to learn that Hemme had given the other masters only an abridged and tendentious version of the story. As they hear the new details, the gathering decision concerning the protagonist's punishment is considerably changed, as the following excerpt illustrates:

The Chancellor took up the reins again. "This changes things considerably. Hemme, do you still set grievance against Kvothe?" Hemme glared and said nothing. "I move to strike both grievances," Arwyl said. The physicker's old voice coming as a bit of a surprise. "If Hemme set him in front of the class, he gave permission. And it isn't malfeasance if you give him your hair and watch him stick it on the mommet's head." "I expected him to have more control over what he was doing," Hemme said, shooting a venomous look at me. "It's not malfeasance," Arwyl said doggedly, glaring at Hemme from behind his spectacles, the grandfatherly lines on his face forming a fierce scowl. "It would fall under reckless use of sympathy," Lorren interjected coolly. "Is that a motion to strike the previous two grievances and replace them with reckless use of sympathy?" asked the Chancellor, trying to regain a semblance of formality. "Aye," said Arwyl, still glaring fearsomely at Hemme through his spectacles. "All for the motion?" The Chancellor said. There was a chorus of ayes from everyone but Hemme. "Against?" Hemme remained silent. "Master Archivist, what is the discipline for reckless use of sympathy?" "If one is injured by reckless use of sympathy, the offending student will be whipped, singly, no more than seven times across the back." I wondered what book Master Lorren was reciting from. "Number of lashes sought?" Hemme looked at the other masters' faces, realizing the tide had turned against him. "My foot is blistered halfway to my knee," he gritted. "Three lashes." (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 292-293).

Even though he is still going to be physically punished, much to his relief the protagonist is no longer to be expelled. Encouraged by such turn of tide, Kvothe becomes bold and dares to enquire the gathering if his knowledge of sympathy demonstrated during Hemme's class should not be proof enough of his mastery of the basic principles of the

subject and, therefore, he should be admitted to the Arcanum²³. At that, Hemme reacts angrily, but is quickly silenced by the Chancellor, who, after briefly considering the matter, puts it to vote. To Kvothe's delight, most masters vote in favour of his admittance and thus, after only a few days of his joining the University, he becomes a member of the Arcanum (a deed that often takes several terms to be accomplished). As the gathering is dismissed, he returns to the dorms and is greeted with enthusiasm by his bunkmates, which makes him realise that professor Hemme is not particularly popular among the students. Soon after he arrives, however, the dormitory stewards comes to him and informs him that as a member of the Arcanum he has to sleep at a different room, with other members of his new rank, and no longer with his fellow first-term students. Different from the reception he got from his former bunkmates, though, as he enters his new dorm room, he is greeted with scowls, glares, and indifference. Kvothe attributes such resentment to the fact that he managed to be admitted to the Arcanum much quicker and easier than the average students do.

During the rest of the term, the protagonist still has to endure a series of challenges and hardships: persecution, prejudice, jealousy, and also financial difficulties. Therefore, even though he manages to finish his first term with academic success, he still must worry about a series of pressing matters, being the most urgent that of acquiring money to pay for the upcoming term tuition. As he struggles to find a solution to such problem, he is once again reminded of the fact that even though he is an outstanding student, he stands in a great disadvantage point in comparison to the other people at the institution:

I made a brief stop at the two Cealdish moneychangers on this side of the river. As I suspected, they wouldn't lend me a thin shim. While I wasn't surprised, the experience was sobering, reminding me again of how different I was from the other students. They had families paying their tuition, granting them allowances to cover their living expenses. They had reputable names they could borrow against in a pinch. They had possessions they could pawn or sell. If worse came to worst, they had homes to return to. I had none of these things. If I couldn't come up with eight more jots for tuition, I had nowhere in the world I could go. Borrowing from a friend seemed like the simplest option, but I valued my handful of friends too much to risk losing them over money. As my father used to say: "There are two sure ways to lose a friend, one is to borrow, the other to lend." Besides, I did my best to keep my desperate poverty to myself. Pride is a foolish thing, but it is a powerful force. I wouldn't ask them for money except as my very last resort. I briefly considered trying to cutpurse the money, but I knew it was a bad idea. If I were caught with my hand in someone's pocket, I would get more than a cuff round the head. At best I'd be jailed and forced to stand against the iron law. At worst, I'd end up on the horns and expelled for Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Arcanum. I couldn't risk it. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 353-354).

²³ A group within the University to which students who show proof of mastery of the basic notions of sympathy may be admitted. It may be compared to the postgraduation level in the actual world educational system.

With so much at stake in the protagonist's life, heroic deeds, typical in many fantasy narratives, appear much less frequently in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*. Busy as he is trying to survive in an environment pervaded by hostility and prejudice and being constantly haunted by the reality of poverty, Kvothe cannot be compared to the more classic fantasy hero, such as Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Not even as a *bourgeois* hero, such as Frodo or Bilbo Baggins can he be compared. The problems he must face as well as the society he is inserted in require that he act differently, that he be a hero of a different kind, and such matters are addressed in the following section.

3.2 A hero of a different kind: analysing the figure of the hero in Rothfuss' narratives

It is a widely recognised fact that at the centre of most literary genres lies the figure of the hero. In its more classical form, that is, deriving from medieval romances as well as epic and mythological texts such as *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, and *Parzival* (Wolfram von Eschenbach), the hero is often depicted as a righteous, mighty, and almost flawless figure. Due to its distinguished features, the heroes in such type of texts are frequently set to accomplish great deeds, typically with the help of either magical, supernatural, or divine intervention. Along with the vanquishing of mythological creatures, fighting and ending wars to restore the peace and prosperity to a land are some of the standard feats of the classical hero. However, with the rise of the novel in the 18th century, which rapidly supplanted the popularity of the romance and older texts, the figure of the hero underwent several changes. Living in a much more down-to-earth and closer-to-the-implied-reader setting, the modern hero tends to resemble the average human being. In addition, since they are often not as powerful or capable of superhuman prowess, the way this type of hero transits in the text, as well as the problems they face (and how they deal with them), are considerably distinct from that of the classical one. In other words, since their traits and the context they are inserted in have changed, so did their path and how they react to the unfolding of the plot.

Attebery (2014) claims that “[m]odern fantasy draws on a number of traditional narrative genres—sacred and secular legends, Märchen, epics, and ballads—and a wide array of cultural strands, including pre-Christian European, Native American, indigenous Australian, and Asian religious traditions.” (Attebery, 2014, p. 12). I propose, however, a slight reworking of the scholar's statement, namely that what he calls “modern fantasy” be

divided in “more traditional fantasy²⁴” and “more recent fantasy²⁵”. If such division is taken into consideration, it is possible to argue that in its more traditional form, fantasy literature tends to bear considerable similarity to the older texts mentioned above, primarily the epics and the mythological ones and mainly in what conflict and characterisation are concerned. By analysing such texts, it may be noticed that their plot revolves mostly around either the struggles of the hero against superior forces (*i.e.*: gods or forces of the nature), or against other men (in conflicts such as wars). In some cases, both conflicts are present. In the *Beowulf* elegy, for example, the hero must face the monstrous creature named Grendel as well as his vengeful mother (described as a water witch). Towards the end of the poem, the hero also faces a mighty dragon, which happens to be his demise. His three foes may be seen as superior forces. Concerning the ancient Greek epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, they tell not only of war deeds, but also of the strife of the heroes against the gods and mythic monsters. In its turn, the medieval chivalric romance *Parzival* concentrates on the heroic feats of Parzival in several battles against kings and other knights, often in the name of love. Similar motifs may be observed in a variety of other ancient texts, such as *The Nibelungenlied*, *The Eddas*, and *The Kalevala*.²⁶ In addition to having a similar plot (revolving around a similar conflict), the heroes in these narratives often present characteristics alike, such as righteousness, bravery, and fearlessness, which are frequently to be found in more traditional fantasy works as well. *The House of the Wolfings*, by William Morris, for example, depicting the wars of the Germanic tribes to defend themselves against the attacks of Imperial Rome, offers a good portrait of the conflict of the heroes against other men. On the other hand, the Tolkienian *The Silmarillion* is a good representation of the strife of heroes against superior forces, which can be seen in the long wars raged by men and the exiled elves against Melkor and his mighty army. Both types of struggles can be also seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, in which the free peoples of Middle Earth engage in gruesome wars against Sauron and his armies.

Concerning the works cited above, it is curious to notice that all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, follow what Tolkien (1997) refers to as the theory of courage or the theory of doomed heroism, in which he asserts that the heroic deeds in ancient texts were often motivated by the notion that all battles end, ultimately, in defeat: victory is only temporary and all kings, heroes and champions alike will, with time, meet death (or a similar force).

²⁴ By such term I refer to works by authors who greatly helped to establish and popularize the genre, such as George MacDonald, William Morris, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien.

²⁵ Fantasy works written in the last three decades or so.

²⁶ As it may be noticed, the present analysis considers only European texts. Different patterns are likely to be found if texts of different origins should be considered.

Thus, the only way to attain eternal glory is through deeds of valour in battle, which will consequently be remembered through songs and stories, making the heroes and their feats live forever. Such idea is well expressed in the chapter “The Battle of the Pellenor Fields” of *The Lord of Rings*, in which Éomer, upon discovering that his king had fallen in battle, spurs his knights into battle with a remarkable war cry:

Then without taking counsel or waiting for the approach of the men of the City, he spurred headlong back to the front of the great host, and blew a horn, and cried aloud for the onset. Over the field rang his clear voice calling: ‘Death! Ride, ride to ruin and the world’s ending!’ And with that the host began to move. But the Rohirrim sang no more. Death they cried with one voice loud and terrible, and gathering speed like a great tide their battle swept about their fallen king and passed, roaring away southwards. (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 1104-1105).

On the other hand, based on my intense study of a series of fantasy works published during the last three decades, I argue that there has been a considerable detachment from more recent fantasy in regard to its more classical form described above. Starting by the type of conflict presented in the plot, rather than addressing the struggle of the heroes with superior forces or with other men, contemporary fantasy tends to revolve around the struggles of the main characters against society and, at times, also against themselves. As for the deeds of the heroes, these are rarely motivated by the Tolkienian theory mentioned above, but often by their will to survive in a society that is hostile towards them. In this sense, if more traditional fantasy texts tend to pay considerable resemblance to myth and epic texts, its contemporary counterpart tend to bear likenesses to a different literary genre, namely the novel, especially in its subgenre social realism. Arguing that a genre that has the impossible at its foundation bears resemblance to more realistic fiction might sound contradictory at first. However, taking Tolkien’s (2001) and Attebery’s (2014) claims that fantasy literature is made of elements present in the primary world (even if often rearranged) and that such primary world material tends to be used to breach the gap between the fantasy world of the narrative and the actual world of the reader, the argument above becomes more meaningful.

Rising during the 18th century as a reaction to romanticism as well as the problems deriving from the growing industrialism and growing in popularity in the 19th century, some of the social realism key elements are the depiction of the struggles of the poor (often with harsh honesty) and the sharp critique of societal flaws and of the ruling powers. Typical examples of this subgenre are the Dickensian novel *Great Expectations*, and the classic *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky. The plot of these novels revolves mostly around both the moral struggles of the heroes (conflict of men against themselves) and their battles to survive

amidst the sheer poverty that afflict them (conflict of men against society). Surrounded by more urging problems, the main characters are left with little or no room for great deeds of heroism (though surviving in dreary conditions should be regarded as a heroic deed itself). Taking these arguments into consideration, an analysis of Kvothe's path in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* gives insight into what extent it is detached from more traditional fantasy and, at the same time, approaches social realism.

As it was argued in chapter one, the setting in Rothfuss' novels is that of the traditional fantasy: a three-dimensional secondary world which possesses an inner consistency of reality. Notwithstanding, the action in the narrative in its bulk is mostly concerned with events typical of the primary world. Differently from the plot of fantasies such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and even the much more recent *Harry Potter* series, in which every other chapter the main characters stumble over magical creatures and face mighty battles against powerful supernatural beings, the events in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* seem to be much less concerned with the fantastic. Apart from the confrontation with the Scrael and the mysterious murder of Kvothe's family at the beginning of the first novel, the only other more remarkable fantastic happening takes place towards the end of the second work, during the protagonist's incursion into the Fae realm and his stay with Felurian. It is true that *The Wise Man's Fear* has a much more fantasy aura when compared to its predecessor. However, considering both novels' length, it is possible to argue that fantastic events function more as a background setting for a plot that is much more connected to the factual world. Through these lenses, the death of Kvothe's parents caused by supernatural forces puts into motion not only the main character's desire to uncover the mystery and avenge his family, but also, in a much larger scale, most of the misfortunes he is to face in the years to come.

Interestingly enough, most of the struggles ensuing in consequence of Kvothe's becoming an orphan have nothing to do with the fantastic. If on one hand the possession of the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* puts Frodo and his fellow hobbits in direct and constant conflict with beings and forces they had only heard of in stories, Kvothe's tragedy brings him challenges that are more connected to the factual world, *videlicet* poverty, hunger, and much more exacerbated prejudice. Therefore, the efforts of the protagonist in Rothfuss' novels may be seen as a quest for his own survival, rather than as a quest to save the world or a people, as it is often the case in more traditional fantasy. As already mentioned previously in this work, Kvothe spent his first years of orphanhood as a street kid in Tarbean, a big city that offered sheer hostility to the poor. The years spent there taught him the skill he would need

the most through the course of his life: that of surviving. Even if it meant to resort to degrading and risky means, as the excerpt below demonstrates:

I had been in Tarbean for years at this point. Three birthdays had slipped by unnoticed and I was just past fifteen. I knew how to survive Waterside. I had become an accomplished beggar and thief. Locks and pockets opened to my touch. I knew which pawnshops bought goods “from uncle” with no questions asked. I was still ragged and frequently hungry, but I was in no real danger of starving. I had been slowly building my rainy-day money. Even after a hard winter that had frequently forced me to pay for a warm spot to sleep, my hoard was over twenty iron pennies. It was like a dragon’s treasure to me. I had grown comfortable there. But aside from the desire to add to my rainy-day money I had nothing to live for. Nothing driving me. Nothing to look forward to. My days were spent looking for things to steal and ways to entertain myself. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 189).

As the quote above shows, his years as a street kid had taught Kvothe enough so that he could stave off starvation. However, it was still not enough to eradicate the problem; poverty and hunger would still haunt him for years to come, frequently bringing him to dreary situations requiring desperate measures. As his second term at the University is about to begin, such notion becomes once again evident: even though the protagonist manages to do well during admissions²⁷, his tuition for the second term is set to three Talents and 9 Jots, an amount that represents 8 Jots more than all the money he had managed to raise during his first term. Apart from borrowing from the few friends he has, Kvothe has no noble means to get the money he needs in due time to pay for his tuition. Spurred by pride, the protagonist opts for not asking his friends for help, which leaves him with a risky option: borrowing money from a gaelet. Gaelets are, the protagonist explains, dangerous individuals who lend money at high interest rates to desperate people. The main problem of doing business with such individuals is that if, for any reason, one does not manage to pay them back in due time, the consequences are severe, ranging from harsh physical aggression to cold-blooded murder. Aware of the risks and being in dreary need, Kvothe decides to search for a gaelet nonetheless.

After visiting several not very respectable taverns and a few other questionable establishments, the protagonist discovers that the person he is looking for lives in Imre, a city in the outskirts of the University, and is called Devi. As he reaches the gaelet’s house, he is surprised to learn that rather than the dangerous-looking man he was expecting to find, Devi was a young-looking, short girl with a pixielike face. As negotiations ensue, Kvothe learns

²⁷ A process similar to an interdisciplinary oral test through which both new and returning students must go at the end of each academic term. Students’ performance in such test determines how much their next term’s tuition will be set to. The better the performance, the lower the tuition.

that Devi's terms are harsher than he had expected: not only does she lend money on exorbitant interest rates, but she also requires that the borrower gives her a couple of drops of their own blood as collateral. Apart from being a gaelet, Devi is also a former member of the Arcanun, which means that possessing a little blood of her clients, she can make sure they will pay her back, otherwise they are at a risk of having it used for nefarious means against them, such as malfeasance. Being a member of the Arcanun as well, Kvothe knows that anyone in possession of any amount of his blood can inflict him enormous pain and even death if they opt to use it in ill-intended sympathy. Seeing the protagonist's astonishment, Devi assures him that she has no ill intent and that even though he does not manage to pay her back in due time she is willing to negotiate. She will only resort to extreme measures if the borrower proves to be extremely uncooperative. Nonetheless, Kvothe reckons her terms are too risky and leaves the place without making a deal with her. Still without a solution for his pressing problem, the protagonist goes over his options one more time, as the excerpt below shows:

After leaving Devi's I paced the streets of Imre, restless and irritated, trying to get my thoughts in order. Trying to think of a way around my problem. I had a decent chance of paying off the two-talent loan. I hoped to move up the ranks in the Fishery soon. Once I was allowed to pursue my own projects, I could start earning real money. All I needed was to stay in classes long enough. It was just a matter of time. That's really what I was borrowing: time. One more term. Who knew what opportunities might present themselves in the next two months? But even as I tried to talk myself into it, I knew the truth. It was a bad idea. It was begging for trouble. I would swallow my pride and see if Wil or Sim or Sovoy could lend me the eight jots I needed. I sighed, resigning myself to a term of sleeping outside and scavenging meals where I could find them. At least it couldn't be worse than my time in Tarbean. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 361).

As the quote above indicates, Kvothe's options are far from ideal: he could either borrow enough money from Devi to afford his tuition and his basic needs for a term at the risk of suffering malfeasance, or he could borrow the minimum from his friends and spend the entire term being homeless with no means to pay for his basic needs. Based on the challenges imposed to the main character and returning to the matter of heroism discussed prior in this section, some interesting considerations arise: could Kvothe's disposition to resort to extreme measures in the face of dreary situations so that he can survive be considered an act of heroism? If yes, what moral dilemmas are at stake and being put into check in the narrative? If not, should the protagonist be regarded as some type of bad or immoral hero? Such questions require that the dichotomy of good and evil in fantasy literature be carefully discussed.

Typically, in both ancient texts and more traditional fantasy works there is a clear division between the inherently good and the intrinsically evil. In the *Beowulf* elegy, for example, the hero is described as a mighty and fearless warrior, a flawless character that works towards the well-being of the ones in need. In other words, it can be argued that in the said poem, the king of the Geats is depicted as inherently good. The monsters, on the other hand, are consistently described as fearful demons and beasts who threaten the lives of whatever is human, which means that in the imagination of the poet and his contemporaries such creatures could only be seen as evil. Such notion is echoed, though with considerable differences, in more traditional fantasy texts such as *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Melkor, for example, is from the beginning of the narrative described as the causer of dissonance. At no moment in the narrative are his intentions regarded as something other than disruptive, chaotic, and, thus, evil. The same happens with his successor, Sauron, whose sole purpose in the narrative is that of dominating and slaving others. Queen Jadis' purpose in the *Narnia* series is not much different from that of the villains in the Tolkienian legacy. As the character herself says, her will is to dominate and to be served:

“But the people?” gasped Digory. “What people, boy?” asked the Queen. “All the ordinary people,” said Polly, “who’d never done you any harm. And the women, and the children, and the animals.” “Don’t you understand?” said the Queen (still speaking to Digory). “I was the Queen. They were all *my* people. What else were they there for but to do my will?” (Lewis, 1983, p. 67. Emphasis on the original).

As for the heroes in such texts, although prone to do good, they are not always flawless; the recognition that they may yield to temptation is often present, as it may be argued, for example, from the passages of *The Lord of the Rings* in which characters such as Gandalf, Galadriel, and Aragorn are offered the One Ring, but refuse to accept it knowing they would probably be corrupted by it. On the other hand, if the heroes in these texts happen to succumb to temptation, they are frequently given the chance to redeem themselves. Such is the case with Edmund in the *Narnia* books and Boromir from the Tolkienian novel: after betraying the Narnians and his own kin, Edmund is redeemed by Aslan's sacrifice and by his valiant deeds during the rest of the story. So much so that at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* he is crowned as King Edmund the Just. As for Boromir, even though he succumbs to temptation and attempts to take the One Ring from Frodo, almost ruining the fellowship's endeavours to destroy it, he is redeemed by his heroic struggle against the Uruk-hai to protect the hobbits. As he lay dying and grieving for having yielded to temptation, Aragorn comes to him and comforts him:

‘I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,’ he said. ‘I am sorry. I have paid.’ His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there. ‘They have gone: the Halflings: the Orcs have taken them. I think they are not dead. Orcs bound them.’ He paused and his eyes closed wearily. After a moment he spoke again. ‘Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.’ ‘No!’ said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. ‘You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!’ Boromir smiled. (Tolkien, 2007, p. 538).

Despite not resisting the influence of the One Ring and acting against Frodo, Boromir died as a hero, rather than as a traitor or villain. Him was given the chance to redeem himself. Such is not presented to the said evil characters in these narratives, who are often labelled as either virtually beyond salvation, as is the case with Sméagol and Saruman, or as inherently evil, as is the case of Queen Jadis, the orcs, and Sauron. Therefore, though with slight differences, both ancient texts and traditional fantasy typically present a clear separation between who or what is good and who or what is not. On contemporary fantasy, however, such distinction is becoming more and more shady, since characters are rarely labelled as simply good or evil, but rather as individuals acting according to their beliefs and/or needs. In other words, their actions, be they “good” or “bad”, are often a product, a consequence, of the circumstances they find themselves in. Therefore, it can be argued that the contemporary fantasy hero may be seen as approaching the complex fragmented condition of human beings, which is neither intrinsically good, nor inherently evil, but a mixture of in-betweens resulting of past experiences, traumas, and other particularities. Consequently, novels such as *The Poppy War*, *The Witcher* saga as well as Rothfuss’ novels and several others, depicting heroes facing moral dilemmas and resorting to extreme or unconventional measures are becoming more and more common in contemporary fantasy. The arguments above considered, the following paragraphs discuss some of Kvothe’s most emblematic deeds throughout the narrative.

According to the protagonist’s account, the first time he was referred to as a sort of hero was during his first year at the University, after an almost-tragic incident at the Fishery²⁸. As the main character is working in an artificing project, hoping to raise some money with it, he is surprised by a sudden commotion caused by the leakage of an extremely corrosive and flammable gas from a huge canister. Aware that a great fire would soon ensue, the students working at the place start panicking and evacuating the place. One of the students, however, gets trapped in the fire and would probably have perished were it not for Kvothe’s nerve and

²⁸ Name given to the vast workshop under the management of Master Kilvin. Also known as “the Artificery”, it is the place where Kilvin’s students and helpers pursue their projects related to artificing.

presence of spirit. Using the resources available as well as his skills as an Arcanist, the protagonist manages to rescue the student and exit the place. Due to the main character's efforts, the rescued student escaped the fire barely singed. Kvothe, however, has to be taken to the Medica²⁹, because due to the inhaling of the toxic smoke, he faints right after exiting the fishery. Luckily enough, neither the intoxication nor the burns he received are too serious and, therefore, he is soon allowed to leave the place. Later, on the same day, as the protagonist sits down at a tavern to enjoy a well-earned meal after an unusually eventful day, he notices that news of the fire had quickly spread:

I limped back to Anker's and found the common room buzzing with excited folk talking about the fire in the Fishery. Not wanting to answer any questions, I slunk into an out-of-the-way table and got one of the serving girls to bring me a bowl of soup and some bread. As I ate, my finely tuned eavesdropper's ears picked out pieces of the stories people were telling. It was only then, hearing it from other people, that I realized what I had done. I was used to people talking about me. As I've said, I had been actively building a reputation for myself. But this was different; this was real. People were already embroidering the details and confusing parts, but the heart of the story was still there. I had saved Fela, rushed into the fire and carried her to safety. Just like Prince Gallant out of some storybook. It was my first taste of being a hero. I found it quite to my liking. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 493-493).

During the next chapters in *The Name of the Wind*, Kvothe's reputation as a storybook hero capable of valiant and wondrous things continue to grow. After hearing rumours of a peculiar event that could offer him insight into the reason why his family was murdered, the protagonist travels to a nearby town named Trebon. Upon getting there, rather than discovering useful information about what he was looking for, the protagonist finds himself entangled in a most pressing affair: saving the town and its villagers of a frenzied oversized fire-breathing lizard. The creature, referred to as a Draccus, lives in woods, has herbivorous habits, and tends to be harmless. The one threatening the village, however, had been feeding on denner trees, which saps are used to produce a highly potent and addicting opiate called denner resin. Therefore, the once friendly and docile creature turns rampant, exits his natural habitat and heads towards Trebon. Upon seeing it, Kvothe feels compelled to do something and, once again, by using his Arcanist abilities, displays a heroic deed in front of several villagers: he manages to kill the deranged Draccus and extinguish the roaring fire caused by it. In the process, however, the protagonist falls from the roof of a half-burned building, hits his head, and becomes unconscious. As he regains consciousness, he finds himself on a bed at an inn and, after a while, learns from the mayor and constable of the town what had happened:

²⁹ The University's medicine department

I had been found unconscious atop the iron wheel that had killed the demon³⁰. The local sawbone doctor had patched me up as best he could, and, unfamiliar with the remarkable thickness of my skull, expressed serious doubts as to whether or not I would ever wake. At first the general opinion was that I was merely an unlucky bystander, or that I had somehow pried the wheel off the church. However, my miraculous recovery combined with the fact that I had charred a hole into the bar downstairs encouraged people to finally take notice of what a young boy and an old widow had been saying all day: that when the old oak had gone up like a torch, they had seen someone standing on the roof of the church. He was lit by the fire below. His arms were raised in front of him, almost as if he were praying.... Eventually the mayor and constable ran out of things to say to fill the silence, and merely sat there looking anxiously back and forth from me to each other. It occurred to me they didn't see a penniless, ragged boy sitting across from them. They saw a mysterious battered figure who had killed a demon. I saw no reason to dissuade them. In fact it was high time I caught a piece of luck in this business. If they considered me some sort of hero or holy man, it gave me useful leverage. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 645-646).

After the unusual incident in Trebon, Kvothe starts, little by little, to be regarded not only as a hero, but also as a person possessing superhuman, holy powers. As the protagonist reflects upon the deeds that he had performed during the last days, he admits that it was an unassuming one that made him actually feel like a hero for the first time. A couple of days after the incident with the Draccus, Kvothe is preparing to leave the town when a thirteen-year-old girl comes to him and says the peculiar events of the former days had left her worried and afraid that demons would come and get her. As she starts crying, the protagonist is moved by her tears and attempts to calm her down. He gives her a trinket he had manufactured in the Fishery and tells her it is a protective charm that would make her safe from demon's attacks. To make his story more convincing, he even recites some lines from a book in the Tema language, unknown to the girl, and tells her that by doing so he had tuned the charm to her and therefore she would still be safe even if she broke or lost the trinket. Upon hearing that, the girl is relieved from her fears and with an exulting countenance embraces and kisses the main character on the cheek to thank him. She, then, exits the room they were in and Kvothe is left there wondering about what had happened:

Over the last month I had pulled a woman from a blazing inferno. I had called fire and lightning down on assassins and escaped to safety. I had even killed something that could have been either a dragon or a demon, depending on your point of view. But there in that room was the first time I actually felt like any sort of hero. If you are looking for a reason for the man I would eventually become, if you are looking for a beginning, look there. (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 650-651).

Considering the excerpt above, it may be argued that the protagonist believes that heroism is more connected to small, unassuming deeds of compassion and care towards the ones in need, than to the great feats of valour and might performed by heroes in more

³⁰ Rather than seeing the Draccus for what it really was, the superstitious people from Trebon believed the creature was a demon.

traditional fantasy and ancient texts. Such assumption becomes even more interesting if the idea that his belief may be connected to the hardships he faced after losing his family. Growing up as an impoverished and orphaned child, Kvothe was seldom shown kindness and compassion towards his dreary situation, being frequently treated with hostility and violence. Therefore, it is most likely that the protagonist understands how difficult it is to feel helpless and afraid and have nobody to turn to. In this sense, Kvothe's belief that true heroism is connected to acts related to things he wished he had had as he was growing up is not surprising. In other words, it may be argued that some of the protagonist's actions are guided, even if unconsciously, by a desire to be the hero he needed but did not have. If such argument is held as true, it could explain why Kvothe behaves a certain way, mainly towards characters he believes find themselves in need of care and compassion, such as the girl in the excerpt above and, most of all, Auri, the outcast former University student that lives in a system of ruins below that institution.

All the deeds discussed above may be considered, although to different extents, heroic. However, as argued earlier in this section, Kvothe's actions are often guided by his will to survive in a society that does not show much compassion towards him. Therefore, many times throughout *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* the character will refer to events in his life that are not traditionally regarded as heroic, but rather as controversial or even extreme. Although not proud of them, the protagonist frequently attempts to justify his unconventional actions by resorting to the reasons that led him to do them. Such idea is present already at the beginning of the first novel, as Chronicler is trying to persuade the main character to allow him to write down Kvothe's book of deeds:

“Some stories paint you as little more than a redhanded killer.” “I’m that too.” Kote turned to polish the counter behind the bar. He shrugged again, not as easily as before. “I’ve killed men and things that were more than men. Every one of them deserved it.” Chronicler shook his head slowly. “The stories are saying ‘assassin’ not ‘hero.’ Kvothe the Arcane and Kvothe the Kingkiller are two very different men.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 48).

According to the excerpt above, what defines the protagonist as either good or evil, hero or murderer, is the way his deeds are perceived and interpreted. Such distinction is made, therefore, based on point of view; thus, it may be argued that most judgement directed to his acts is subject to some sort of bias, either towards or against the protagonist. The problem of such dichotomic arguments, based on “eithers” and “ors”, is that it tends to disregard the complexity of a given (literary) figure: Kvothe is limited to be either good or bad, but never both. The flaw of such approach becomes even more evident if the classic argument from St.

Augustine is taken into consideration. For this philosopher and theologian of the 5th century, evil is but the absence of good and is the result of free will. Consequently, even though one can do good, they are still subject to errors or bad decisions resulting from their free will. Consequently, it is possible to argue that even though one has a good nature and intent to do good, the so-called evil actions may arise from time to time because of given circumstances. Tolkien, whose literary works constantly present the interplay between good and evil, also discussed the matter, as it can be seen in the following excerpt from one of his letters to his editor Milton Waldman, in which the author argues that “[t]here cannot be any ‘story’ without a fall [...]”. (Tolkien, 2000, p. 147). Maybe the most classic representation of such argument in Tolkien’s works appears in his *The Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo, one of the heroes in the narrative, yields to the temptation of the One Ring and attempts to claim it to himself. Such act does not make Frodo less of a hero or less of a good character, but rather closer to human beings in the factual world, who are neither entirely good, nor entirely bad, but capable of both. It is, therefore, based in such arguments that Kvothe’s deeds below are discussed and analysed.

In the first half of *The Wise Man’s Fear* Kvothe is greeted with the news that a very rich and noble figure, the Maer Alveron, is in search of someone that is “[...] clever, well-spoken, mannerly, educated, and discreet.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 391). Most importantly, the youngster should be good with words and be musically talented. In other words, the Maer is in search of someone precisely like Kvothe. Encouraged by the prospect of obtaining a patron that could greatly help him obtain some sort of financial stability, consequently granting him the possibility to have the means to live properly and pursue his academic endeavours, the main character decides to leave the University for a period of time and sets towards Severen, a major city ruled by the Maer, which is located in the kingdom of Vintas, in the East of that secondary world. After a long and tempestuous journey, the protagonist reaches his objective and, after much effort, he manages to obtain Maer Alveron’s favour and be well seen in his court. However, before Kvothe is given any substantial financial aid from the Maer, the last bids him fulfil a last mission for him: track and execute a group of bandits that had been waylaying his tax collectors. Surprised and slightly daunted by the Maer’s request, but still not wanting to lose the noble’s favour, the main character accepts to accomplish the mission. He is, then, put in charge of a group of three mercenaries and one tracker and sets to the Eld, a nearby vast and old forest where the bandits are supposedly hiding. The search for the wrongdoers lasts several weeks, but when Kvothe’s group finally track them, the weight of what he has set to do, as the following excerpt demonstrates, starts to burden the protagonist:

I brought out the rag that held the pinch of ash and a slender piece of iron, holding them ready in my hand. My stomach churned as I thought about what we had been sent here to do: hunt and kill men. True, they were outlaws and murderers, but men nonetheless. I deepened my breathing and tried to relax. (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 670-671).

Nonetheless, when the time comes to do what he had come to do, urged by the fact that his company is largely outnumbered and driven by his will to survive, the protagonist manages to perform the deed in one of the most enthralling and gruesome passages in the entire novel:

“What are we going to do?” Marten repeated. “What if they’re hurt?” What if they’re dead? I closed my eyes and slid down below the ridgeline, trying to gain a moment of clear thought. My foot bumped something soft and solid. The dead sentry. A dark thought occurred. I drew a deep breath and threw myself into the Heart of Stone. Deep. Deeper than I had ever been before. All fear left me, all hesitation. I took hold of the body by its wrist and began to drag it up toward the lip of the ridge. He was a heavy man, but I hardly noticed. “Marten, may I use your dead?” I asked absently. The words were in a pleasant baritone, the calmest voice I had ever heard. Without waiting for an answer, I looked over the ridgeline toward the camp. I saw one of the men behind the wall bending his bow for another shot. I drew my long, slender knife of good Ramston steel and fixed the image of the Bowman in my mind. I set my teeth and stabbed the dead sentry in the kidney. The knife went in slowly, as if I were stabbing heavy clay instead of flesh. A scream rose above the sound of the thunder. The man fell, his bow flying wildly out of his hands. Another mercenary stooped to look at his companion. I refocused and stabbed the sentry in his other kidney, using both hands this time. There was a second scream, shriller than the first. More a keen than a scream, I thought in an odd separate corner of my mind. “Don’t shoot yet,” I cautioned Marten calmly, not looking away from the camp. “They still don’t know where we are.” I drew the knife out, refocused, and drove it coolly into the sentry’s eye. A man stood upright behind the wooden wall, blood pouring down his face from underneath his clutching hands. Two of his comrades rose, trying to get him back below the wooden parapet. My knife rose and fell and one of them toppled to the ground even as his hands rose to his own bleeding face. “Holy God,” Marten choked. “Dear holy God.” I set the knife against the sentry’s throat and surveyed the camp. Their military efficiency was falling apart as they began to panic. One of the wounded men continued to scream, high and piercing over the grumbling thunder. (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 679-680).

In the excerpt above, Kvothe resorts to sympathy to gain advantage over the numerous foes his company and he had to defeat. The way he decides to apply his arcanist knowledge, however, is rather unorthodox: he makes a mental binding between a dead sentry they had slain and the other living bandits still alive. After the binding was established, whatever Kvothe did to the dead sentry would be felt by his living peers. For this reason, whenever the protagonist stabbed the corpse, one of the other sentries was mortally wounded. Kvothe’s unusual application of his arcanist knowledge in the battlefield may be compared to the innumerable times science and scientific knowledge was (mis)used to develop devices of mass extermination. A rather ignoble application of knowledge with the sole purpose of winning wars and inflicting pain. Nonetheless, it was the only resource the protagonist had

available to perform the deed he was commanded to do and, at the same time, assure that his companions and he escaped the confrontation alive. This said, it is likely that some may resort to the *cliché* that desperate times require desperate measures. The way the situation is framed, however, demands a much more careful debate. For example, it is important to consider the reasons that put the protagonist into such a dreary position.

Kvothe decided to come to the Maer Alveron because he hoped to obtain a patron that could help him have a better life. Before he could obtain the Maer's favour, however, he had to prove he was worth it. Such endeavour *per se* almost resulted in the protagonist's undoing, as it is described in chapters fifty-nine to sixty-four of *The Wise Man's Fear*, in which Kvothe is almost sentenced to death in his attempt to convince the Maer that one of his servants had been poisoning him. After the situation is cleared and the protagonist is deemed innocent, he starts to be regarded by the Maer as a trustworthy person, as the excerpt below shows:

“Kvothe, you have proved perfectly trustworthy and I regret any doubts I briefly entertained about you.” He sipped and swallowed before continuing. “Unfortunately, I cannot allow news of a poisoning to spread. Especially with the poisoner escaped.” He gave me a significant look. “It would interfere with the matter we discussed before.” I nodded. Widespread knowledge that his own arcanist had nearly killed him would hardly help Alveron win the hand of the woman he hoped to marry. He continued. “Unfortunately this need for silence also precludes my giving you a reward you all too richly deserve. Were the situation different, I would consider the gift of lands mere token thanks. I would grant you title too. This power my family still retains, free from the controlment of the king.” My head reeled at the implication of what the Maer was saying as he continued. “However, if I were to do such a thing, there would be need of explanation. And an explanation is the one thing I cannot afford.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 490).

Although grateful, the Maer is still reluctant to give Kvothe the reward he deserves. Such situation urges the protagonist to remain in the Maer's court for a longer period and make further attempts, if not to win, to remain in the nobleman's favour. Such enterprise demands that the protagonist fulfil several of Alveron's requests, such as aiding him on courting Meluan Lackless³¹ and getting rid of the said bandits that had been waylaying his tax collectors. That is why the protagonist accepts, even though reluctantly, to track and execute the waylayers. He is bound both to the Maer's promise to finally reward him and his fear to contradict a powerful figure, as it may be argued from the following excerpt:

I gave him a congratulatory nod. “You've already planned it better than I could, your grace. It hardly seems as if you need my help at all.” “Quite the contrary,” he said. “I still need someone with a little sense to lead them.” He looked at me meaningfully. “Someone who understands magic. Someone I can trust.” I felt a sudden sinking sensation. Alveron got to his feet, smiling warmly. “Twice now you have served me beyond all expectations. Are you familiar with the expression ‘third

³¹ A noblewoman who is the sole heiress of the ancient Lackless family.

time pays for all'?" Again, there was only one reasonable answer to that question. "Yes, your grace." (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 557-558).

Days after accepting the Maer's request and already attempting to track the waylayers in the Eld, Kvothe concludes that Alveron's request may be imbued with evil intent towards him, that is, the Maer could have sent the protagonist to perform a task that had little chances of success and that could lead him to his own death. In case Kvothe failed on his endeavour and died, the Maer would no longer be indebted to him for saving his life. Such considerations are important to the present discussion because they give insight to a most reoccurring issue in the primary world: that of the less favoured classes being put into obnoxious and controversial situations by oppressive ruling powers that are often concerned with their own good and benefit, rather than with the development of politics that would assure that even the most in need part of the population could have the means to lead a proper life. This idea becomes clear in the chapter "Another road, another forest" of *The Wise Man's Fear*, in which one of the mercenaries in Kvothe's company realises he is fighting for one thing that he does not agree with:

"I can't believe I'm defending tax collectors," Dedan muttered disgustedly. Hespe gave a throaty laugh. "You're defending civilization," I corrected. "And you're keeping the roads safe. Besides, Maer Alveron does important things with those taxes." I grinned. "Like pay us." "That's what I'm fighting for," Marten said. (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 582).

Dedan's indignation together with the protagonist's response to it is filled with a sort of irony that points to a sad reality that pervades Rothfuss' novels from its beginning: the taxes charged by the powerful figures in the novels, like the King and the Maer, are oppressive to such an extent that a parcel of that secondary world's population can barely afford to pay them and still have enough means to maintain themselves. Nonetheless, some people that are also part of the unfavoured portion of the population see themselves joining a cause they do not believe so that they can have the means to survive. In this sense, I come back to my previous point concerning the deeds of the protagonists in several contemporary fantasy novels: rather than being labelled as either "good" or "evil", they should be seen as a product of the circumstances they find themselves in. Such discussion was already present, though somehow different, in *The Lord of the Rings*, namely in the chapter "Of herbs and stewed rabbit", in which Samwise Gamgee reflects upon what might have led the men fighting the Gondor soldiers into the gruesome war being waged across Middle-earth:

It was Sam's first view of a battle of Men against Men, and he did not like it much. He was glad that he could not see the dead face. He wondered what the man's name was and where he came from; and if he was really evil of heart, or what lies or

threats had led him on the long march from his home; and if he would not really rather have stayed there in peace [...]. (Tolkien, 2007, p. 864).

Sam's consideration alludes largely to the problematic at hand in Rothfuss' novels, for it approaches critical questions regarding good and evil: what lies behind one's decision to perform drastic actions, such as joining a cause that they may not even believe in? What makes one risk their own life in an endeavour that is not exactly theirs? It may be argued, then, that there could be at least three reasons behind such decisions, namely exacerbated nationalism, threats as well as misleading promises incoming from ruling powers, or sheer need, which I believe is the case in Rothfuss' novels. Kvothe and his companions did not join the Maer's cause because they believe it, nor because they are simply "evil of heart" to quote Sam's words, but rather because they found themselves in dreary situations that required that they resorted to extreme measures. The points above considered, it is important to highlight that I do not intend to claim that the ends justify the means, nor that Kvothe's deeds should be seen lightly, but rather to argue for a reading and thinking that goes beyond the traditional labelling of (fictional) characters as either "good" or "evil" and that favours a more human perception of one's actions, thus prompting a less judgmental attitude that acknowledges that behind most decisions lie a series of motivations that are not always known to the observers. Thus said, there is one more situation in *The Wise Man's Fear* that I would like to discuss before concluding the section.

After the gruesome incident in the Eld, Kvothe goes through a series of further adventures: he follows Felurian into the Fae realm, he returns from it and tells his tale to his worried companions, he travels to Ademre in the Northeast of Temerant to learn the Adem culture and their sword and hand-to-hand art of combat, and finally starts his returning journey to the University. After a few days of being on the road, as the sun was setting and the protagonist was hoping to find somewhere to stay the night and rest, he is greeted with a most pleasing sight: a group of troupers were camping in a nearby wood. Upon close examination of the encampment, Kvothe identifies signs that lead him to believe that these troupers were Edema Ruh: "Troupers. What's better, I recognized familiar markings on the side of one of the wagons. To me they stood out more brightly than the fire. Those signs meant these were true troupers. My family, the Edema Ruh." (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 945). As he approaches the troupers, he is first greeted with suspicion, for it was already night and Kvothe appearance caught them by surprise. When they realise that the protagonist is of the Edema Ruh, however, all suspicion is put aside and Kvothe is welcomed as the Ruh tradition prescribes. As the night went on and Kvothe learns more about their hosts, it is his time to

grow suspicious: the protagonist learns that, some days before, not only had the said Edema Ruh troupe pillaged a nearby village, but they had also abducted two teenage girls from it, who they had been holding captive for depraved reasons. Upon learning about such hideous doings, the protagonist concludes that he must do something to set the girls free and to defend the honour of the Edema Ruh. Thus, he manages to poison the food and drink of his hosts and kill them. Reflecting on the hideous deed, the protagonist admits his was not an honourable act: “It was a terrible night, but I found them all. There was no honor to it, no glory. But there was justice of a sort, and blood, and in the end I brought their bodies back.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 958). In the following morning, upon seeing a row of dead bodies in the middle of the encampment, one of the abducted girls enquires what had happened during the night. Kvothe, then, attempts to explain the reasoning behind what he had done:

When I finally spoke, my voice sounded strange to my own ears. “All of the Edema Ruh are one family,” I explained. “Like a closed circle. It doesn’t matter if some of us are strangers to others, we are still family, still close. We have to be this way, because we are always strangers wherever we go. We are scattered, and people hate us. “We have laws. Rules we follow. When one of us does a thing that cannot be forgiven or mended, if he jeopardizes the safety or the honor of the Edema Ruh, he is killed and branded with the broken circle to show he is no longer one of us. It is rarely done. There is rarely a need.” I pulled the iron from the fire and walked to the next body. Otto. I pressed it to the back of his hand and listened to it hiss. “These were not Edema Ruh. But they made themselves out to be. They did things no Edema would do, so I am making sure the world knows they were not part of our family. The Ruh do not do the sort of things that these men did.” “But the wagons,” she protested. “The instruments.” “They were not Edema Ruh,” I said firmly. “They probably weren’t even real troupers, just a group of thieves who killed a band of Ruh and tried to take their place.” Krin stared at the bodies, then back at me. “So you killed them for pretending to be Edema Ruh?” “For pretending to be Ruh? No.” I put the iron back in the fire. “For killing a Ruh troupe and stealing their wagons? Yes. For what they did to you? Yes.” (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 960-961).

Soon after the above dialogue takes place, Kvothe suspicions are confirmed: agonizing on his deathbed, one of the troupers admits that they had attacked and killed a Ruh troupe and had been pretending to be from it. After the dreadful incident, Kvothe returns the abducted girls to their village. His conscience, however, is heavy and he shows signs that his deed had left markings on him that would plague him for many a time to come: “I remembered the blood. The way it had felt against my hands. The thickness of it. I had never killed anyone like that before. Not coldly, not close up. I remembered how warm their blood had been. [...] I lay awake a long while. When I finally slept, the dreams were worse.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 968). Besides having to deal with his own heavy conscience, the protagonist must face further trouble, for when he arrives at the town the girls he rescued live, he is treated with a mix of suspicion and hostility. Misguided by their prejudice towards the Edema Ruh, the villagers accuse the protagonist of being part of the group who had kidnapped the two young ladies.

Kvothe, then, must explain that the ones who had committed such atrocities were not Ruh. The protagonist could assure them of that because being a Ruh himself, he knew that no one claiming to be of the Ruh family would ever act like that. Notwithstanding, it is only after much ado that the main character manages to calm the villagers' spirits and is, then, thanked by the kidnapped girls' families for having rescued their daughters. On the other hand, the authorities of the town cannot overlook the fact that Kvothe had killed several people to save the girls; thus, they advise him to leave the village at once if he wants to avoid being punished for his deed. As he prepares to leave, the mayor of the town approaches the protagonist and enquires if there was anything they could do to thank him for what he had done. Kvothe's response is considerably emblematic: "Remember it was bandits who took them," [he] said as [he] turned to leave. "And remember it was one of the Edema Ruh who brought them back." (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 987).

The future consequences resulting from Kvothe's incident with the troupers, as the protagonist shows to be aware of, would not be few and were bound to bring him further trouble. Therefore, acknowledging that his deed was serious enough to sentence him to the gallows, he hushes towards the Maer's court to give the nobleman his account of the facts before rumours of it reached him. Thus, as soon as he sets foot in the court, he tries to schedule a meeting with Alveron, who soon receives him. Firstly, the Maer enquires about the matter of the waylayers, demanding a thorough explanation of what had happened, for he did not believe the information he had received prior to the protagonist's arrival: how could a group of four mercenaries led by a young man possibly manage to defeat a group of twenty-seven men? The main character, then, omitting the part in which he resorted to gruesome use of his arcanist's abilities, tries to convince him that they managed to do so only because they had set a surprise attack. Despite Kvothe's efforts, the Maer still regards his account with suspiciousness. Nonetheless, the matter is left aside and Kvothe announces he has further news to share, his account of the killing of the fake troupers. At this point, their conversation is no longer private, for Meluan Lackless, to whom the Maer had gotten married while Kvothe was away, joined them. Their reaction to Kvothe's deed, as the following excerpt shows, is somehow dissonant:

"I think he did right," Meluan said hotly. "I say you give him a score of guards and let him do the same to every ravel band of Ruh he finds within your lands." "My dear," Alveron said with a touch of sternness. "I don't care for them much more than you, but law is law. When . . ." "Law is what you make it," she interjected. "This man has done you a noble service. You should grant him fief and title and set him on your council." "He killed nine of my subjects," Alveron pointed out sternly. "When men step outside the rule of law, anarchy results. If I heard of this in passing, I

would hang him for a bandit.” “He killed nine Ruh rapists. Nine murdering ravel thieves. Nine fewer Edema men in the world is a service to us all.” Meluan looked at me. “Sir. I think you did nothing but what was right and proper.” (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 1023-1024).

Meluan’s belief that Kvothe should be rewarded for what he had done is intrinsically tied to her prejudice towards the Edema Ruh: in her view, killing Ruh should be seen as nothing other than a noble act, a favour made to the society. Alveron on the other hand, even though admitting he does not care for the people that had been killed, regards Kvothe’s action as passive of suffering the law. Controversial as the discussion may be, it gets still more complicated when the protagonist discloses that he is from the Edema Ruh while the fake troupers were not. The revelation shocks both the Maer and Meluan, the last being so indignant and furious that she exits the room, refusing to stand in the presence of the protagonist. Also distressed, Alveron dismisses Kvothe and sends him the following letter the next day:

Kvothe, I have thought a while and decided your blood matters but little in light of the services you have rendered me. However, my soul is bound to another whose comfort I hold more dearly than my own. Though I had hoped to retain your services, I cannot. What’s more, as your presence is the cause of my wife’s considerable distress, I must ask you to return my ring and leave Severen at your earliest convenience. As to the matter that precipitated this unfortunate circumstance, I believe you have acted in the best interest of myself and Vintas as a whole. In fact, I have received report just this morning that two girls were returned to their families in Levinshir by a red-haired “gentleman” named Kvothe. As reward for your many services I offer the following: First, a full pardon for those you killed near Levinshir. Second, a letter of credit enabling you to draw on my coffers for the payment of your tuition at the University. Third, a writ granting you the right to travel, play, and perform wherever you will within my lands. Lastly, my thanks. Maershon Lerand Alveron. (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 1027-1028. Italics in the original).

By analysing the letter above alongside with the previous arguments concerning Kvothe’s deeds, as well as their motivations and consequences, it may be argued that while the first and the second are connected to circumstantial matters and needs, the last seems to be dictated by social matters, such as prejudice and politics. In other words, the way the main character’s actions are seen and judged are often determined by how much in consonance they are with the dominant politics and ways of thinking of the society he is inserted in. Therefore, his killing of the waylayers in the Eld and of the fake troupers were only forgiven because they served the Maer’s interests. Thus, it may be argued that matters of blood and race can be somehow overlooked if the service provided favours the ideals of the ones in power. In this sense, the following question seems pertinent: being Edema Ruh, would Kvothe be pardoned

were he not acting in the service of the Maer? Sadly, the historical background of that fictional universe points to a negative answer.

Coming back to the questions posed at the beginning of this section, concerning the “heroic” and “unheroic” deeds of the protagonist, as well as the moral dilemmas tied to them and the dichotomy of good and evil, I would like to conclude the present section by contrasting them with the arguments raised thus far. As argued at the beginning of the section, the figure of the hero in more traditional fantasy texts, such as *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, tends to follow a specific pattern: they are almost flawless characters whose purpose is to do good and work towards the well-being of their people. In addition, they are seldom burdened by dilemmas concerning the “right” way to act because their narratives present the distinction between “good” and “evil” clearly. Therefore, even though such heroes may be faced with complex predicaments, these are often related to how to achieve the greater good, how to make sure that their actions benefit most of the ones in need. In other words, more traditional fantasy often portrays heroes of the collective, whose altruistic deeds are an attempt to benefit the group, rather than the individual. Such characteristic may be seen even in heroes such as Frodo, who even though is not capable of great deeds in the battlefield, typical of the classic hero, his actions are pervaded by his desire to aid his people, as the following excerpt demonstrates: “I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.” (Tolkien, 2007, pp. 1346-1347). Frodo’s heroism is altruistic and directed to the well-being of the ones he loves. In other words, as Tolkien argues in one of his letters, “Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could; and also in complete humility, acknowledging that he was wholly inadequate to the task.” (Tolkien, 2000. p. 327). Both excerpts above present central points that are typical of the heroes in more traditional fantasy: they act nobly and with the purpose of ensuring the well-being of the collective. Besides that, though it is not the case with Frodo, they are often seen as fit for the endeavours they pursue, and they act also driven by their desire to prove their valour.

On the other hand, in more contemporary fantasy texts, such as Rothfuss’ novels and works like *The Witcher*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *The Poppy War*, and even the *Harry Potter* series to some extent, the heroes’ actions tend to be often directed to the individual, rather than to the collective. Such claim, however, is not intended to argue that the hero in more contemporary fantasy tends to be selfish or petty, but rather that since they are so frequently engaged in saving their own lives from the several threats arising from a society,

a world order, that is hostile towards them, that they are left with little time to save the world. Before they can act for the benefit of the collective, they must make sure that they can survive themselves. Such characteristic, as argued previously in this section, is typical in literary works belonging to the social realism, such as some of the novels by Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky, which are often concerned with the conflict of the hero against society or of the first against themselves. Therefore, it is understandable that the hero in texts such as *The Name of the Wind* and the *Wise Man's Fear* tend to act first for their own good, rather than for that of the collective, since this last is often against them. Which does not mean, however, that they are incapable to act towards the ones around them, as it was demonstrated during the analysis of Kvothe's deeds. As the main character argues, most people can do good if they are given the chance (Rothfuss, 2011).

Another major change that seems to be taking place in contemporary fantasy in comparison to the more traditional one, as argued previously, has to do with the notions of "good" and "evil". If often clearly marked in more traditional fantasy works, such concepts have become considerably blurry in more recent fantasy. Characters tend to be no longer classified as either good or bad, but rather as complex figures whose actions are a product of their past experiences, traumas, and beliefs, as well as their will to survive in a hostile environment. So much so that they are often plagued by their conscience and by guilt in case they see themselves forced to perform controversial actions, such as is the case with Kvothe after he kills the troupers who were pretending to be Edema Ruh, as it can be seen in the following excerpt:

I took a swallow. I didn't mean to say anything, but I found myself talking anyway. "I think there might be something wrong with me," I said quietly. "A normal person doesn't have it in him to do the things I do. A normal person would never kill people like this." "That may be," she admitted, sipping from her own cup. "But what would you say if I told you Bil's leg had gone a bit green and sweet smelling under that bandage?" I looked up, startled. "He's got the rot?" She shook her head. "No. I told you he's fine. But what if?" "We'd have to cut the leg off," I said. Gran nodded seriously. "That's right. And we'd have to do it quick. Today. No dithering about and hoping he'd fight his way through on his own. That wouldn't do a thing but kill him." She took a sip, watching me over the top of her cup, making it a question of sorts. I nodded. I knew it was true. "You've got some medicine," she said. "You know that proper doctoring means hard choices." She gave me an unflinching look. "We hain't like other folk. You burn a man with an iron to stop his bleeding. You save the mother and lose the babe. It's hard, and nobody ever thanks you for it. But we're the ones that have to choose." She took another slow drink of tea. "The first few times are the worst. You'll get the shakes and lose some sleep. But that's the price of doing what needs to be done." (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 984).

Kvothe's anguish is such that he even feels as if there is something wrong with him, as if he were not a normal person. Gran's response to the protagonist distress is worth

highlighting, for it emphasises something that, perhaps, Kvothe was not yet consciously aware: to be human means having to make hard choices from time to time, choices that may haunt one's conscience for a lifetime. At the same time, she also brings into discussion a "what if" question that makes room for a series of others: what would have happened if Kvothe had spared the lives of the troupers? What other villages would they have pillaged if the protagonist had not acted? How many lives would have been lost? How many were spared because of his deed? Since it is not possible to clearly foresee the long-term consequences of one's actions, it is probable that Kvothe's conscience would still be troubled even though he had acted differently, showing mercy to the ones he killed. No matter how controversial and harsh Kvothe's decision had been, the protagonist did what he believed was the necessary thing to do at that moment, and, as Gran argues, doing what must be done comes with a price, be it good or bad, high or low.

In this sense, decision-making in both more traditional and more recent fantasy poses considerably different challenges: knowing what to do when there is a clear distinction between who is inherently good and who is intrinsically evil seems to be a much simpler task. That is why the decision of the free peoples to wage war against Sauron forces in *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, is hardly seen as a dilemma, but rather as the only logical solution; the forces in the narrative are pointedly divided: it is the battle of good against evil. On the other hand, in fantasy works such as *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, in which such scission is greatly inexistent, the making of choices is often accompanied by moral dilemmas: how eager can one be to deal out death in judgement when the people on the other side are recognised as much human as oneself? How can one be judged for performing morally controversial actions when these are driven by their will to survive? In this sense, if Rothfuss' narratives have a hero like Kvothe, it is because the way they are framed needed a hero just like him: a hero that is neither good nor bad, but a complex character that is faced with complex challenges that demanded difficult choices that often plague his conscience; a character that more than being a hero, is, in a way, also human and representative, in a considerable extent, of what it means to be human.

Having talked about how Rothfuss structures his fictional universe, how and which problems are presented, as well as how the hero acts towards them, there is one more point I would like to discuss in this work, namely that of the "happy ending", or, to use the Tolkienian term, that of the *Eucatastrophe*. Should it be expected in a narrative that has proven to be both similar to and different from the more traditional branch of fantasy? If yes, how is such *Eucatastrophe* structured and what are its implications? If not, what might its

lack be pointing to? This issue and further matters related to it are discussed in the following section.

3.3 *Eucatastrophe* of a different kind: the reformulation of the happy ending

This section addresses one of the central concepts in the Tolkienian essay “On Fairy Stories”, namely the *Eucatastrophe* while problematizing the growing difficulty to apply it to more contemporary fantasy fiction. The term *Eucatastrophe*, *per se*, originates from the Greek word *katastrophein*, where “kata” stands for “down” and “strophein” for “turn”. To make the Greek “downturn” something positive and relatable to his idea of the function of fantasy stories, Tolkien added the prefix “eu-” (good) to it, turning it into the “good downturn”, or simply the “good catastrophe”. According to the scholar, the *Eucatastrophe* is the highest function of fantasy narratives, without which they would be incomplete. In other words, the ideal and the full-fledged fantasy story can only be achieved if it presents what the author refers to as the consolation of the happy ending. Such claim, however problematic it may be, serves its purpose considerably well when applied to the fantasy story Tolkien had in mind for it: his own *The Lord of the Rings*. For that text, as I have argued elsewhere³², the idea of the *Eucatastrophe* works considerably well, at least if some instances (such as the problem with Frodo) are left aside. For the application in other fantasy texts, especially the more contemporary ones, however, the Tolkienian happy-ending theory, as I argue below, offers a series of limitations.

At the centre of the limitation of the *Eucatastrophe* theory lies the fact that it has at its core one of the most fervorous of Tolkien’s beliefs, namely his Christian faith. The consolation of the happy ending, in this sense, alludes to the Christian belief that argues that no matter how hard the toils and sorrows in the material world may be, these will be redeemed in the afterlife, in the Kingdom of Heaven, where the good, the meek, and the righteous will for the eternity abide. In this sense, the Tolkienian idealised fantasy story may only fully work if it somehow presents the idea of the sudden joyous turn:

[...] a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events,

³² For further information on the subject, refer to Rocha (2019a).

however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the “turn” comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality. (Tolkien, 2001, p. 69).

Such turn, as the excerpt above indicates, works as to provide one with hope in situations beyond hope, to reassure one that despite their sorrows and grief, they should still keep a brave and good heart, for even though “[t]he Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die[...] he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed.” (Tolkien, 2001, p. 73). The problem and limitation concerning the Tolkienian *Eucatastrophe* is, in this sense, that it alludes to a type of joy that is final, rather than seeing it as something transitory, possibly leading to the belief that once such joyful state is achieved, it denies the chance of future sorrow and failure. Therefore, if on one hand the Tolkienian idea seemed to work for the time his fantasy novels were published, on the other hand, it poses a series of challenges for the more contemporary fantasy works written over half a century later. In this sense, by analysing some of the events in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear*, in the remainder of this section I discuss not only to what extent such sort of *Eucatastrophe* is still effective or viable, but also how it is presented and what the possible changes in its presentation might mean. In this sense, if changes are found, possible explanations are proposed.

To start discussing the matter of the happy ending in Rothfuss’ novels, I would like to call attention to both the prologue and epilogue of the two works, particularly to their tone. More than the fact that they somehow mirror one another, presenting only slight modifications, what seems to stand out is their tone: a resigned, almost hopeless, and mournful tone used to address a specific theme: that of a silence of three parts. The first silence, described as the most obvious part of the three, was constituted by the hollow and echoing quiet caused by the things that were lacking. (Rothfuss, 2007). It was the silence that originates from absence, of things that ought to be there, but were not. The second silence, said to be a small, sullen one, represented avoidance. It was the silence caused by the denial to face a harsh reality. As for the third, final silence, the greatest of the three, was the silence of resigned hopelessness, and “[i]t was deep and wide as autumn’s ending. It was heavy as a great river-smooth stone. It was the patient, cut-flower sound of a man who is waiting to die.” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 2). Such silence, filled with a sense of disillusionment and lack of perspective, belongs to Kvothe and its existence is reinforced at the beginning and end of both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear*. The reasons for its existence are never fully disclosed in the narrative, but often hinted at: the protagonist had decided to go into hiding, to

live in seclusion, because it is believed that he had committed a most serious crime, one that had conferred him the title of “Kvothe the Kingkiller”; he had lost most of what he truly loved and was left with no reason whatsoever to carry on. No matter what the reason for the existence of such silence might be, the fact remains that it is it that dictates the tone at the beginning of the story, the tone of the protagonist’s present situation.

It was such a hopeless tone, that is often reiterated in Rothfuss’s novels, that struck me as remarkable when I first read *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear*. It made me think that, perhaps, Kvothe was deprived of his *Eucatastrophe*. More than that, it made me come back to an assumption that had been slowly growing during the last few years I have been dedicating my time to the study of fantasy literature: not all fantasy stories necessarily present a happy ending, at least not as the Tolkienian cannon prescribe. Since such thought started to bloom in my mind, I have been reminded of several narratives devoid of an ending that is typically considered as happy: *A Monster Calls* (2016), by Patrick Ness, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), by Katherine Paterson, the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy (2012-2014), by Leigh Bardugo, and *The Witcher Series* (1992-2013) are just some examples of something that may be slowly becoming a tendency. If that is the case, such tendency, I argue, dialogues with Tompkins’ claim (1985) mentioned in the introduction of this work, in which she states that literary texts are engaged in solving problem(s) related to the time they were written. Even though I would say that rather than solving problems, literature is engaged in addressing them and instigating possible solutions, the scholar argument is still valid, for it points to a central question in my work: if there is, indeed, a growing number of (fantasy) works proposing not-so-happy endings, what are these stories trying to say? To what are they pointing to? Attebery (2014), refers to the applicability of fantasy works to current social needs. In this sense, is contemporary fantasy literature trying to address the idea that not all stories, factual or fictional, will necessarily end as expected? More than that, as I argue in the following paragraphs, rather than focusing on presenting *Eucatastrophes*, I believe this growing tendency addresses not only the struggles, but also the necessity, and the importance of carrying on even when nothing goes as planned and the so much wished for happy ending does not come as expected.

As argued above, both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* start by reinforcing the idea that something in Kvothe’s life had gone amiss. Even though many of the possible reasons for that are presented during the protagonist’s account of his early life in the first two books of the still unfinished trilogy, the actual cause has not yet been revealed. It is known that prior to having established himself as an innkeeper in the middle of nowhere (in a

secluded small town called “Newarre”), the main character had tragically lost his parents at a very young age, suffered for a considerable part of his life due to sheer poverty, been victim of prejudice several times both at the University and at different social spheres, and that he had to face several other hardships. Through hints in the frame story, it is possible to infer that Kvothe managed to overcome the problem of poverty and that he is no longer troubled with financial issues: he has his own inn, which he manages to maintain even though he has not been receiving many guests lately, and the few customers he receives cannot afford spending much money, since most people in the town had been suffering with the high taxes being charged by the King. Nonetheless, the protagonist is able to keep his prices affordable and, at the same time, be both charitable and somehow lavish with his money: he buys much of the produce of the farmers of the town (apples, mutton, etc), he gives more money than things are worth so that he can support the people from whom he buys them, he orders expensive things, like brand new barrels for storing apple and cider, a finely made mounting board made of expensive wood for his sword, among many other things. Considering the points above and the fact that the business in the inn has not been ideal lately, it is possible to argue that Kvothe has not been making much (if any) profit with his trade. It is even possible to assume that he has been losing money; money that, as it is stated in the chapter “Wood and Word” at the beginning of *The Name of the Wind*, the protagonist does not need:

Kote was in the middle of it all, always moving, like a man tending a large, complex machine. Ready with a drink just as a person called for it, he talked and listened in the right amounts. He laughed at jokes, shook hands, smiled, and whisked coins off the bar as if he truly needed the money. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 29).

Therefore, the protagonist has arguably managed to solve the financial issues that had plagued him for years. Such improvement in his life, however, does not seem to have been enough to assure him a happy ending, for the frame narrative presents an adult Kvothe that often pretends that nothing is amiss, in order to hide the burdens of someone that carries significant scars and wounds within. More than that, by going into hiding and creating the persona of an unassuming innkeeper for himself, it seems that the protagonist longs to forget his past life and deeds. That is probably why he refuses to tell Chronicler his story at first, for he fears the pain that remembering may cause him, as it may be seen in following excerpt:

Won’t you even consider...” Kote shook his head. “It was a long time ago —” “Not even two years,” Chronicler protested. “—and I am not what I was,” Kote continued without pausing. “And what was that, exactly?” “Kvothe,” he said simply, refusing to be drawn any further into an explanation. “Now I am Kote. I tend to my inn. That means beer is three shims and a private room costs copper.” He began polishing the bar again with a fierce intensity. “As you said, ‘done is done.’ The stories will take care of themselves.” “But—” Kote looked up, and for a second Chronicler saw past

the anger that lay glittering on the surface of his eyes. For a moment he saw the pain underneath, raw and bloody, like a wound too deep for healing. Then Kote looked away and only the anger remained. "What could you possibly offer me that is worth the price of remembering?" (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 47-48).

Remembering, as it may be argued, comes with a cost that the protagonist does not seem to be willing to pay. He still carries unhealed wounds, traumas, that he is trying to forget, or, at least, ignore. In the process of trying to forget his past, however, Kvothe is also losing his identity: he is no longer Kvothe the Arcane, but rather Kote the innkeeper. The problem of such behaviour, as Bast, the protagonist's apprentice, points out at the end of *The Name of the Wind* is that, with time, people tend to become what they pretend to be, they become, somehow, a representation, either fictional or factual, of what they tell themselves they are: "[i]t's like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 716). Bast's claim, though in a considerably oversimplified way, points to that psychological maxim that says that if a person is told frequently enough that they are "x" without hearing any sort of contradiction or counterpoint, the chances they will eventually believe they are "x" is great. Such conditioning is likely to slowly result in identity loss and the several crises inherent to it.

Therefore, identifying the dangers of his tutor's behaviour, Bast decides to act; he manages to lure Chronicler to the place Kvothe and himself are hiding so that the scribe would ask the protagonist for an account of his life. Differently from what the main character claims, Bast believes that if Kvothe remembers his own story, he may realise that even though he had to face several hardships and failures, he had also his share of good times and victories, which may lead him to recognise that he is more than just his traumas, his bad decisions, and his failures; he is also his good deeds, his victories, and his right decisions. In other words, remembering may help him see he is neither the villain nor the hero, but rather both, and that it is exactly such paradoxical nature that makes him human. Avoiding such recognition is making the protagonist slowly fade away, as it may be argued from the following excerpt at the beginning of *The Name of the Wind*: "In fact, Kote himself seemed rather sickly. Not exactly unhealthy, but hollow. Wan. Like a plant that's been moved into the wrong sort of soil and, lacking something vital, has begun to wilt." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 23). Refusing to acknowledge, to accept that his errors are part of who he is, the protagonist cannot be at peace with himself, being constantly plagued by feelings of guilt and regret. It is such difficulty Kvothe has in reconciling with his past that dictates, to a considerable extent, the heavy and hopeless tone of the frame story. He cannot accept that whatever he has done or

gone through does not, should not, represent the totality of who he is, neither be enough to condemn him to a life of (self-imposed) misery and regret. My claim that part of his misery is self-imposed is based on the protagonist's behaviour at the beginning of the narrative, specifically a very emblematic moment in the chapter "Wood and Word" from *The Name of the Wind*, in which the protagonist, after receiving the mounting board he had ordered from Graham, the village's carpenter, decides to hang it on one of the walls of the main room of his inn and, then, display his sword on it:

[...] he set the sword on the mounting board. Its grey-white metal shone against the dark roach behind it. While the handle could be seen, it was dark enough to be almost indistinguishable from the wood. The word beneath it, black against blackness, seemed to reproach: *Folly*. Kote climbed down, and for a moment he and Bast stood side by side, silently looking up. Bast broke the silence. "It *is* rather striking," he said, as if he regretted the truth. "But..." He trailed off, trying to find appropriate words. He shuddered. Kote clapped him on the back, oddly cheerful. "Don't bother being disturbed on my account." He seemed more lively now, as if his activity lent him energy. "I like it," he said with sudden conviction, and hung the black scabbard from one of the mounting board's pegs. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 26. Emphasis in the original).

The meaning behind the deed, it may be argued, is representative of the protagonist's relationship not only with his past, but also of the effect he wants it to have in his present: by hanging his sword, Folly, in a place it will be frequently within his eyesight, Kvothe will be constantly reminded of and reproached for the times he acted in a way he ought not to. Such decision gives room for thinking that the protagonist believes he deserves to be punished, to suffer, because of his past actions, in a cycle, as argued above, of self-imposed misery. Interestingly, when Bast asks him what he had in mind when he decided to order the mounting board for his sword, the protagonist answers by commenting on his decision-making process: "I tend to think too much, Bast. My greatest successes came from decisions I made when I stopped thinking and simply did what felt right. Even if there was no good explanation for what I did." He smiled wistfully. "Even if there were very good reasons for me *not* to do what I did." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 25. Emphasis in the original). The problem with his reply is that it does not answer Bast's question properly: does the protagonist believe that thinking too much before acting should be seen as folly? Is he trying to say that presently he believes that acting without thinking should be seen as reckless even though it had rendered him great success in the past? Whatever the interpretation may be, it is Bast's reply that seems to solve the riddle: "So you're trying to avoid second-guessing yourself?" Kote hesitated. "You could say that," he admitted. "*I* could say that, Reshi," Bast said smugly. "You, on the other hand, would complicate things needlessly." (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 25. Emphasis in the

original). In this sense, according to Bast, the problem with his Tutor is that not only does he brood too much about things past, but he also tends to overcomplicate things unnecessarily, while neither will change the fact that he has no control over what came to pass.

Considering that Rothfuss structured his novels resorting to the story-within-a-story technique, the accounts in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* may be divided into two main parts, namely the framed story (or stories) and the frame story. As already mentioned previously in this work, the framed story is an extensive account of Kvothe's deeds and hardships faced as a young boy. On the other hand, the frame story, when it appears, informs the reader about the protagonist's, already an adult, present situation. In other words, while the first presents (past) actions, the latter exposes (present) consequences. Kvothe has already suffered, worked, and hoped, but he has not yet been redeemed. The sudden joyous turn has not yet taken place, nor has the protagonist's *Eucatastrophe*. With Rothfuss' trilogy still unfinished, it is not yet possible to ascertain whether it will take place or not. Evidence in the text suggests that it will not, at least not in the way Tolkien (2001) proposes. If that is the case, it may be argued that if the Tolkienian ideal narrative focuses on the maintenance of hope in spite of evident defeat, the *Name of the Wind* and the *Wise Man's Fear* discusses the importance of carrying on despite the absence of a happy ending, despite apparent failure (for one does not fail in life, one learns with it). Therefore, Bast's claims that Kvothe complicates things unnecessarily may be seen as a type of wake-up call, alerting his tutor that there is still life and the possibility of happiness even after apparent defeat. For that to happen, however, it is important to learn to let go of feelings of guilt, something the protagonist shows difficulties in doing, as the following excerpt, in which Kvothe argues that he is to blame for a series of problems hinted at in the frame story, illustrates: "Kvothe gave his student a long, weary look. "You know better than that, Bast. All of this is my fault. The scrael, the war. All my fault."" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 695). It is important to highlight that Bast's attitude towards his tutor, the way I see it, does not seem to be an attempt to encourage Kvothe to adopt a carefree attitude towards his mistakes, but rather to urge him to embrace a more forgiving posture towards himself, otherwise he may spend the rest of his life grieving for things he can no longer change.

In this sense, compared to the hopeful tone in the Tolkienian ideal fantasy story, frequently present in his *The Lord of the Rings* for example, a shift to a more resigned one seems to be slowly taking place in the more recent fantasy fiction, as it may be observed not only in Rothfuss' novels, but also in several other fantasy narratives, like the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy by Leigh Bardugo, from which the following excerpt was taken:

There were still wars, and there were still orphans, but the building that rose over the ruin that had been Keramzin was nothing like the one before. It was not a Duke's home, full of things that shouldn't be touched. It was a place for children. The piano in the music room was left uncovered. The larder door was never locked. A lantern was always lit in the dormitories to keep away the dark. (Bardugo, 2014, p. 414).

At the end of Bardugo's trilogy, the resigned tone mentioned above is arguably evident: there is a recognition that the problem of war and orphanhood is still a reality. However, the atmosphere described in the quoted excerpt leaves room to presume that the characters learned to live as happy as possible despite the grief, the traumas, and the pain, as the following passage from the same novel corroborates:

The boy and the girl had both known loss, and their grief did not leave them. Sometimes he would find her standing by a window, fingers playing in the beams of sunlight that streamed through the glass, or sitting on the front steps of the orphanage, staring at the stump of the oak next to the drive. Then he would go to her, draw her close, and lead her to the shores of Trivka's pond, where the insects buzzed and the grass grew high and sweet, where old wounds might be forgotten. (Bardugo, 2014, p. 417).

It is important to highlight that the resigned tone present above, and which I argue has become typical in a series of other fantasy works, does not necessarily imply defeatism, but rather an argument in favour of the importance, the necessity, of being resilient and of learning that even though some wounds may never fully heal, life will go on and happiness may present itself from time to time. In this sense, it may be argued that such possible trend in contemporary fantasy literature could be pointing to an *Eucatastrophe* of a different kind, one that, rather than putting emphasis on an ultimate happy ending, argues for an understanding, a recognition of the ever-changing nature of life, which, as the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (2014) proposes, challenges both ultimate happiness and final defeat: "*Laß dir Alles geschehn: Schönheit und Schrecken./Man muß nur gehn: Kein Gefühl ist das fernste*³³." (Rilke, 2014, p. 79). Once again, the apparently resigned tone of the passage above is not, I believe, arguing in favour of defeatism, but rather against the idea that life is limited to either happiness or sorrow, victory or defeat. In this sense, the idea of the happy ending in several works of contemporary fantasy is being redefined: it seems to be shifting from the "either x or y" view of life to a "not only x, but also y" perspective. Given the possibility that such recognition, such change of perspective, may be difficult to be accepted and understood, fantasy literature works as a means to restore, or even to enhance, clarity. It is precisely in such function of fantasy stories, that lies, as Kvothe argues in *The Name of the Wind*, great part of their appeal:

³³ Let everything happen to you: Beauty and Terror. / One must just go on. No feeling is final. (My translation).

“Think of all the stories you’ve heard, Bast. You have a young boy, the hero. His parents are killed. He sets out for vengeance. What happens next?” Bast hesitated, his expression puzzled. Chronicler answered the question instead. “He finds help. A clever talking squirrel. An old drunken swordsman. A mad hermit in the woods. That sort of thing.” Kvothe nodded. “Exactly! He finds the mad hermit in the woods, proves himself worthy, and learns the names of all things, just like Taborlin the Great. Then with these powerful magics at his beck and call, what does he do?” Chronicler shrugged. “He finds the villains and kills them.” “Of course,” Kvothe said grandly. “Clean, quick, and easy as lying. We know how it ends practically before it starts. That’s why stories appeal to us. They give us the clarity and simplicity our real lives lack.” (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 332-333).

Considering the excerpt above, I would like to highlight two things: the structure Kvothe argues is traditional in (fantasy) stories resembles, in a rather simplified way, that presented by Joseph Campbell (2004) in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which the scholar argues that the hero’s journey often follows a typical path, which starts with what he calls separation (the hero is urged to go on an adventure), followed by initiation (the hero goes through a series of ordeals), and concludes with the return (having achieved what he had left to seek, the hero, now much wiser and capable of reshaping the reality around him, returns to his land).³⁴ Kvothe’s path in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man’s Fear* resembles, to a considerable extent, both the protagonist’s and Campbell’s theory: after his parents are killed, he is called to adventure by the urge to avenge his parents; along his journey, he is faced with a series of challenges (surviving in Tarbean and at the University, saving the town of Trebon, killing the supposed bandits in the Eld, making through his incursion into the Fae Realm, learning the Adem fighting techniques, etc), he receives (magical) aid from Elodin, from Felurian and, to some extent, from the Adem citizens. Since the protagonist has grown up as a member of a nomadic traveling group, there is no exact place to which he would return after the end of his journey. Therefore, it may be argued that he opted for settling in Newarre. Because of the gap left in the narrative due to the absence of its third instalment, it is still unclear if the protagonist has managed to claim his revenge. It may be argued, therefore, that despite small differences, Kvothe’s account is rather similar to that of the stories he claims tend to be the most appealing and that provide one with the clarity and simplicity their real lives need. Nonetheless, the protagonist seems to fail to recognize the similarities. The second point I would like to highlight concerns such issue.

Kvothe’s argument concerning the appeal and function of stories seems to echo Tolkien’s definition of recovery. As discussed in the first chapter of this work, the scholar argues that by presenting elements from the primary world in the fantastic setting of a

³⁴ Campbell’s theory is much more intricate than that, but for my present purpose such diluted version of his theory shall suffice.

secondary world, fantasy stories help the (implied) reader to regain a clear view of them, a view that could have been obscured not only by grief and sorrow, but also by arrogance and selfishness. To use Tolkien's words, fantasy stories work as to enable one to see things apart from oneself. These narratives, the scholar argues, can provide the (implied) reader with such renewed view because they "[...] deal largely, or (the better ones) mainly, with simple or fundamental things, untouched by Fantasy, but these simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting." (Tolkien, 2001, p. 59). The fundamental and simple things mentioned by the author, I argue, can be, for example, those inherent to everyone's life: joy and sorrow, success and failure, consolation and grief, love and hate, and, of course, life and death. Therefore, by making these inherent things more luminous in their fantastic setting, fantasy narratives work to provide not only a clearer view of them, but also to instil a sense that none of them are final, that life is cyclical.

Tolkien's propositions above resemble, I argue, even if slightly, Campbell's (1991) propositions concerning the functions of myth. For the North American scholar, myths may be seen as having four central functions: the mystical, which has to do with the awakening of a sense of wonder in the individual concerning the universe; the cosmological, which helps communities physically shape the mystical through stories and rituals; the sociological, which sees myth as providing societies with a basis for social order and morality; and finally the psychological or pedagogical, through which individuals are helped in obtaining a clearer understanding of the cyclical nature of life, the universe, and one's role within such continuum. For the present discussion I would like to focus on the psychological function, since, as Campbell (1991) argues, it is through it that the other three are synthesized and understood. Such mythological function, the scholar claims, is the most personal of the four, for the understanding inherent to it tends to come to different people at different moments in life. It may be seen as representing what Tolkien (2001) refers to as the regaining of a clearer view, because once attained it allows the individual to apply what they may learn through stories to their doings in the actual world. In this sense, if fantasy stories are seen, as I believe they may, functioning, even if to some extent, in a way analogous to myth, the reformulation of the happy ending in more recent fantasy narratives seems to be a way to demonstrate that with the establishment of different word orders in different periods in history, new problems requiring alternative solutions tend to arise. To fulfil their function, in this sense, stories need to be constantly reshaped to meet new demands.

Coming back to Rothfuss's narratives, the way it reformulates the happy ending may be pointing to the necessity of acknowledging that the sense of joy does not deny the

possibility of sorrow, nor does the poignance of grief reject the chance of future happiness. In this sense, Bast strategy, above, may be seen as working analogously to the Tolkienian theory concerning the recovery of fantasy stories and to functions of myth proposed by Campbell: by retelling his own story, the protagonist may realise that it was not only terror, but also beauty, even though in different proportions; that his present grief and sense of failure do not deny eventual future joy. Thus, recovered, the protagonist may resume his life, but now perceiving that it still has purpose.

As argued at the beginning of this section, Tolkien claims that the consolation arising from the *Eucatastrophe* is the highest function of the work of fantasy. Such consolation, with strong roots in the Christian belief, is largely present in fantasy works of the author's time, such as his own *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. Analysing how and if such idealised happy ending is present (or hinted at) in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, published six decades after "On Fairy Stories", has shown that it has been largely reformulated. If the Tolkienian *Eucatastrophe* prescribes a state of happiness that, when finally achieved after much toil and grief, is final, Rothfuss' novels seem to address the matter as something transitory and that does not deny the possibility of future sorrow. Although still unfinished, *The Kingkiller Chronicle* trilogy seems to be arguing in favour of a view that embraces both joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, life and death, and sees them not as final or exclusionary, but rather as complementary and natural parts of the continuum of life.

This reformulated view of the happy ending may be seen as an attempt to call readers' attention to the importance of embracing life in its entirety and of being resilient, thus coming to the recognition that there may be joy even after loss, pain, and failure. If such idea is accepted, it helps explain why so many contemporary fantasy narratives conclude with a bitter-sweet ending: young Conor loses his mother due to cancer in *A Monster Calls*, the hero Geralt of Rivia dies and young Ciri is left once again orphaned in *The Witcher* series, the main character loses his best friend in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, Lyra Belacqua witness the death of her parents and is denied the possibility of being together with her beloved Will Parry in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Alina and Mal see most of their friends die in the war in *The Sadow and Bone* trilogy, in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, Kvothe goes through loss, pain, poverty, prejudice, failure and is left broken and unwilling to forgive himself and carry on. All these characters went through experiences that left them with scars that may never fully heal. However, all their suffering does not necessarily imply that their life is faded to endless sorrow; a change in perspective, a resilient

attitude, and an understanding that life is not static, but rather a continuous cycle, may help them come to the recognition that despite the pain, the loss, and the sorrow, there may certainly still be joy. And such recognition is also valid to the people in the primary world. And such is one of the many social functions of fantasy stories: they provide us with the clarity and simplicity our lives may be lacking.

4 SOME (FURTHER) CONSIDERATIONS

[...] we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.

(Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*)

I would like to begin the considerations in this section with a brief personal digression, which, I believe, is in consonance with what has been discussed thus far and that also sets the tone for what remains to be said. I began writing this dissertation in December 2019, exactly four years from the present moment, in which I start its final chapter. In retrospect, that seems to be much further in the past than it actually is. I believe that many share the same impression as me, for much happened during this seemingly short period of time. That year concluded with the ominous shadow of a possible health crisis looming on the horizon. Months later, a state of calamity due to the dreadful COVID-19 outbreak was declared worldwide. Millions were lost as a consequence of its severity, while the ones that managed to avert it were faced with the dreary reality of isolation and imminence of possible death. Forcefully, loneliness was imposed to the world (at least to the ones wise enough to heed the advice given them). Amidst such a desolate situation, fear rapidly grew while hope shrunk. Hope, however, may be renewed even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to open a fantasy book.

During most part of the pandemics, it was literature that made me company. I probably read over fifty books during the imposed social isolation period and whenever I opened a book, I felt I was not alone. Every time I finished a fantasy story and returned it to its due place on the shelf, a feeling of hopeful joy slightly grew inside me. I read about Geralt of Rivia's struggles against prejudice and I was able to feel his burden; I followed Alina Starikov's path through orphanhood, war, and further loss and I felt her pain; through the eyes of Fang Runin I witnessed her loss, her doubt, and her grief and I felt compassion for her; finally, I read and reread Kvothe's survivor's tale and every time I closed either *The Name of the Wind* or *The Wise Man's Fear* my heart was heavy. All these stories were filled with tragedy, loss, sorrow, grief, and death, and every single one of them left me broken and

devastated. Nonetheless, I learned with them. They reminded me of the importance of being resilient, of carrying on despite the pain, the wounds, and the traumas. They taught me that one seldom escapes moments of great distress and turmoil unscathed and that the scars deriving from such confrontations may last a lifetime. More importantly, perhaps, they reminded me that there is still life past the grief and the seemingly unbearable. Therefore, it was mostly these stories that aided me through the tempestuous years the world was afflicted by such dreadful crisis. It was them that made me not abandon hope and succumb to despair.

The primary focus of this dissertation was to investigate to what extent Rothfuss' novels was in consonance with the Tolkienian theory concerning fantasy stories. When differences in the proposed model were found, I attempted to explain why they might have arisen. The idea was instigated by a bold claim by Attebery (1992), written almost two decades before the publication of *The Name of the Wind*. According to the scholar, the publication and consequent success of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) established a sort of formula for fantasy literature. Although I recognise the invaluable importance and contribution of the author's legacy to the genre, different from what Attebery believes, I argue that the merits, the value of any fantasy work should be assessed primarily upon an analysis of the work on its own, rather than by investigating to what extent it resembles or not another. In this sense, if both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* bear any resemblance to *The Lord of the Rings* (and they do), rather than using the similarities as a parameter of judgement, I argue that the question to be asked is what is being done with the borrowed material. In other words, how Rothfuss' appropriates Tolkienian elements and mixes them with his own view on fantasy to create a narrative that consequently may resemble Tolkien's, but that is also unique. Such approach leads to the recognition that the literary craft involves not only replication, but also displacement and innovation. Therefore, the advantages of an approach to fantasy based on such premise reside, I argue, on the idea that it offers insight into the several possibilities of the genre, its richness as well as its capacities. More than that, it casts light into the adaptability and fluidity of a genre that produces works that are often used to address the demands of the time and place they are written. By recognizing the everchanging nature of fantasy as well as literature's tendency of borrowing from previous works, it is finally possible to investigate why variations tend to occur. In this sense, by analysing the recurrent themes addressed in works of more recent fantasy, I attempted to identify a pattern that could be indicative of a current tendency.

My analysis started with considerations regarding the way Rothfuss builds his secondary world. To do so, I approached his novels in the light of Tolkien's (2001) and

Kyrmse's (2003) theories concerning worldbuilding. Central to these scholars' theories are the concepts of arresting strangeness and inner consistence of reality, two features that, when achieved through literary craft, tend to result in the creation of a three-dimensional secondary world that inspires a sense of depth, diversity, and of historical time in the readers. Through the presentation of elements present in the primary world displaced in the fictional universe, the creation of a secondary world that is both similar and dissimilar to the factual world is made possible. The analyses showed that Rothfuss' fictional universe possesses the characteristics proposed by Tolkien and Kyrmse. However, the most important question proved to be not how Rothfuss' secondary world conforms to the proposed model, but rather how it differs from it. In my analysis, that meant how the gap between primary and secondary world is breached in the narrative. Such differences are worth considering because they give insight into what the author's may be attempting to call attention to in their works as well as to the problems they may be trying to address.

Therefore, if Tolkien made his Middle-earth closer to his (implied) readers by creating characters (the hobbits) that resemble the average Victorian person of his time and, then, involving these characters in a complex affair (a war), and finally making a point that such conflict was only managed to be solved, to a considerable extent, due to the role the hobbits fulfilled in the narrative, his intention, as he claimed several times in his letters as well as in his narratives, was to show that it is often the deeds, however small and seemingly unassuming, of the average person that move the wheels of the world, that make a difference at the end of the day. Given that *The Lord of the Rings* was published in a period in which Europe (as well as other places around the globe) was greatly plagued by a sense of increasing hopelessness due to the Wars, it is understandable that Tolkien wanted to breach the gap between his secondary world and the factual the way he did. Writing over fifty decades after Tolkien, in a different historical moment and from a different place, the way Rothfuss breached the gap between his secondary world and the factual is considerably different from that of the twentieth century author.

If Tolkien approaches, to a considerable extent, the problems of war, Rothfuss' narratives concern mostly the problems of poverty, prejudice, as well as other types of social issues. The setting in Kvothe's story is, indeed, fantastic, the arresting strangeness is undeniably there. However, it serves mainly, I argue, as a background to the discussion of the issues mentioned above. Kvothe's struggles and aspirations are predominantly rooted in the primary world: an orphan kid that must overcome sheer poverty and the hostility of a society that cares very little about the less favoured so that he can have access to what ought to have

been granted to everyone by right: access to food, to a shelter, to a safe environment, and, not the least, to education. All things that, when granted, would ideally be enough to assure that a person can not only thrive, but also bloom within society. Therefore, the gap between Temerant and the factual world is breached, to a great extent, by the struggles and aspirations of the main character, that are, as argued, representative of what is observable in many a place around the world.

Attempting to better understand how Rothfuss built his narrative to address the issues mentioned above, I went over the theories of two prominent scholars of the field of fantasy literature, namely Bryan Attebery (1992) and Farah Mendlesohn (2008). Although their theories have, indeed, their merits, they present also considerable limitations. In order to identify patterns that could broaden the understanding of how fantasy literature works, these scholars opted for setting aside an aspect that I believe should be central to most studies endeavouring to obtain insight into the workings of the genre, namely the study of what fantasy texts produced at different times and places are saying. An analysis of fantasy that disregards what meaning a given text is trying to convey in favour of a study focusing on how such meaning is being conveyed, may be deemphasizing what I believe to be some of the genre's greatest merits and potential: its adaptability, diversity, and its extensive resourcefulness and recursiveness. In other words, a study favouring solely an analysis of how fantasy may be used, risks disregarding the fact that an infinity of things may be done with fantasy as well as what it can do for us. Therefore, I argue that a more comprehensive approach to the genre should consider not only the "how" of fantasy, but also the "what". Thus, rather than trying to understand solely how Rothfuss weaves his narrative, I also decided to investigate what meaning the author was attempting to convey in his fantasy novels. Consequently, if the first chapter of my analyses focused mostly on the "how", the second chapter addressed mainly the "what".

In the chapter "(New) tendencies on fantasy I approached three main aspects of *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*, namely the problems these narratives discuss, the dilemmas of the hero, and the reformulation of the happy ending. I attempted to demonstrate that the first has a considerable impact on the other two, that the problems imposed to the hero may influence not only his behaviour, but also his path. At the same time, that if the struggles of the hero changed, so did, to a considerable extent, the way the happy ending is presented. Central to that part of the work was the argument that a change in the central conflict presented in more recent fantasy in comparison to more traditional works of the genre may be observable in several fantasy narratives of the last three decades. Such

change, when present, tend to be accompanied by modifications in the characterisation of the hero.

Major texts of fantasy literature, said to have established and popularised the genre were published during the 19th and 20th centuries. Among them are works by authors such as Tolkien, Lewis, Morris, and MacDonald. In the works of these authors, which I termed more traditional fantasy, the conflict tends to be often either between the hero against the Gods (or any other type of superior forces, such as nature or fantastic creatures) or the hero against other men (in conflicts such as wars). On the other hand, in Rothfuss' narratives, as well as in other more recent fantasy works, it is the presentation of the struggles of the hero against society or against himself that has become more typical. In this sense, the major battles Kvothe faces in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* are primarily against social and psychological issues, namely orphanhood, poverty, hunger, prejudice, guilt, and loss of identity.

Therefore, heroes whose main aspiration is to prove themselves through great deeds in epic battles and to work towards the well-being of the collective are hardly possible in more recent fantasy. They are often overwhelmed to such an extent by problems of individual order that they are left with no time or strength to look after the collective. In this sense, with so much at stake, the characterisation of the hero has also greatly changed in a number of works of more recent fantasy. The figure of the hero, that in more traditional fantasy considerably resembles that of classical texts such as the epic and whose central characteristics are altruism and righteousness, has been largely reformulated to fit the new challenges presented to them in more recent fantasy. That has meant that the once simplistic and inherently good tendency of the hero has assumed a considerably more complex nature, subject to a series of dilemmas, for it often happens in more recent fantasy that the notion of good and evil, right and wrong is presented in a less dichotomous fashion if compared to what was often the case in more traditional works of the genre. Thus, even though the hero in Rothfuss' narratives may be seen acting according to what he believes is right, there are also moments in the narrative he must act according to need. Consequently, in both *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* Kvothe is seen not only showing compassion, helping the ones in need, and performing a series of other noble actions, but also engaging in several controversial actions, such as stealing, lying, killing, and also inflicting physical pain to obtain revenge, as the excerpt below shows:

After patching up my leg, I took every bit of rainy-day money I had saved and bought five pints of dreg, a cheap, foul liquor strong enough to blister the inside of

your mouth. Then I limped into Dockside and waited for Pike and his friends to spot me. It didn't take long, I let him and two of his friends follow me for half a mile, past Seamling Lane and into Tallows. I kept to the main roads, knowing they wouldn't dare attack me in broad daylight when people were around. But when I darted into a side alley, they hurried to catch up, suspecting I was trying to make a run for it. However, when they turned the corner no one was there. Pike thought to look up just as I was pouring the bucket of dreg onto him from the edge of the low roof above. It doused him, splashing across his face and chest. He screamed and clutched at his eyes as he went to his knees. Then I struck the phosphorus match I'd stolen, and dropped it onto him, watching it sputter and flare as it fell. Full of the pure, hard hatred of a child, I hoped he would burst into a pillar of flame. He didn't, but did catch fire. He screamed again and staggered around while his friends swatted at him, trying to put him out. I left while they were busy. (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 191).

Kvothe's deed above was guided by his desire to get revenge on a character that had not only beaten and robbed him during his first day in Tarbean, but that had also destroyed the protagonist's most precious belonging and sole material link to the memory of his parents: his father's lute. Kvothe's violent and merciless act against his enemy would probably not have such a striking effect had it happened in a work of more traditional fantasy. Aslan executes Queen Jadis in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, while orcs and goblins are shown no mercy in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but such deeds hardly have the same impact in the (implied) reader as do the similarly gruesome ones enacted by Kvothe in Rothfuss' narratives. Such difference occurs, as I argued in the second chapter of this work, possibly because the way notions of good and evil, right and wrong tend to be presented differently in the works of more traditional fantasy as compared to the more recent works of the genre. Jadis, as well as the orcs, and goblins, are presented not only as the enemy, but also as nonhumans, monsters, having an exclusively and inherently evil character. Thus, in the rather dichotomous view of more traditional fantasy works, in which the boundaries between good and evil tend to be well defined, imposing death to the ones marked as wicked is often regarded as the most logic and viable solution. On the other hand, in narratives in which such boundaries are presented as shady or even inexistent, the recognition that the enemy being fought is as much human as the hero fighting them starts to arise, as the following excerpt from the *Poppy War* well illustrates:

"I wonder what a Federation soldier looks like," Kitay said as they descended the mountain to pick up sharpened weapons from the armory. "They have arms and legs, I'm guessing. Maybe even a head." "No, I mean, what do they *look* like?" Kitay asked. "Like Nikara? All of the Federation came from the eastern continent. They're not like Hesperians, so they must look *somewhat* normal." Rin couldn't see why this was relevant. "Does it matter?" "Don't you want to see the face of the enemy?" Kitay asked. "No, I don't," she said. "Because then I might think they're human. And they're not human. We're talking about the people who gave opium to toddlers the last time they invaded. The people who massacred Speer." "Maybe they're more human than we realize," said Kitay. (Kuang, 2018, pp. 232-233. Italics in the original).

The tendency of recognizing the other, the enemy, as much human as oneself in several works of more recent fantasy lead (or should lead) to the realisation that evilness, once ascribed typically to the enemy, may be also seen in the hero. Therefore, different from the dichotomous view that regard characters as either good or evil, often present in more traditional fantasy, the analysis pursued in this thesis argues that a shift in the propensity can be observable. Consequently, characters, heroes or said villains, are all capable of doing both good and of resorting to extreme measures, liable to mistakes as well as to getting things right. When it comes to Kvothe (and to a series of other protagonists in more recent fantasy), the determining factor behind his decision-making process is intrinsically connected to the situation he finds himself in. Most of the time, as the analysis has shown, it is the protagonist's will to survive in the face of dreary situations that dictates his actions, as the excerpt below shows:

Luck smiled on me the next day, and I managed to steal a bundle of rags off the back of a wagon and sell them to a ragman for four iron pennies. Too hungry to worry about tomorrow, I bought a thick slice of cheese and a warm sausage, then a whole loaf of fresh bread and a warm apple tart. Finally, on a whim, I went to the back door of the nearby inn and spent my final penny on a mug of strong beer. (Rothfuss, 2007, p.).

The logics behind the protagonist reasoning is seemingly straightforward: to avert starvation, he steals; to be given a chance, he conceals the truth; to escape death, he kills. However, given the complexity of the character, his more extreme actions, as it was argued in the second chapter of this work, are often accompanied by feelings of guilt and remorse. In this sense, the study performed has demonstrated the, when compared to what is often presented in more traditional fantasy, the figure of the hero in Rothfuss' narratives was largely reformulated. The changes observed, on one hand, are intrinsically connected to the type of conflict addressed in the narrative: rather than taking part in epic battles to save the world, the protagonist in *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear* must fight several individual battles, be them against poverty, prejudice, or a different social issue, to save himself. On the other hand, the resignification of concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, also play a major role: by presenting a protagonist possessing a complex nature, closer to what may be observable in the factual world, Rothfuss managed to create a hero that feels closer to the (implied) reader and whose struggles evoke a range of feelings: from admiration to anger, love and hate, but, most importantly, the feeling of compassion that restrains judgement in favour of solidarity and understanding.

Lastly in this dissertation was the matter of the happy ending analysed, mainly its considerable reformulation in the works of more recent fantasy. Perhaps the element that gives the most insight into the path the genre seems to have been taking and also into its everlasting appeal and value, above all in periods of crisis and turmoil. As argued, a considerable number of fantasy works published during the last three decades depict an ending that may be arguably considered bittersweet, rather than ideally happy. The fairy-tale-like dynamics, in which the good and hardworking are, at the end of the narrative, rewarded, while the wicked and foul typically suffer or perish, seems to be, if anything, the exception to what might be slowly becoming an often-observable tendency. Therefore, Tolkien's (2001) claim arguing that the mark of any good fantasy story, of what he calls the higher or more complete type, is its presentation of the *Eucatastrophe*, the sudden joyous turn intended to show readers that the toils and sufferings of the main characters were not in vain, is presently highly debatable. The answers, the wisdom, provided by fantasy narratives regarding the problems they address are liable to change according to when and where a given text is produced. Consequently, solutions that seemed viable decades ago are unlikely to meet the needs of the present. The demands and social concerns of the factual world keep changing, thus, in order to be able to respond to them, the nature of fantasy also undergoes reformulations. In this sense, an important question to ask concerns what a given fantasy work written at a specific historical moment offers insight into. Therefore, the fact that the happy ending in several more recent fantasy narratives has been considerably reshaped testifies not only about the adaptability of the genre, but also about the type of story a specific context seems to be needing.

Kafka (1990) proposes, as stated in the epigraph above, that we need books that affect us and touch us deeply, books that make us experience more than just joy and bliss, books that remind us about the other side of what means to be human, namely, to experience pain, loss, and failure. Similarly, in *The Wise Man's Fear* Kvothe is asked why a story should be told if not to entertain, to which he promptly answers that, apart from amusing and entertaining us, stories are also often be told to teach us. Both arguments above considered, I claim that part of the value and appeal of fantasy literature resides in the fact that that it provides us not necessarily, not strictly, with the stories we want, but oftentimes with the stories we need. Aware that such notion may be troubling to some audiences, some authors, such as Sapkowski, attempt to deal with the issue inside their own fictional stories, as the following excerpt from *The Witcher: the Lady of the Lake*, demonstrates:

I am very tired. I watched the death of my friends who followed me here to the end of the world. They came to rescue your daughter. Not even knowing her. Apart from Cahir, none of them even knew Ciri. But they came here to rescue her. For there was something in her that was decent and noble. And what happened? They found death. I consider that unjust. And if anyone wants to know, I don't agree with it. Because a story where the decent ones die and the scoundrels live and carry on doing what they want is full of shit. (Sapkowski, 2022, pp. 403-404).

Upon finishing a (fantasy) narrative and realising that the end presented is not in consonance with what was expected, the implied reader may voice a reaction similar to Geralt's, above. Coming to grips with the fact that many times life provides us with what we need, rather than with what we want may prove extremely challenging. Nonetheless, it is something that, in a way or another, seems to be part of growing and of learning to be resilient: falling is part of learning to walk, failure often teaches about humility, and death may teach about loving, giving value and, ultimately, about living. The present observable tendency in more recent fantasy literature seems to be pointing precisely to that: rather than aspiring to ideal endings and being haunted by feelings of failure if things do not go exactly as planned, one may benefit from adopting a more resilient, less fatalistic attitude towards life, consequently recognising that if joy is not final, neither are pain, sorrow, failure, and, perhaps, not even death.

Kvothe faced loss, pain, failure, and was left with wounds that may take a lifetime to heal. He carried on despite it all. How his story ends is still to be seen, but there is still room to hope that by retelling his story he may realise that there was also, at times, happiness in it, and that he may still be greeted, from time to time, by further joyful moments. Considering that fantasy stories are woven from the material in the primary world, the insight they present may help us reshape our understanding of events in the factual world, thus prompting us to embrace a wiser and more resilient posture towards them. In this sense, part of the value of fantasy narratives is that they help us regain the view that no feeling is final, no conflict or crisis are constant. Both the good and the bad will repeatedly come and will, eventually, go, for life is a continuum, and that is arguably what the present tendency in more recent fantasy is trying to show. Finally, this study attempted to offer a glimpse into the observable behaviour of the genre in the last three decades. However, since tendencies are also not final, continuous research within the field is necessary, so that when the present tendency changes (for it sure will), new questions may be posed, and new meanings found.

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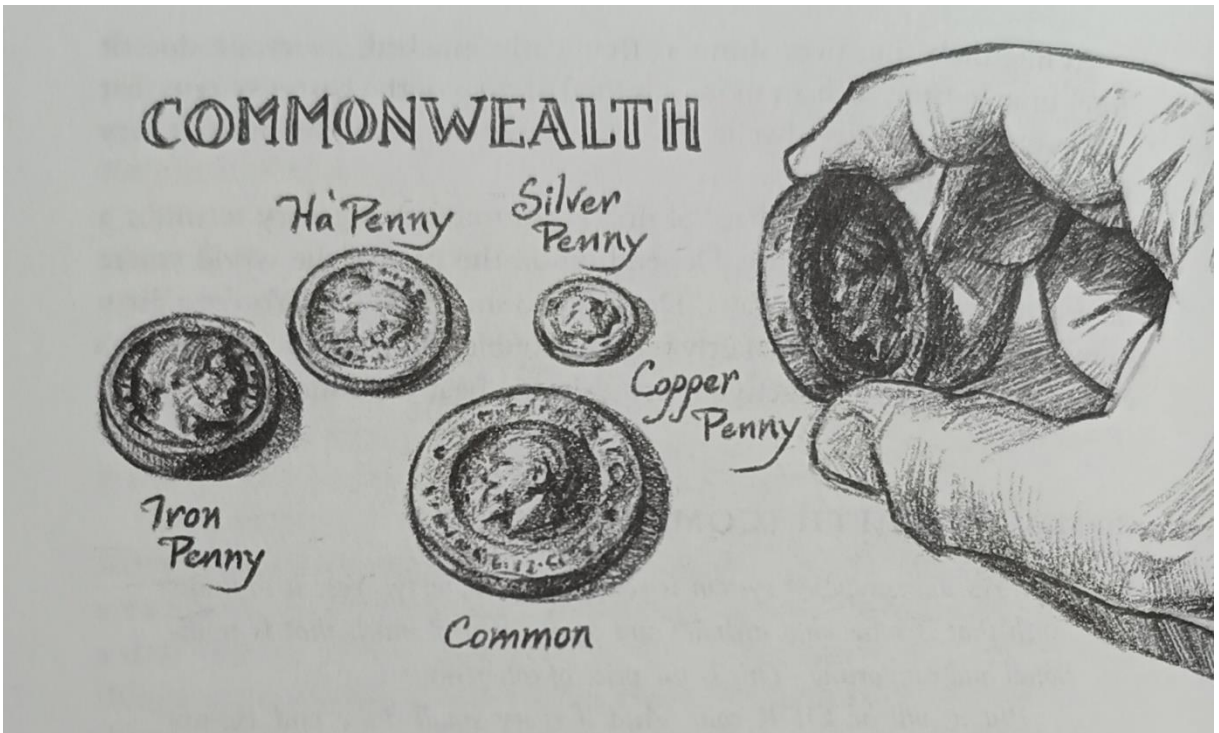
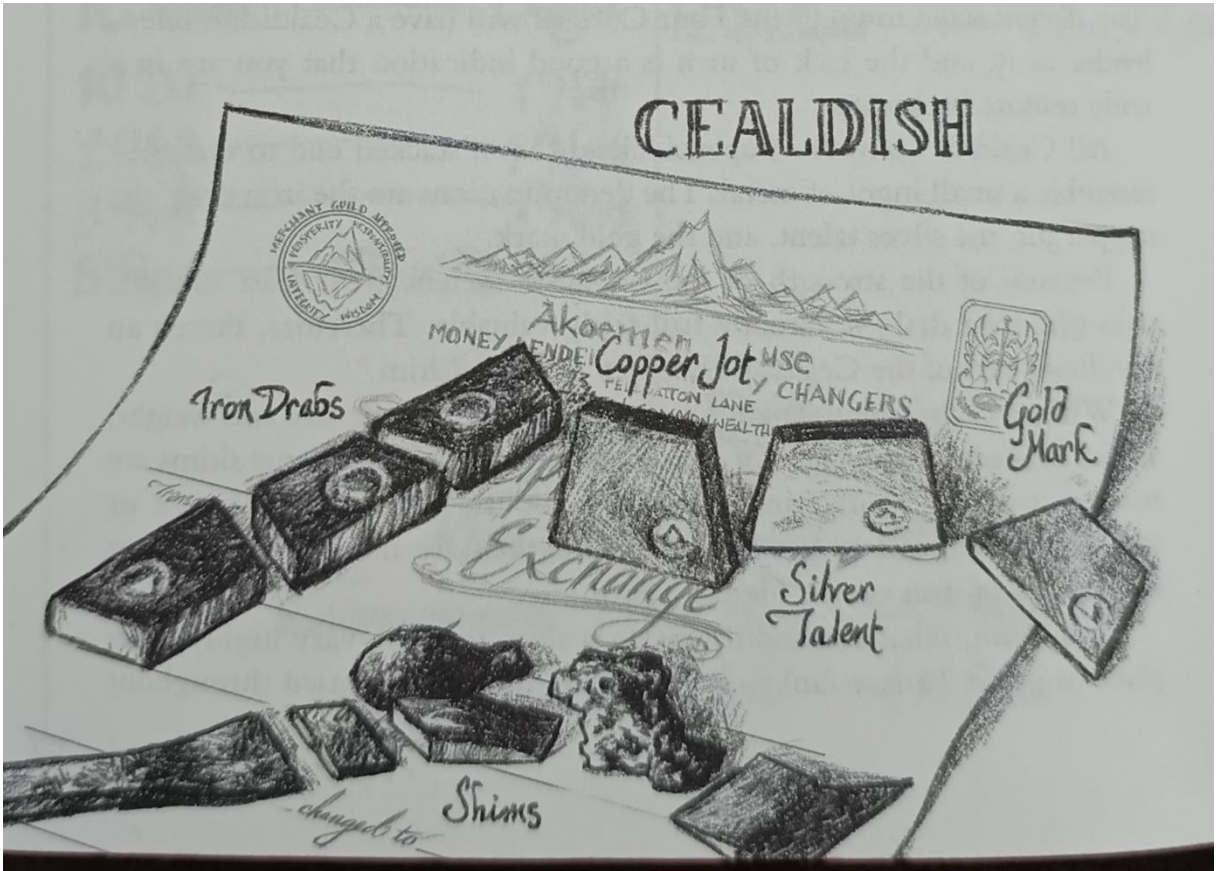
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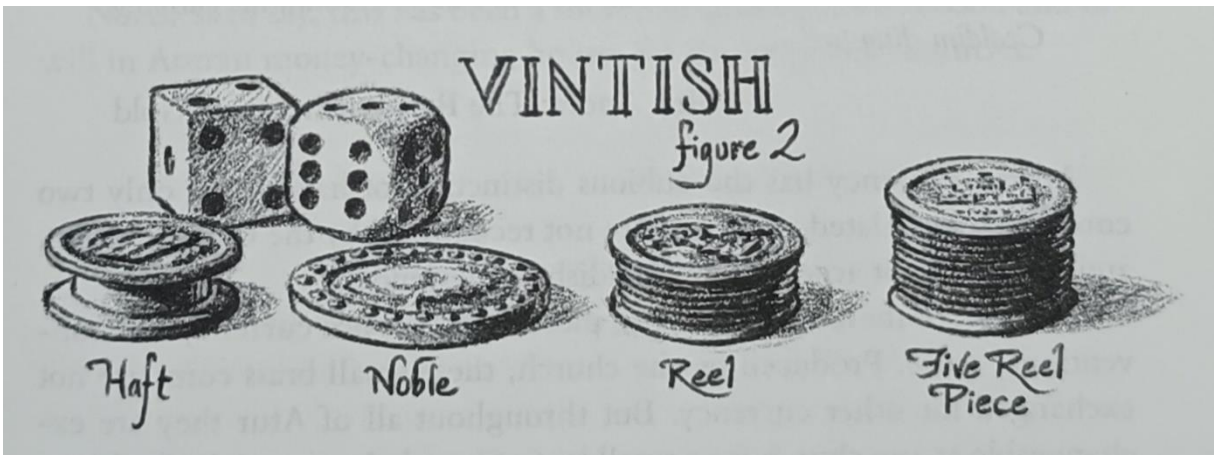
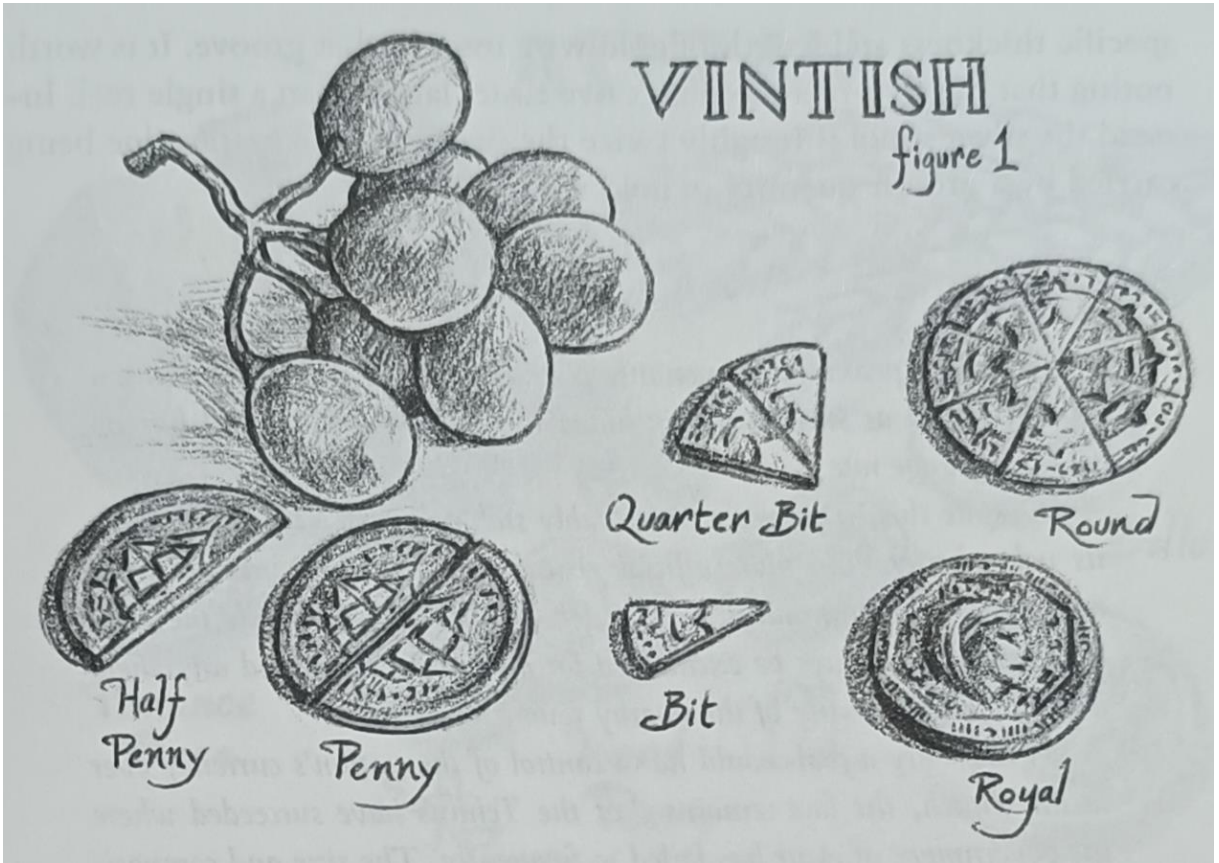
ANNEX A – Map of Temerant

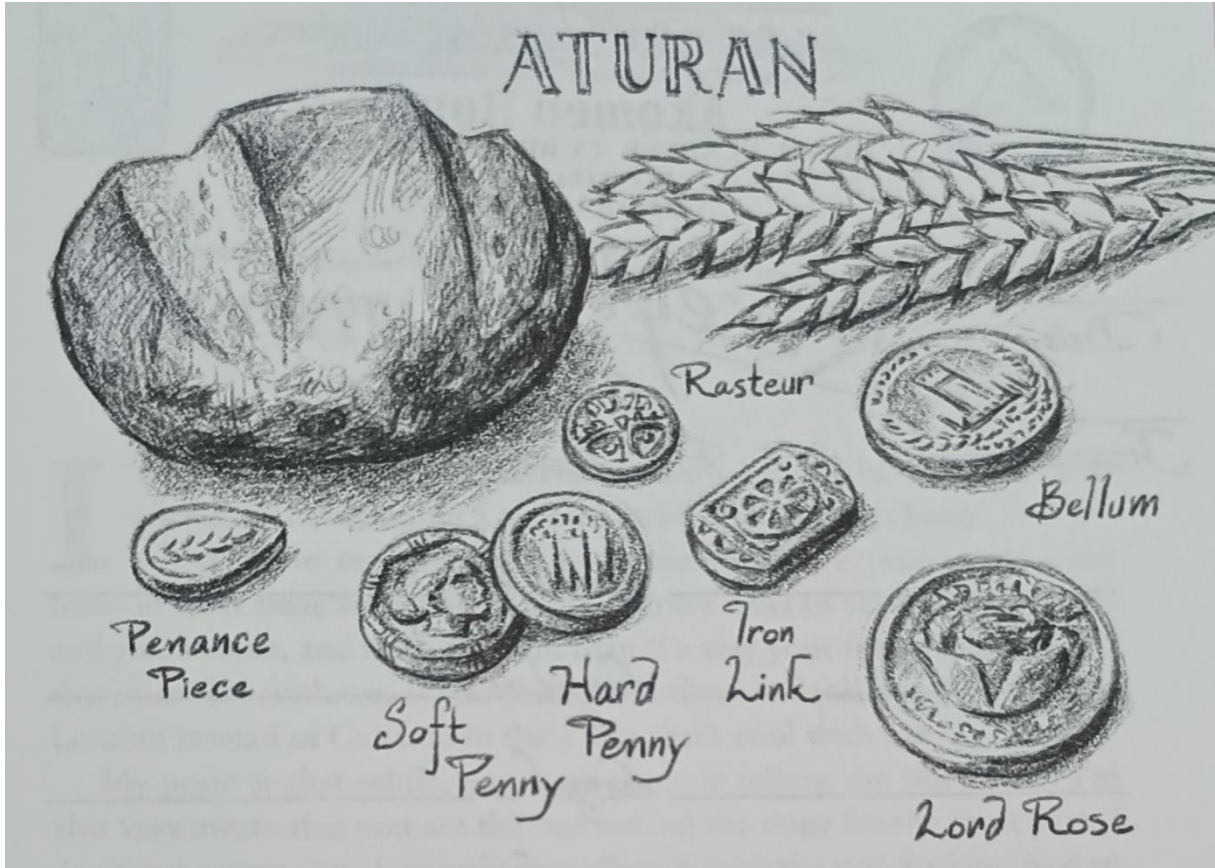


Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. xxi)

ANNEX B – The currencies of Temerant







Source: Rothfuss (2017, pp. 718-723)

ANNEX C – The Aturan Calendar

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> DEARTH </div>				
LUTEN	1	12	23	34
SHUDEN	2	13	24	35
THEDEN	3	14	25	36
FEOCHEN	4	15	26	37
ORDEN	5	16	27	38
HEPTEN	6	17	28	39
CHAEN	7	18	29	40
FELLING	8	19	30	41
REAYING	9	20	31	42
CENDLING	10	21	32	43
MOURNING	11	22	33	44

Hiệh Mourning

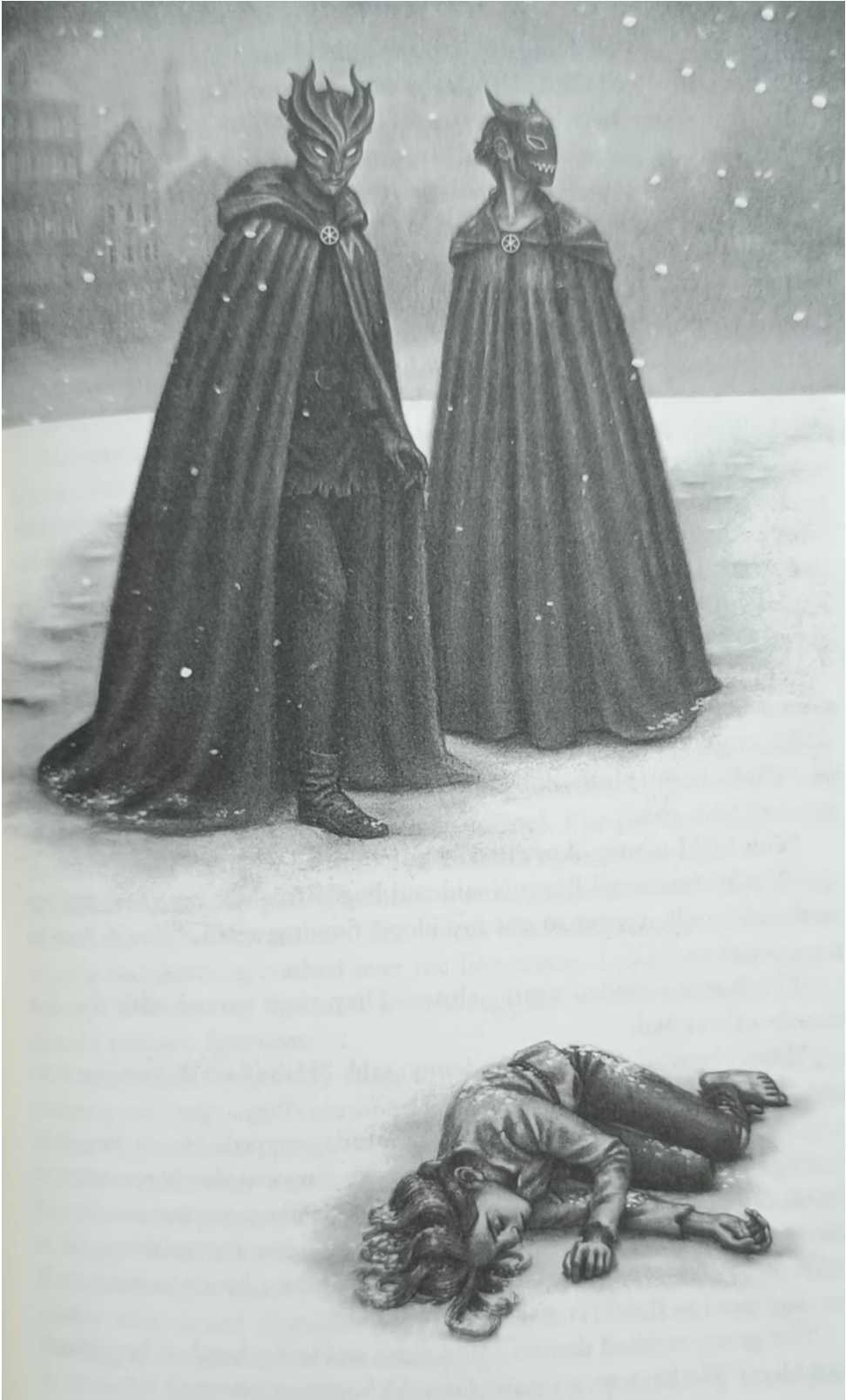
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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ANNEX D – Tarbean



Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 140)

ANNEX E – Midwinter’s Day



Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 157)

ANNEX F – Fela in Flames

Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 470)

ANNEX G – The Draccus

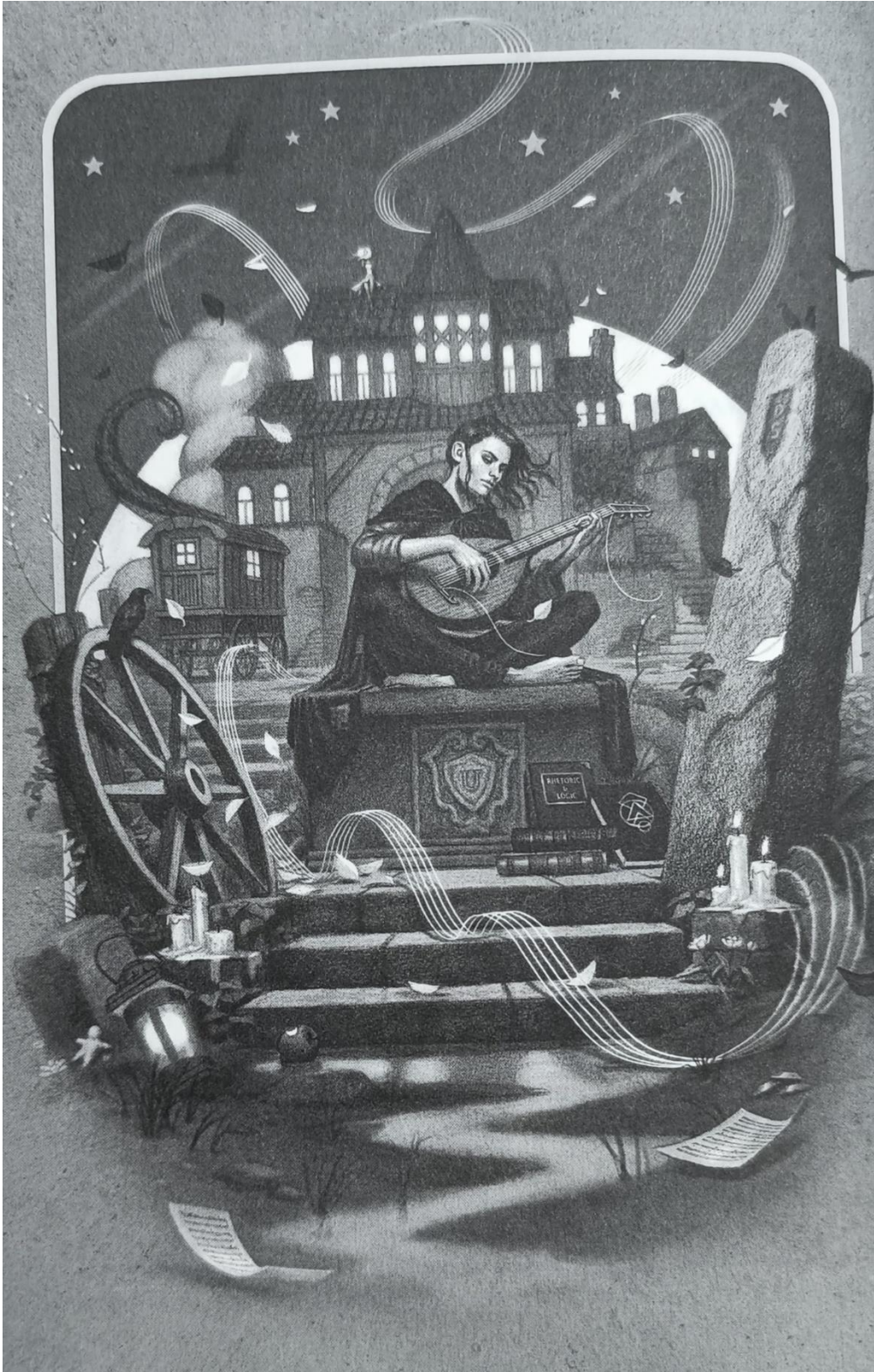
Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 571)

ANNEX H – A Demon Dispatched



Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 617)

ANNEX I – Endings & Beginnings



Source: Rothfuss (2017, p. 696)