Fantasy Beyond the Page:

Metafiction and Mythmaking in Patrick Rothfuss' "Kingkiller Chronicle" and J. R. R. Tolkien

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Master's Thesis in English Literature and Culture

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May 2024

UNIVERSITY
OF BERGEN

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven undersøker hvordan Patrick Rothfuss, i sin "Kingkiller Chronicle", inspireres av og samtidig distanserer seg fra en av fantasy-sjangerens grunnleggere, J.R.R. Tolkien. Oppgaven setter søkelys på bruk av metafiksjon og mytologi i Rothfuss' verk. Disse elementene er gjenkjennelige fra Tolkiens fortellinger, men Rothfuss bruker dem for å nå helt andre litterære mål. Tolkien bruker sine fortellinger til å ære det han så på som Guds skaperverk og Guds plan. Rothfuss, på sin side, benytter metafiksjon og mytologiske elementer til å stille spørsmål om sannheten bak slike religiøse fortellinger, og skaper en bevisst usikkerhet rundt disse temaene. I denne oppgaven brukes Tolkien som bakgrunn for analyse av Rothfuss og hans verk.

Oppgaven begynner med en introduksjon rundt bruk av metafiksjon og mytologi i fantasy-sjangeren. Mens Tolkien inspireres av ortodoks kristendom, argumenterer denne oppgaven for at Rothfuss henter religiøs inspirasjon fra gnostisisme, noe som skaper en mer kritisk og usikker holdning til religiøse strukturer. Begge bruker religiøs inspirasjon gjennomgående i sine metafiksjonelle verk. Dette er derfor også gjennomgående i de tre kapitlene denne oppgaven inneholder. Første kapittel undersøker skapelsesmyter, og hvordan disse utvikles over tid, gjennom menneskers formidling og tolkning av dem. Slik gjenfortelling over tid gjør det vanskelig å vite historisk kontekst og sannheter rundt dette temaet. Denne problemstillingen belyses gjennom Rothfuss' fortellinger, i kontrast til Tolkiens verk. Videre diskuterer oppgaven bruk av magiske elementer, og hvordan disse kan brukes til å belyse strukturer i vår virkelige verden. Tolkien bruker magiske elementer som et bilde på vitenskap og den moderne maskinen, og til å belyse og advare mot menneskets dominans over naturen. Rothfuss bruker lignende elementer til å reflektere over kunnskap og makt. Han gir et mer optimistisk syn på vitenskapens potensiale, samtidig som han bruker dette temaet til videre å belyse usikkerhet rundt skapelsesmyter, der han knytter temaet til kunnskap og forståelse. Det siste kapitlet undersøker «quest-narrativet», som er en viktig struktur i fantasy-sjangeren. Tolkiens helt, Frodo, er uselvisk og selvoppofrende, mens Kvothe i Rothfuss sine fortellinger fokuserer på personlig erkjennelse. Kvothe's reise viser hvordan historier og myter kan forvrenge sannheten, og dette bidrar videre til Rothfuss' belysning av det han ser på som en epistemologisk usikkerhet rundt skapelsestemaet. Oppgaven ønsker med dette å vise hvordan

Rothfuss' sine fortellinger, og fantasy-sjangeren generelt, kan bruke sin tilsynelatende avstand fra vår egen verden til å reflektere over etablerte strukturer i våre liv på nye måter.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Erik Tonning, for believing in this idea. Your thoughts and reflections during this process have been invaluable. This thesis would not be what it is without you. Further, I would like to thank my significant other, for being patient and understanding, and my dog, for reminding me to take breaks and occasionally go outside during this process. Lastly, thank you to the child I used to be, and all the fantasy she read religiously, that inspired me to dive into the topic of this thesis. She would have loved this.

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Introduction

> “A story is like a nut” Vashet said. “A fool will swallow it whole and choke. A fool will throw it away, thinking it of little worth.” She smiled. “But a wise woman finds a way to crack the shell and eat the meat inside.” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 761)

Fantasy literature has long captivated readers by offering an escape from the “real world” into realms of magic and imagination. Due to the distinctiveness and immediate recognizability of the genre, authors attempting to add their contributions to it today face the challenge of asserting their own voice while also fitting into a familiar landscape of storytelling. This thesis will examine the American writer Patrick Rothfuss’ “Kingkiller Chronicle” (a planned trilogy where only two novels, *The Name of the Wind* (2007) and *The Wise Man’s Fear* (2011) have so far appeared) against the background of one of the founding figures of fantasy, J. R. R. Tolkien. Rothfuss both draws on and distances himself from Tolkien in his use of fantasy narratives to thematize the power of storytelling itself. Caldecott (2005, p. 9) argues that Tolkien’s story in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) is ultimately about how the world and the self are made, and as we shall see this could also be said for Rothfuss’ narrative. In both writers we find an emphasis on metafiction and mythological inspirations, whereas their underlying philosophies and the principles behind their fictional world-building differ sharply. Albeit not on the same scale as Tolkien, Rothfuss has in his own way left a mark on the modern fantasy genre, by weaving elements of mythology and metafiction into the fabric of his narratives. This thesis will draw comparisons with Tolkien as a means of highlighting Rothfuss’ contribution, but the critical focus here will be on Rothfuss, aided by insights drawn from the secondary literature on Tolkien. In this introduction, I will set the scene by first providing an overview of the use of metafiction and mythology in the fantasy genre, and explaining some of the theoretical frameworks for the analysis that will follow in the coming chapters.

What role does metafiction play in shaping the fantasy genre?

The fantasy genre is an apt vehicle for investigating the practice of storytelling. The genre often contains "intricate metafictions (Attebery, 2013, p. 1), meaning that it often explores more than one main story, where the characters draw you in by telling new stories. The term metafiction, as defined by Garcia-Siino (2015, p. 30), is used for stories that "explore the theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction". The word "fabulation" can be seen as associated with the term metafiction. Fabulation is defined by Scholes (1979, p. 3) as narratives that "put the highest premium on art and joy", meaning that they focus on the art of creating (writing) within their narration. The focus then often becomes on the fluid boundaries between reality-in-fiction and fiction-in-reality, as the writing focuses on the process of writing, or storytelling, itself. Scholes considers metafiction as a form of fabulation, not as separate from it (1979, p. 8). Metafiction is a term used for writing that explores the theories surrounding fiction through the act of writing, and it is self-conscious about language, form and writing (Garcia-Siino, 2015, pp. 30-35). Hutcheon says that at one point in time, novels seemed to refuse to give any power or attention to its medium, meaning language (2013, p. 11). However, with metafictional writing, language, and the process of reading, writing, and telling stories becomes the focus that drives the narrative. This is increasingly a way for fantasy writers to play with their stories, including the reader in the process of their work in new ways.

By using metafictional tools in storytelling, authors get to highlight aspects of the real world through fiction in new ways. Scholes explains that "fiction functions as both map and mirror at the same time", and that by using fabulation (here, metafiction) we can describe reality in a way that realism and philosophy cannot (1979, p. 13) because reality is "too subtle" for realism and too direct for philosophy. Using fiction to explain reality is metafictional, as is using fiction to reframe existing mythology and folklore, politics, and society. By portraying situations and characters in otherworldly settings, writers highlight specific problems with less distraction from other aspects of our world. As Scholes puts it: "Beast and princess are not phony symbols […] but fictional ideas of human essences" (1979, p. 123). Wood (2022, p. 219) agrees, arguing that by being distant from reality, fictional stories can illustrate cultural norms of real life more accurately than other sophisticated texts. As Kenny (1996, p.

9) suggests, fantasy literature explores the intricacies of the human experience, offering insights into psychology and enriching our understanding of human existence.

In metafictional fiction, the utilization of language to tell stories within stories is a way to make the reader less passive and more intertwined with the story itself. According to Hutcheon (2013, p. 8), there has been an "increasing interest in how art is created, not just what is created". This trend offers authors and protagonists new ways to engage with their own narratives and readers, providing diverse ways of interacting with the storytelling experience. Scholes understands metafiction as stories that emphasizes structure, form, or philosophical qualities, often experimenting with all of these at some point (1979, p. 114). Waugh defines metafiction as narratives that systematically draw attention to their artificial nature, to "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality". She further explains that by doing this, these stories examine the structures of narrative fictions while simultaneously exploring the fictionality of the real world as well (1995, p. 40). She continues by saying that studying metafiction should be seen as important because it "offers insight into the representational nature of all fiction and the history of the novel as a genre" (Waugh, 1995, pp. 42-43).

The correlation between mythology and metafiction serves as a further lens through which we can delve into the origins of storytelling and the active engagement of readers. According to Tolkien: "To ask what is the origin of stories [...] is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind" (1938, p. 8). Reading metafictional stories, we partake in stories in a way that is more active than when reading other fictional genres. We are confronted with the "origin of the story" in which we are reading, the fact that we are reading it at all, and the concept of creating written stories itself. In the fantasy genre, the concept of mythology is easy to correlate with the concept of metafiction, as myth (either existing in real life or made up for the story) is often used to bring the concept of storytelling into focus in these narratives. Through the process of mythopoeia (mythmaking) fantasy narratives deploy older myths as basis and inspiration. Thus, the genre challenges traditional ideas and norms surrounding mythology, while also challenging religious attempts to constrain the power of mythology (Attebery, 2014, p. 31).

What role does mythology play in metafictional fantasy?

The classification of fairy tales and myths has evolved over time. Attebery points out that while contemporary classifications distinguish fairy tales and myth as different genres today, fairy tales were previously seen as reconstructions of myths. For instance, the Grimm brothers' collection of fairy tales were exclusively seen as myth reconstructions at the time of their publication (Attebery, 2014, p. 15). According to the OED, "mythology" was at one point seen as "the delivery of matters by way of fables or tales" (OED, 2023), which is an interesting definition that ties made-up stories to real "matters" of society. Donovan (2022, p. 82) says that "world myths" usually are regarded as accounts of a remote past, that explain origins of life and/or the universe, that establish authority for governing structures related to values or morals. Attebery (2014, p. 2) defines mythology as all collective stories "that encapsulate a world view and authorizes belief". The term "mythopoeia" was used by Tolkien in reference to the act of "mythmaking", especially in his poem "Mythopoeia" addressed to C. S. Lewis, referencing what he saw as the importance and truths hidden in mythology (Tolkien, 1931). Tolkien did not coin the term, but it had not been used frequently before this. In the eighteenth century, the term "mythoplasm" had been used to describe the same processes, and the term "mythification" has also been used to describe it (OED, 2023). The significance of incorporating themes of myth and religion into the fantasy genre, revealing its inherent metafictional nature, underscores its exploration of truths and symbolic meanings embedded within mythological narratives (Attebery, 2014, p. 4).

Attebery discusses how we not only find existing myths in the fantasy genre, but that fantasy often reframes myths, constructing new ways of looking at the traditional stories and beliefs, often redefining the relationships between reader and mythic texts (2014, p. 2). He calls fantasy "one degree more fictional than fiction". Fantasy is often used to weigh the claims of myth against the claims of history or science (the second especially used in science fiction) (Attebery, 2014, pp. 21-22). However, as a genre, fantasy does not have a very long history, regardless of how much inspiration it takes from "ancient" ideas and myths (Garcia-Siino, 2015, p. 12), and the lines of what is and is not fantasy is also not always clear. Wood (2022, p. 222) explains how Tolkien uses his essay "On Fairy-stories" to outline the interplay between what we now call "fantasy" and traditional folk narratives. Tolkien's work, amongst

others such as C.S. Lewis and William Morris, suggests that fantasy should not be understood in isolation, but rather as a counterpoint to the history of myth (Attebery, 2014, p. 22).

The modern fantasy genre is seen as connected to terms like “fairy-story” or “folktale”. Tolkien understood fairytales as stories that are not stories about fairies, but stories about “Faerie”, the place where fairies exist, as he discusses in his famous essay “On Fairy-Stories” (1938). This place contains many other things outside of actual fairies (Tolkien, 1938, p. 4). Tolkien does not speak about “fantasy” as a genre specifically in his famous essay, but rather about “fairy stories”, which might be seen as an older genre, or a precursor to fantasy based on legends, myth, and folk tales, often told to children. Many modern fantasy stories are based on tropes, concepts, and creatures from such tales, making it easy to see them as related. However, Tolkien’s version of “fairy stories” are closer to what we consider as “fantasy” than the traditional folk narrative of other scholars. The word “fantasy” as a genre was however not even used to describe Tolkien’s own writing until years after it was first published (James, 2022, p. 191). Words like “heroic romance” and “science fiction” was used instead. Within Tolkien’s essay, the word fantasy is used as headline for a chapter in which he speaks on the minds capability to create what he calls “narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode”(Tolkien, 1938, p. 23). What we call “fantasy” today, developed in the wake of – and sometimes as an alternative to – scientific and rationalist thinking in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the more modern version of the genre was not fully established until the late twentieth century (Garcia-Siino, 2015, p. 15). The genre challenges reality and is as such intrinsically metafictional (Garcia-Siino, 2015, p. 16).

The relationship between fantasy and mythology is complex, and both words to some degree mean the same thing in some settings. This is apparent in the use of such phrases as “it’s just a myth” or “only fantasy” (Attebery, 2014, p. 9). Tolkien recognized that traditional narratives like folk-tales and myths were foundations for fantasy (Wood, 2022, p. 215). The term “mythopoeia” entered the discourse when Tolkien wrote a poem on the subject as response to C. S. Lewis, who called myths “lies breathed through silver” (Tolkien, 1931). He conveyed that myths, though they are fundamentally untrue, always “tends towards the truth, leading to genuine understanding on the conditions of existence” (Attebery, 2014, p. 4). The

act of mythopoesis reshapes the narrative we have about the world, which Attebery (2014, p. 8) says might be why people have such strong feelings about the fantasy genre, in both positive ways (such as the Harry Potter-fandom) and negative ways like book-banning and book-burnings. The way we describe and tell stories makes up our view of the world and its truths, and existing and "new" mythology is constantly developed in fantasy and sci-fi stories. The word "new" in this context means new angles and new ways of connecting existing myth to the world, as part of the ideas around myth is that they travel between people through time, as they are always connected to some sort of historical context (Attebery, 2014, p. 20). Tolkien's expression "mythopoeia", is in the context of fantasy used to describe how existing myth is often used in fantasy by reframing and taking specific elements, using them in new ways. As Attebery (2014, p. 9) puts it, "Fantasy, as a literary form, is a way of reconnecting to traditional myths and the worlds they generate". Both Tolkien and Rothfuss use mythological concepts and ideas to frame their narratives and the metafictional aspects in them.

Why discuss metafiction in Rothfuss' works through the lens of Tolkien's writings?

In Rothfuss' "Kingkiller Chronicle", the protagonist tells the story of how he came to be the person he is, focusing both on his own version of events, and on those of other people in his life. He tells this story of his youth to a man called "Chronicler", who writes it down in the frame-story. This written version of events is what most of the novels contain, with snippets from the frame-story included in between. This is very much a story about the power of storytelling, and the various ways in which storytelling can be used. Rothfuss focuses on both the empowering and the isolating feelings that come when you encounter, encourage, and spread rumors and stories about yourself that are greatly exaggerated or untrue. Rothfuss also gives attention to the way stories are received, and how little control we have over stories once they are out there in the world. The protagonist, Kvothe, is a young man who mythologizes himself to better get through life and give him advantages that he otherwise would not have. He grows up as part of a travelling troupe on the margins of society, and then becomes homeless and orphaned, with very little money and no clear place to call home. The focus in much of this story is how stories shape who we become as people and the trajectory of our lives. It is told through the protagonist's life, but also through characters he meets or hears about in folktales and myths encountered on his journey.

Rothfuss' narrative explores how we do not always have power over the stories that become part of our identities. Once these stories are "out there", they will live their own lives as they travel from person to person, and from place to place. In the background of this story about "making yourself" through storytelling, is another story: a wider, older mythological history that surrounds the incidents as well as the songs, poems, and books the protagonist encounters during his time in the travelling troupe and later on in the big libraries at "The University".

Both Rothfuss and Tolkien display religious themes in their metafictional narratives, though they do so in very different ways. Tolkien says in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* that the human creative impulse stems from "the image and likeness of a Maker" and that literary art mirrors "God's aesthetic creation" (1938, p. 27). Attebery (2014, p. 1) points out that Tolkien saw each individual fairy-tale (or fantasy story) as a lesser stand-in for the salvation narrative. Tolkien is to some degree saying that God writes us, as we write stories. Catholic elements and the Bible are seen as central inspiration in Tolkien's writings, as he was a devout Catholic his whole life. Rothfuss on the other hand, rejects the idea of any Christian influences to his work. In an interview with WIRED book club when asked about this subject, he argued that while his stories do allude to "the archetype of the self-sacrificing god", nonetheless, "by the time Jesus did that, it was old news" (Rothfuss, 2016). Where Tolkien measures all written narratives up against the Christian one, Rothfuss seems to view the Christian narrative as just one amongst many other narratives of gods and self-sacrifice for the greater good. Rothfuss is rejecting these subjects as a uniquely Christian theme, while still displaying many religious references.

My own suggestion in this thesis is that Rothfuss' presentation of religious themes correlates strongly with Gnostic mythology. Gnosticism stems from some of the same stories and sources as the Christian creation myths. Sometimes seen as a heretic branch of Christianity, Gnosticism also takes inspiration from many other religions and mythologies (Jonas, 1970, p. 25; Kenny, 1996, p. 16; Mackey, 1984, p. 112). Gnosticism claims that through seeking and obtaining "true knowledge", we will get salvation. It also stems from a belief that the world is

fundamentally imperfect and even evil, and that it was created by godlike beings who are also imperfect. Kenny (1996, p. 21) says that Gnosticism works on the imagination, rather than the intellect, just like fantasy itself. As we shall see, Rothfuss bases his whole narrative in a search for knowledge through stories and adds elements of questioning gods and origins in a way that recalls the Gnostic idea of multiple powerful but imperfect godlike beings, and the search for enlightenment or *gnosis*. This contrast between the authors' religious inspirations will be discussed in all three chapters of this thesis.

In many ways, then, Rothfuss seems to intentionally distance himself from Tolkien and his legacy. The way he talks about Christianity is one of these, but he also more explicitly refers to Tolkien by name, saying that Tolkien "over-explains and over describes" his works. He goes on by saying that he himself is better at brevity, and at being more direct in his writing (Bedord & St. Denis, 2007). In the same interview he does also say that he loves Tolkien's works, despite distancing himself as an author from the detailed explanations of his writing. Rothfuss feels that each part of his story written down needs to be essential for the development of the story and tries his best to always get to the point, whereas according to Rothfuss Tolkien is invested in the minutest details of every part of his storytelling, leaving less for the reader to fill in by themselves. However, both Rothfuss and Tolkien frame their entire stories around the power of storytelling. Tolkien tells his story from "hand to hand", in written versions of his tales, that get rewritten and translated over time by different people for different purposes, adding and losing elements, going from diaries and historical work to something entirely other before we as readers have a chance to be a part of it (Brljak, 2010, p. 21). He places the decisions he made as an author inside the universe he created, like when he changed the original story of the Hobbit to fit into a wider history of Middle-Earth after its success, explaining it as versions of Bilbo's diary changing with time as it got told (Caldecott, 2005). This way of editing his stories made his network of tales grow rapidly, and they all had complex literary histories and relationships to each other (Donovan, 2022, p. 81). His narrative is not about stories shaping people, like in Rothfuss's story, but how stories told through time shapes history and our outlook on the world and the origins of things. Tolkien is preoccupied with storytelling as a concept, and how humans as storytellers are makers of worlds. Through telling stories, we are mirroring God, making our own small worlds within the one created "for us", making us "sub-creators" (Phelpstead, 2022, p. 69). Rothfuss is also preoccupied with similar themes, but not through mirroring a God. Rothfuss' novels use the

power of storytelling to create a multifaceted and somewhat distorted image of a man, Kvothe, so that he becomes what is told through others' perception of him. We are also constantly reminded that we are in a way reading Chronicler's version of the tale, not necessarily Kvothe's own version. Whereas in Tolkien, true "sub-creation" is about participation in the truth of creation itself, in Rothfuss creative making is more often associated with the mediated ambivalence and uncertainty of "making things up".

Structure of the thesis

Chapter one, "Creation Myth and Origin Stories", will dive into the concept of myth, specifically focusing on creation myths and origin stories in Rothfuss, comparing to Tolkien's use of these themes. This chapter will look at how they both establish these themes as one of the most important aspects of their narratives. Where Tolkien is a Catholic who bases all his works in some form of mirroring of the Christian creation story, Rothfuss explores religion in a more gnostic way. He uses familiar Christian imagery, warping it to give us a "failed" creation story, very reminiscent of Gnostic beliefs. This chapter looks at how the concept of creation myths shape Rothfuss' narrative, compared to Tolkien's, incorporating discussions on truth in historical contexts, literary movements and unreliable narration and the authors respective religious inspirations. Chapter two, "Faerie and Magic", will explore the concept of "faerie", as Tolkien uses it in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* (1938). Where Tolkien discusses this term mostly in his non-fictional work, Rothfuss reflects on similar things directly in his tale through his term "fae", exploring the boundaries between human and non-human, including deities and godlike beings in the discussion. Further, the concept of "magic" is discussed in relation to this. Tolkien uses magic as parallels to science and the machine, using it as warning against domination of nature. Rothfuss, like Tolkien, also sees magic as a "science". However, we will look at how he describes knowledge and science as power and opportunities for good, while also focusing on how the knowledge we have shapes our view of the world. The chapter tries to show how these typical fantasy-elements can be used for metafictional reflection, providing indirect parallels to real-world structures. Lastly, chapter three, "The Hero and the Quest Narrative", will dive into the concepts of the quest-narrative as explained by Booker (2004), exploring how the hero is motivated and navigates the quest he is on. This trope is recognizable in the fantasy genre, and in Rothfuss and Tolkien's works. However, we will see that how they do this is

motivated by different philosophies. Tolkien uses his Catholic inspirations heavily in explaining his hero's motivations, whereas Rothfuss explores a more non-tradition, personal quest-journey that affects mostly our hero, Kvothe, himself. Different elements from the quest-journey as Booker categorizes it will be used to highlight different metafictional aspects of Rothfuss' story, compared to Tolkien's work.

Chapter 1: Creation Myths and Origin Stories

This chapter examines a metafictional problem found in both Rothfuss and Tolkien: the challenge of discovering and understanding truths within stories, specifically in creation myths and origin stories. How do we acquire understanding of origin and creation myths, and how do they evolve through reinterpretations and dissemination across time and through personal beliefs? How do the stories we believe in shape our lives and choices? Fantasy's strongest claim to cultural importance, is its way of redefining and exploring readers' relationships with myth and folk-tales, according to Attebery (2014, p. 4). The genre does this by exploring and providing new frameworks to evaluate these narratives. Fantasy also does this with more established religious and mythological narratives. In the guise of escapism, fantasy offers views and reflections on the divine, prophecy, origins of worlds and more, that are all elements of traditional myths and established real life religions (Attebery, 2014, p. 142). Mackey (1984, p. 112) says, "God may be beyond the province of scientists, but He or She is fair game for science fiction writers". Indeed, fantasy can be seen as a "sort of theological thought experiment" (Attebery, 2014, p. 70) providing a framework to explore and test narratives of faith in various ways. However, whereas Tolkien does so to confirm the image of a monotheistic, Catholic God and his creation, Rothfuss highlights the human uncertainty and ambivalence of any search for origins through myth and fiction.

Tolkien's Providence versus Rothfuss' Uncertainty

Tolkien highlights what he sees as the underlying patterns in stories, connecting them all to echoes of the biblical narrative of creation and salvation. The importance of "God's plan" and providence is clear from the first page of the *Ainulindalë*. Here, Tolkien describes creation through music, as the angels ("Ainur") at the beginning of creation first sing alone, before they learn to listen to each other, and see the bigger picture, for "as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony" (Tolkien, 1999, p. 3). This "bigger plan" is also seen through his thinking on myth and mythopoeia, and how he connects it to the real world by saying that through mythmaking and storytelling, we are "sub-creators" (Phelpstead, 2022, p. 69). Caldecott (2014, p. 69) further says that Tolkien uses his fantasy-story to "discover the truth of the world and express it in a mythological narrative". He mirrors specific elements of creation in his *Silmarillion*, like creating the world

through a series of stages (Caldecott, 2014, p. 75), just like the Christian God who created the world in seven days. Caldecott points out that this is connected to the idea of human creations, and how they, whether they be mathematical or mythic, cannot help but reflect the archetypical processes of creation (2014, p. 69). He then adds, “the fairy-story or myth is merely an echo or shadow of the truth of history” (2014, p. 84). Similarly to Caldecott’s argument, McIntosh (2009, p. 7) also said that Tolkien believed that fantasy literature imitated some of the consistency of the real world. Tolkien’s “truth” reflects the biblical creation story and the idea of providence by connecting the making of stories to the Christian God and his creation story. Man, having been created by God, cannot help making stories, as God creates our story (Tolkien, 1938).

Tolkien uses the *Silmarillion* (1999) to reflect upon the origin of his tales. Nagy says that the mythological depth of Tolkien’s work first comes from this addition to his narrative (2022, p. 93). Tolkien connects the very idea of myth and legends to truth in one of his letters to Milton Waldman:

> I believe that legends and myths are largely made of “truth,” and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear (Tolkien, 1999, p. xviii)

This explains why Tolkien uses descriptions of music to promote what he sees as the “ultimate harmony” and God’s plan. He describes his Ainur, the angels, thus:

> But for a long while sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Iluvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony (Tolkien, 1999, p. 3).

He then adds:

> Then the voices of the Ainur, like unto harps and lutes, and pipes and trumpets, and viols and organs, and like unto countless choirs singing with words, began to fashion the theme of Ilúvatar to a great music […] (Tolkien, 1999, p. 3).

Here, music is used to describe the essence of creation and is at the very center of the creation-story of his imaginary world.

All this is very different from how Rothfuss uses music in his creation-stories. Kvothe, the protagonist, as a musician and part of a family of travelling entertainers ("The Edema Ruh"), knows a lot of songs about central mythological characters and the various origin-stories of his world. As he says himself:

> The Edema Ruh know all the stories in the world, and I am Edema down to the center of my bones. My parents told stories around the fire every night while I was young. I grew up watching stories in dumbshow, listening to them in songs, and acting them out on stage (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 568).

These stories often vary in their descriptions of central characters, some depicting them as deities, some as men or "faerie", and some just as ambiguous betrayers and deceivers. Rothfuss also uses nursery rhymes and other poetry, scattering them throughout his novels. They all, in some way, hint at the origins of central characters, like the Chandrian, who killed Kvothe's parents. The Chandrian are introduced before this happens, in a nursery rhyme depicting their non-human, mystical essence:

> When the hearthfire turns to blue,
>
> What to do? What to do?
>
> Run outside. Run and hide.
>
> […]
>
> When his eyes are black as crow?
>
> Where to go? Where to go?
>
> Near and far. Here they are.

[…]

See a man without a face?

Move like ghosts from place to place.

What's their plan? What's their plan?

Chandrian. Chandrian (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 26-27).

This nursery rhyme is the first of its kind we are introduced to in the story, but there are many similar ones throughout, introducing names and characters, fairy-stories, and deities, as well as cultural norms, court gossip, and more. Rothfuss uses nursery rhymes, songs, and similar forms to point at an epistemological uncertainty, questioning the origin of every "known" fact, because they all give different versions of events and origin-stories. Kvothe himself notes the contradictions in them several times. The more he learns of the Chandrian after they killed his parents, the more he questions existing origin stories he grew up with, and that the people around him believe. Rothfuss, by inserting these smaller stories into his main story, creates a world of storytelling where the "truth" behind various origins and myths are questioned by the very existence of these various versions of events in the stories. In the case of the Chandrian, most people in his secondary world believes them to only be a fairytale, because their only existence in stories are given through children's stories like the rhyme above. However, when Kvothe's father creates a (heavily researched) song about them, they show up and kill him, and everyone who heard the song. This then implies that the reason they only exist in children's stories and rhymes, is because they do not want authentic information about them circulated. Thus, how stories are spread through history affects the impression we have of the people in them, and questioning how stories are affected in various ways through history creates an inherent uncertainty of their origins and truths.

Where Tolkien uses music to show the reader an underlying harmony and providence, Rothfuss subverts this in his tale, by using the same element to create uncertainty and confusion about origin-stories and creation myths. Rothfuss provokes the reader, and Kvothe, to actively question the authenticity of these tales. The perilousness of storytelling through song and music is the very thing that starts Kvothe's quest, as his father's song about the

origins of the Chandrian is what killed his troupe and left him alone as a child. As Kvothe says to Chronicler (and the reader); "You'd be surprised as the sorts of things hidden away in children's songs" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 37).

When Rothfuss writes that "Every tale has deep roots somewhere in the world" (2007, p. 458), he is focusing on the complexity of the connection between stories, people, and historical events, and gives each story value as it exists in a context. Rothfuss tries to show how all stories are manipulated, competing, constructed, made-up or artificial, in some way. For example, the story of Lanre, who in many of the stories in Rothfuss' universe is seen as a fallen hero and great man, is in other stories seen as a traitor, who then became the leader of the Chandrian. However, Rothfuss wants to show that despite all these motivations behind storytelling, they still tell some part of the truth or explain some part of their origin. But this truth may not reflect truth of the world or the origin of the "story" itself, but rather some truth about the people inhabiting it, or telling it, and their motivations and beliefs. Rothfuss' questioning deliberately creates epistemological uncertainty and a feeling of lack of insight, subverting Tolkien's ideas on the place origin-stories and myth have in our world as reflections of God and the biblical creation story.

Exploring Truths: Protagonists and Readers

Tolkien does not center Frodo or Bilbo's journeys on self-reflexive storytelling like Rothfuss does, but rather wants the reader to feel like their stories are themselves part of a form of background mythology. Tolkien's stories do bring out the discussion on origins of stories by presenting them as a version of a version of a version of an original story, for instance through Bilbo's diary, seen as the origin of what is then later called the "Red book", and a focus on language and translations over time (Brljak, 2010, p. 24). The "Red Book", or *the Hobbit*, was put into the wider Middle-Earth mythology by saying it was told to Sam's children and their descendants. It is then said that it became a favorite amongst children, and underwent changes to become more palatable for that audience (Brljak, 2010, p. 18). Part of Tolkien's original ambition was to create an origin myth for England, as he felt the country was lacking one (Donovan, 2022, p. 79). Tolkien to some degree felt like his *Silmarillion*, the creation myth, origin-story and historical background to what happens in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, was the main story, and that he had been forced to publish in the wrong

order, as he wanted them to be seen as one product, published together (Nagy, 2022, p. 94). The *Silmarillion* starts with the creation of his whole universe and includes several historical events that shape the origin of his hobbit-stories. They are what makes these narratives "productive of myth" (Nagy, 2022, p. 93), letting the reader seek out information and connections for themselves.

In contrast, Rothfuss foregrounds the themes of creation myth and origin stories inside his narrative from several angles, making it impossible for the reader to read his narrative without reflecting on them. The protagonist, Kvothe, is searching for the origin and truths behind the myth surrounding who the Chandrian are and what their motives are. This is what drives everything else that happens in the story. Kvothe as a character is at the core someone who wants to understand how things connect and how they work, which also goes for the connections between historical events and the myths he comes across. Rothfuss' narrative highlights the complexities involved when it comes to understanding the origins of creation myths by viewing them through Kvothe's perspective and through Kvothe's own origin story.

In addition to Kvothe's quest to uncover the origins of the Chandrian's story, his retelling of his own origin-story to Chronicler in the frame-story provides the reader with an intimate look at how his own creation story develops. This invites us to question both the legends surrounding him and the origins of the tales he shares. Kvothe says:

> I'm giving you my story with all the grubby truths intact. All my mistakes and idiocies laid out naked in the light. If I decide to pass over some small piece because it bores me, I am within my rights […] (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 340).

While reading this story about a young man looking for the truth surrounding his parents' violent death by the hands of the Chandrian and about their ultimate origins, we as readers also begin to question the origin and creation of this "legendary" man himself. The reader does not necessarily get the whole story, and neither do any of his peers.

This approach is reminiscent of Linda Hutcheon’s point that there is rarely mere falseness in story-telling, but rather multiple truths reflecting different versions of events and attitudes to them, all of which are important to seeing the whole (2013, p. 109). All versions of a tale tell us something about opinions, beliefs, and society at the time of the tale’s origin, or it reveals truths about the author or storyteller. This in fact reflects both Rothfuss’ and Tolkien’s ideas surrounding origins and creation myths. In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien specifically highlights how the storytellers job affects the stories and their truths, through writing, editing, selecting, summarizing, compressing and excluding parts of the narrative (Nagy, 2022, p. 101). Similarly, Rothfuss highlights how stories change according to people’s perspectives and knowledge, and how they change across time and with retellings, according to the person telling the story and their own beliefs. At one point, Kvothe says, “There is no good story that doesn’t touch the truth” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 182). On the other end of that spectrum, another character called Skarpi answers Kvothe by saying that, “You have to be a bit of a liar to tell a story the right way. Too much truth confuses the facts. Too much honesty makes you sound insincere” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 183). This again fits with Hutcheon’s account of “historiographic metafiction” and what is entailed in the concept of “truth” in storytelling. She argues that “recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 105). Historical and fictional texts are for Hutcheon equally intertextual, while both are conventionalized in their narrative form and never entirely objective. She argues that when writing both history and fiction, people are faced with the same problems and questions, such as what events should be included, and how much invention is involved (Hutcheon, 2013, pp. 107-108). Rothfuss explicitly highlights this attitude to storytelling in the “Kingkiller Chronicle”. The reader and other characters are challenged to question Kvothe’s story, his own versions, other people’s version, and the version we as readers are presented with. Furthermore, Kvothe questions the mythological and historical accounts he comes across in books, orally transmitted stories, or songs. One of the clearest examples is this conversation between Kvothe and Chronicler:

> ‘Think of all the stories you’ve heard […]. 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.' (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 303-304)

Here, Kvothe is commenting on the structure and sequence of events in his own origin story. He is saying that because of the tale being true, it will be messy. However, Kvothe also selectively and openly omits certain segments of his narrative that he prefers not to revisit, and skips parts he deems uninteresting or unpleasant to recount. Moreover, despite Chronicler's role as the conduit for this story, the reader is constantly reminded that Kvothe is adept at using storytelling as a tool to navigate his own life, often resorting to fabrication, embellishment, and manipulation, raising the question of the actual "truth" despite his reassurance at this point. We are also repeatedly reminded that Chronicler serves as a scribe of Kvothe's narrative, thus presenting us with his written version of the tale, leaving room for potential editing or embellishments from his part as well, perhaps to conform to conventional narrative structures. This aspect resonates with Hutcheon's (1988) exploration of historiographic metafiction, wherein the reader is encouraged to question the truths of the text and its alignment with history. We can further this concept and say that it focuses on encouraging readers to question the truth behind creation myths and origin stories. By instilling a sense of skepticism regarding the authenticity of this narrative, both through characters' perspectives and the interweaving of established religious and historical mythologies, Rothfuss employs metafictional techniques that closely align with Hutcheon's understanding of the interplay between history and fiction. Christopher Booker's assertion that "our history books are largely made up of stories" further underscores this approach (2004, p. 2).

Throughout the "Kingkiller Chronicle", Rothfuss intricately links the historical accounts and archives that Kvothe encounters at the University with the folk and fairy tales ingrained in his childhood memories from the troupe he grew up with and the origin of the Chandrian's intentions and goals. This connection extends to Kvothe's identity as a natural storyteller and performer nurtured by his upbringing. As Rothfuss expresses it, "All the truth in the world is held in stories, you know" (2011, p. 349), highlighting the narrative's exploration of the

power and complexity of storytelling in shaping perceptions of truth and reality, to the point where we never really know the origins of things. As Kvothe is searching for the creation story and the motives of the people who killed his parents and their troupe, we as readers get to know multiple accounts of Kvothe's own creation myth as well.

A degree of discussion on truths and origins of stories is present in Tolkien's works, although this is not directly integrated into the narrative of the LOTR-trilogy. Frodo is not searching for the truth of something or to become expert in a subject in *The Lord of the Rings*. He is simply searching to destroy the ring that he inherited from Bilbo. However, through the first original prologue, Tolkien tried to tie the story to reality by shaping it as he imagined a lost British mythology would have been (Donovan, 2022, p. 79). Furthermore, through the *Silmarillion*, published posthumously, we as readers get to question the truth and origin of the narrative itself, outside the events that are told in the story. We are thus allowed a glimpse of the underlying religion, creation and history surrounding the narrative, although this appears only indirectly in *The Lord of the Rings*. In 1916, after his service in the war, Tolkien started writing what he called "The Lost Tales", which would later become his more known works (Nagy, 2022, p. 93). Just in this title, we already see hints at his attention to origin-stories and the truth and history behind them. What is lost may be restored by the help of divine providence, as in this poem from *The Fellowship of the Ring* that prophesies the return of the king to the throne of Gondor:

> All that is gold does not glitter,
>
> Not all those who wander are lost;
>
> The old that is strong does not wither,
>
> Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
>
> From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
>
> A light from the shadows shall spring;
>
> Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
>
> The crownless again shall be king (Tolkien, 2011a, p. 170).

While Tolkien, too, might emphasize the difficulty in grasping origin-stories amid multiple versions and rumors in a broken and conflicted world, there is nonetheless a faith here that on the deepest level, truth is recoverable: “Deep roots are not reached by the frost”. This kind of conviction is precisely what Rothfuss’ metafictional framing of his “Kingkiller Chronicles” tends to undermine.

Religion, Rumors, and Travelling Tales

Rothfuss also frames his narrative using religious references and inspiration, just like Tolkien. However, where Tolkien was an orthodox Catholic, Rothfuss bases his religious inspirations in Gnostic philosophies. By doing so, Rothfuss further distances himself from Tolkien, as Gnosticism is known as a heretical version of Christianity. Where Tolkien bases his stories in his own personal religious beliefs, Rothfuss appears to use Gnosticism more as a general means of mythological inspiration.

At the time that Christianity originated, Palestine was “seething with salvational movements” (Jonas, 1970, p. 31). Amongst them was Gnosticism, stemming from a word that appears within and around Christianity in its first centuries. It is derived from “gnosis”, meaning “knowledge”. The word gnostic means “the knowing ones” (Jonas, 1970, p. 32), just like the name Kvothe means “to know” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 55), supporting the idea that Rothfuss writes his works with Gnostic inspirations in mind. Rothfuss, having read Tolkien and been aware of his religious beliefs, may even be using his Gnostic inspirations to critique and distance himself and his story from Tolkien’s legacy.

In Gnosticism, there is emphasis on knowledge as way towards salvation, or as salvation itself (Jonas, 1970, p. 32), which is exactly what Rothfuss tries to show us in his narrative. Gnosticism started alongside orthodox Christianity, but claimed to stand outside the traditional Church, using the Christian scriptures in different ways, and also creating their own scriptures (Kenny, 1996, p. 40). God in Gnostic beliefs has a nature alien to that of the universe. Gnosticism explains all material existence as flawed, and salvation can only be achieved through knowledge that helps one transcend it. The world is the result of lowly, hostile powers. According to Jonas, within Gnosticism the earth is often depicted as the

innermost dungeon in the prison that is the universe (1970, p. 43). The biggest difference between Christianity and Gnosticism is that to Gnostics, the world we live in and the planet we live on, in a sense is Hell, a place to move away from spiritually. For Christians, the world is made by God, and he governs over it and protects it as his creation, despite its fallen state. The differences between Gnosticism and Catholicism affect the origin stories that surround the respective worlds Tolkien and Rothfuss have created. Tolkien sees the Christian God and his creation story as the one true story and tries to reflect this work in his own work, while Rothfuss includes "failed" Gods, wicked Gods, and godlike creatures, while also encouraging us as readers to question their authenticity. Rothfuss includes stories about origins and creation told by many different people: for example, an old man assumed to be a former priest, or unknown storytellers in bars who get arrested for blasphemy. This gives Kvothe and the reader several versions of tales where characters are connected with the creation and origin of Kvothe's world and the religions that surround him. Both the fact that he includes the different layers and variations of godlike characters, and the fact that he highlights a questioning of them, would be consistent with Gnostic inspiration.

Gnosticism highlights false Gods, like the Demiurge, and in some versions, angels can also create worlds (Jonas, 1970, p. 98). This blurring of lines and other semi-divine beings is exactly what we find in Rothfuss' creation stories. Tolkien, by contrast, does not subject his creation stories themselves to this kind of questioning. He might have thought that explicit discussion of different religions in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* would have given readers opportunity to question their authenticity. He thus separates his religious creation stories in *The Silmarillion* from the narratives of Bilbo and Frodo. By contrast, Rothfuss tries to make his characters and readers question his religious stories and characters throughout the whole of his narrative.

Tolkien's creation mythology, epitomized in the *Silmarillion*, remains a subject of ongoing debate, especially considering the posthumous publication by his son Christopher. Tolkien never finished this work and seemed to never be fully satisfied with it. However, his son, Christopher, published the *Silmarillion* four years after his father's death. The discussion on how "true to the story" this publication is, when Tolkien himself never got to approve of it, ventures into metafictional territory, discussing the truth and authenticity of this compendium

of origin stories and creation myth, and how it would have looked if Tolkien had had the time he needed to finish and publish it himself. Indeed, *the Silmarillion* serves as the foundational creation story behind *The Lord of the Rings*, acting as an archive of Tolkien's broader mythological universe (Nagy, 2022, p. 101). This, together with the original foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*, puts Tolkien's world and creation into relationship with our world, even though he went back on his original idea to create an English mythology, removing this idea from the second edition foreword in 1966 (Brljak, 2010, p. 17). In this way, Tolkien's narrative and its metafiction has a way into the real world that Rothfuss' narrative does not. This metafictional approach intertwines his mythology with our world, through different literary mediums, adding complexity to the storytelling and involving the reader more in the story by having them "collect" stories to build the image of the world of the *Lord of the Rings* in their own minds.

The premise of Rothfuss' "Kingkiller Chronicle" is that Kvothe wants to know the truth behind the origin-stories that exist about the Chandrian. The origin and knowledge behind the myths surrounding these characters is why Kvothe's own origin story exists, and how he becomes the person he is. Kvothe, as a young boy living on the streets of a city called Tarbean, encounters a storyteller called Skarpi in a bar, surrounded by children eager to hear his stories. Here, Kvothe asks to be told the legend of Lanre, one of the figures his father had made songs about in his childhood. Through this tale, we are introduced to other mythic beings and people, like Selitos, who is introduced like this:

> Such was the power of his sight that he could read the hearts of men like heavy-lettered books. Now in those days there was a terrible war being fought across a vast empire. The war was called the Creation War, and the empire was called Ergen. And despite the fact that the world has never seen an empire as grand or a war as terrible, both of them only live in stories now. Even history books that mentioned them as doubtful rumour have long since crumbled to dust (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 175).

Selitos is said to know the true names of things just by looking at them (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 175). In the myth recounted to Kvothe (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 174-181), we learn about Lanre, the protector and guardian of seven cities, who acquires power and newfound knowledge. He

is driven by the goal of reviving his deceased wife, who in her prime had previously brought him back to life. However, this new knowledge came at a great price for Lanre, while resurrecting his wife proved futile. Along the course of this journey, he had irreparably ruined his relationship with the world and its ethical boundaries. Accordingly, we could say that he attains freedom from moral judgement, somewhat like the Gnostic pneumatics, due to this newfound knowledge. Lanre's actions thereafter, however, do not mirror a just or moral God, but a ruthless and angry one. From a different angle, this fits with Gnostic ideas surrounding the world and its origins. We might say that Lanre acts in a godlike manner in so far as his power and knowledge leads to him losing his humanity. This argument is strengthened by him achieving immortality because of what he learns. This is a concept we will explore further in the chapter called "Faerie and Magic". During the "creation war", Lanre's betrayal of Selitos and the seven (or eight, depending on the version) cities prompts Selitos to condemn Lanre to an existence shrouded in eternal darkness. He says "This is my doom upon you. May your face be always held in shadow, black as the toppled towers of my beloved Myr Tariniel" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 181). Before his banishment, Lanre realizes that his name no longer reflects his changed identity. He says "I am no longer the Lanre you knew. Mine is a new and terrible name"(Rothfuss, 2007, p. 180). This name is "Haliax".

The first time we as readers hear the name Haliax is when Kvothe is a little boy who finds his troupe brutally murdered. Through hearing this story, Kvothe learns that Lanre, the hero of many songs, myths, and stories, including songs made by his father, may also be Haliax, the leader of the Chandrian, who are responsible for his parents' death. Although the story of Lanre's destruction of seven cities in the creation war remains unverified and is contradicted in other accounts encountered by Kvothe later, he wholeheartedly believes it. We see this when Denna, Kvothe's love interest, makes a song about Lanre's heroism, and Kvothe becomes so angry that they stop speaking for a while. Kvothe immediately puts Skarpi's tale of Lanre into his "map" of what happened to his parents and why, shown in excerpts like this:

> I was remembering a man with empty eyes and a smile from a nightmare, remembering the blood on his sword. Cinder, his voice like a chill wind: 'is this your parents' fire?' Not him, the man behind him. The quiet one who had sat beside the fire. The man whose face was hidden in shadow. Haliax. This had been the half-

> remembered thing hovering on the edge of my awareness since I had heard Skarpi's story (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 185).

He does not question Skarpi even for a second here. Further, Kvothe thinks back to that time, seeing Cinder kneeling in front of him:

> His face expressionless, his voice sharp and cold. 'Someone's parents', he had said, 'have been singing entirely the wrong sort of songs.' They had killed my parents for gathering stories about them. They had killed my whole troupe over a song (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 186).

This highlights the importance of storytelling through song in this narrative and how even Kvothe, amidst numerous unfounded rumors about himself, readily accepts tales about others with minimal scrutiny. Even though Kvothe seemingly harbors strong feelings for Denna when she tells her version of Lanre's story through her first ever self-made song, he remains entirely convinced of Skarpi's version of this tale, which he first encountered as a vulnerable child. Denna insists that she has extensively researched Lanre's origin story: "What do you know of the research I did? […] You haven't the slightest idea! I have been all over the world digging up pieces of this story!" (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 495). But Kvothe is not even listening to her. All he can think about is that so did his father, and that is why the Chandrian had killed him. Though Skarpi is a minor character so far in this unfinished series, his influence on Kvothe and his perception of the world and his personal narrative and origin story is tremendous. This, mixed with Kvothe's unresolved childhood trauma and his concerns for Denna's safety, makes it entirely impossible for him to entertain what she is saying. While he does acknowledge her story to some extent, shown by his fear, the possibility of her being in danger from the Chandrian, as suggested if her story is true, is too distressing for him to confront. At the same time, Skarpi's account of the Chandrian's origin and creation has become an integral part of Kvothe's worldview and identity, and accepting Denna's version of the story, where Lanre is the fallen hero, would challenge his understanding of who the Chandrian were, while also potentially meaning she was in danger.

Looking at Gnostic influences here, the theme of a search for knowledge is inherent. Lanre's search for knowledge changes him as a person, just like Kvothe's search for knowledge shapes him as a person every step of the way. As he searches for knowledge about the Chandrian, he comes across knowledge of many other things, as his search brings him to the University where he learns magic, and later to the school in Ademre where he learns to become a mercenary. These things are byproducts of his search for the Chandrian, but he accepts and dives into them fully, trusting that all knowledge leads him closer to his goal. The story of the Chandrian and Kvothe's contemplation of its various versions offer insightful reflections on the origins and understandings of creation myths. Tolkien conducts this discussion outside his narrative, in the *Silmarillion*, in his letters to friends and colleagues, in forewords, while Rothfuss actively puts it into the story. As Chronicler says on the subject of looking for the origins of the myth surrounding dragons, "I went looking for a legend and found a Lizard" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 43). This quotation is interesting, as it might reflect Chroniclers thoughts on Kvothe (being the "lizard" behind the great legends of him), as well as Kvothe's thoughts on the Chandrian, if he ever finds the origin to their story.

Rothfuss and Tolkien both employ angel-like beings in their works. The Amyr in Rothfuss' "Kingkiller Chronicle" and the Ainur in Tolkien's legendarium are both described as physically resembling the stereotypical image of angels. We are introduced to the story of the Amyr in Rothfuss' narrative very soon after having been introduced to Skarpi's origin story of the Chandrian. The Amyr represents the opposing force to the Chandrian, but, unlike Tolkien's Ainur, they are seen as more ruthless, and in some ways just as ruthless as the Chandrian themselves. This again fits with Rothfuss' Gnostic inspirations. Both of Skarpi's stories are told to a young, orphaned, grieving Kvothe. In this story, Tehlu, who is seen by most in Rothfuss' universe as the one true God, having inspired the religion of the Tehlin Church, in this story appears as a man. A man who knows some form of powerful magic, but a man, nonetheless. Skarpi not only tells this story with Tehlu as man, but he also makes him kneel to someone else: "He knelt before Aleph, his head bowed, his hands open at his sides" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 188). In this story, we are met with another alternative "God", Aleph. In Kvothe's world, most people are believers of Tehlu, and members of the Tehlin Church. For people who are not believers of the Tehlin Church, Aleph is the one who "named all things". In this story, Tehlu, Selitos and many others volunteer to protect the world from the Chandrian, amongst other evils. They are then touched by Aleph, and grow wings, before

disappearing in a fire that hides them from mortal sight, similarly to how Selitos in the other story hides Lanre from the world, and consequently creates the Chandrian.

In the previous story, we learn that Selitos is a skilled “Namer”, suggesting that Tehlu might then have been equally skilled in Naming, or some other forms of magic, eventually attaining godlike status through gradual embellishment through storytelling over time. Aleph, although not explicitly identified as a deity, commands reverence and admiration in the story Skarpi tells, because of his unparalleled mastery at “Naming”, a form of magic that is further explored in the next chapter. Skarpi’s accounts here implies that there is no God, just people more skilled at understanding and shaping the world through their own skills at “Naming”, making them gods through stories told by people with less understanding of these things. The narrative of the Creation War itself, which is one of the main creation myths in Rothfuss’ work, is told as a war primarily between “Namers”, supporting this idea. However, Skarpi’s stories to Kvothe hint at significant alterations in the world’s creation- and origin stories over time. Much like Kvothe’s adeptness at crafting and manipulating rumors to navigate his own circumstances, the characters of Selitos, Lanre, and Tehlu may have undergone similar transformations as their stories circulated through time. The “Kingkiller Chronicle” constantly highlights how Kvothe makes up rumors, spreads existing ones, and encourages new ones through different means, all in order to get him through life as an orphaned boy with no money. At the same time, the rumors also become a disadvantage, and get away from him, as referenced in the title of the series. Rothfuss hints at similar things having happened to the characters of Selitos, Lanre and even Tehlu as time went on and their stories carried on. The layering of specific creation stories along Kvothe’s own creation of his own myth, hints at this being the case, as well as when Kvothe spreads his own rumors of Chronicler to other people, after getting annoyed at being pushed to talk about specific details of his own story. When Chronicler says the stories that Kvothe spreads through the Waystone Inn in the frame-story, have no value, because they are made up, Kvothe responds “It might not be true, but that doesn’t mean it’s nonsense” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 339). This idea of a heavily qualified and partial access to truth is again typical of Rothfuss’ approach.

Conclusion: Narrative Self-Awareness in Origin Stories

This chapter has highlighted the interconnectedness of fiction, reality, history, and myth, as

used in Rothfuss' narrative, against the background of similar elements from Tolkien. In different ways, these authors are centrally concerned with the importance and understanding of creation myth and origin stories, and the problems of knowing the truth behind such tales. Rothfuss includes many such tales in his main story and centers the whole narrative drive on this quest for knowledge, whereas Tolkien prefers to present his origin stories in their own separate texts which can carry a quasi-biblical authority of their own.

By tying the concept of historiographic metafiction and "truth" as Hutcheon understands it together with mythology and religion in these texts, we get a deeper understanding of how metafiction works together with religious myth and storytelling. Further, by examining Rothfuss' Gnostic explorations in the "Kingkiller Chronicle" in relation to Tolkien's Catholic influences in his works, we see how fantasy can become an important metafictional tool for reflection on subjects in our world and their place. This shows how the hyper-fictionality of the fantasy genre can become a genuine strength rather than a weakness (Attebery, 2014, p. 1), exemplifying relevant experimentation with voice and form no less than other genres.

Chapter 2: Faerie and Magic

This chapter examines two of the most recognizable and central elements of fantasy novels: the themes of faerie and magic. The starting point for this discussion will be the concept of "faerie" as explored by Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" (1938) and some of his uses of magic in his fiction. We will use Tolkien's understanding of the concepts of faerie and magic as tools to explore Rothfuss' contrasting ideas and narrative practice on these subjects. Tolkien's essay, and his wider influence on the fantasy genre, is fundamental in bringing out the potential for metafictional reflection in fantastical elements like elves, fairies, wizards, and magic. Far from being merely escapist, these elements utilize concepts from mythology, folklore, and religion to provide indirect parallels to real-world experiences and structures.

This insight in certainly shared by Rothfuss, who was an avid reader of Tolkien's work from early on, as he has confirmed in an interview (Bedord & St. Denis, 2007). However, he does not necessarily agree with Tolkien's method and message. Rothfuss appears to intentionally subvert and distance himself from Tolkien's ideas on faerie and magic in his stories. This chapter will highlight these differences, examining how Rothfuss employs these concepts to create his own unique interpretation of the classic fantasy elements. In particular, we will focus on how "faerie" and magic generates contrasting metafictional reflections on the themes of agency, power, and domination of the world in the work of both authors. This analysis is not, however, a full-scale comparison between the two authors, but rather this chapter uses Tolkien's ideas as a tool for focusing the discussion of Rothfuss.

One key way in which Rothfuss' work differs ideologically from Tolkien's, is based on the authors own religion and beliefs, as already mentioned in the previous chapter. Tolkien's whole conception of the fantasy narrative is inspired by his Catholic beliefs, while Rothfuss uses Gnostic ideas to explore and shape his own fantasy universe. This chapter will first explore faerie as a concept and how it is adapted in Rothfuss' works, before going on to examine fairy-creatures and how they are handled in Rothfuss and Tolkien. Next, the chapter will explore how Rothfuss' approach to magic differs from Tolkien's, based on personal beliefs surrounding nature and science.

On Faerie: Concepts and Contrasts

Tolkien starts his essay "On Fairy-Stories" by asking the reader what a "fairy story" is. He says that fairy tales have often been understood to be a) about fairies or fairy legends, b) unreal or incredible and c) a falsehood (Tolkien, 1938, p. 2). However, Tolkien disagrees:

> […] fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faerie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (Tolkien, 1938)

In Tolkien's essay, fantasy means "the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds" (Tolkien, 1938, p. 20). Tolkien references medieval literature and mentions folklorists like Andrew Lang as inspiration and beginning for scholarly accounts of the fantasy genre. He understood fairy stories and fantasy as necessities in the modern post-war world, and said that it offered recovery, escape and consolation to people who needed it (Tolkien, 1938; Wood, 2022, p. 214). The *Lord of the Rings* reflects how Tolkien defined fairy stories, emphasizing quest, loss and eucatastrophe (Wood, 2022, p. 217). The term "eucatastrophe" is linked with what Tolkien calls glimpsing a transcendent joy "beyond the walls of the world". This joy is not linked to escaping the real world, and does not deny the existence of sorrow or tragedy, as these things are necessary for this type of joy to occur. What it does, however, is "deny ultimate defeat", as Tolkien explains it, giving a "catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart", sometimes accompanied by tears (Tolkien, 1938). The eucatastrophe does not necessarily involve a "happy ending", though it could be communicated in that way. It is seen as a sudden happy turn in the story, which Tolkien views as the highest function of any fairy-story. The ultimate, model eucatastrophe is according to Tolkien the resurrection of Christ. In the Silmarillion, Tolkien emphasizes harmony, as seen when Eru creates the universe through "a Great Music", with harps, pipes and trumpets (Tolkien, 1999, p. 3), emphasizing harmony through his musical descriptions. Through his eucatastrophes, Tolkien wanted people to get a taste of this ultimate harmony of the world and creation, and the feeling of joy that accompanied it.

Rothfuss seems to view the “escape” or sudden happy turn very differently, and not as part of anything connected to a bigger religious picture. In his works, there are very few sudden turns in any direction, the most prominent being the *un*happy turn where Kvothe is orphaned early on in the story. This event is the opposite of eucatastrophe, emphasizing tragedy. On the other hand, Rothfuss does include many happy events throughout the story. They are, however, rarely accompanied by a feeling of resolution and ultimate harmony, which is what creates the feeling Tolkien deems as important in his eucatastrophe. The framing of Rothfuss' story through a frame-narrative is part of the reason for this. In the frame-narrative, we get a sense of being at the tail-end of Kvothe's story, or at least he seems to feel like that himself. This is mentioned in several ways, but particularly in how Rothfuss ends the second book, by having Chronicler describe the silence surrounding Kvothe in his inn, saying that it was “the patient, cut-flower sound of a man who is waiting to die” (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 994). Because of descriptions like this, we get the feeling that there is no eucatastrophe or escape from the world in his narrative. Kvothe's overall goal of understanding who the Chandrian are, and perhaps revenging his parents, is the only thing that feels like it could give relief, as Kvothe always has this in the back of his mind throughout the story. In keeping with Rothfuss' Gnostic inspirations, the goal in Gnosticism is an escape from the physical world through enlightenment by way of knowledge, and in the frame narrative Kvothe seems to have given up on his quest for knowledge, thereby giving up on his enlightenment. Or maybe the supposed answer (or enlightenment) was not what he wanted it to be, and turned out to not be the happy ending or turn he was hoping for. As readers, we do not know everything yet, because the third and final part to the story is still unreleased. However, Kvothe in the frame-story has become a completely different person from Kvothe in the story he tells us through Chronicler. If revenge is the only relief he has been able to access, this could in itself reflect ironically on the concept of eucatastrophe as something unavailable.

Whether Kvothe has taken revenge before the events we see in the frame-story or not, he is clearly thoroughly disillusioned with the outcome of his story. In fact, he seems very much defeated and done with his mission. Rothfuss seems to not believe in the importance of the eucatastrophe, at least not in the way Tolkien does. No matter what happened to get Kvothe where he is in the frame-narrative, it is still described as the end of his story, and there is no

transcendence or harmony anywhere in sight. Whatever happened, the relief Kvothe wanted seems to have been an illusion. This can be seen as connected to the Gnostic view of the world as prison and illusion (Jonas, 1970, p. 43), and to the idea of it being created in the image of a failed God. This will be explored further in the section below. After having discussed eucatastrophe in the fairy-story, which Tolkien views through a religious lens, a closer look at the gods as handled in Rothfuss is required.

The Failed God and Faerie Gods: Divinity or Delusion

An important part of Rothfuss' faerie-narrative is his discussion surrounding gods and people's understanding of religion as carried through time using storytelling. Rothfuss instills a skepticism about the status of his deities and religious characters that fits with the image of the failed gods of Gnostic myth. The different candidates for divinity in his narrative work instill a constant questioning and reflection on the very concept of gods itself. This fits within Rothfuss questioning of what makes something real and what makes it fantasy and faerie-stories. Tehlu, for example, is sometimes seen in Kvothe's world as the one true God, parallel to Eru in Tolkien's works. Other times, however, he is seen as just a powerful man with knowledge of magic. It all depends on which story we are reading.

In *The Name of the Wind* (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 155), one of the stories about Tehlu, here in the guise of God, relates how he also gets born onto Earth as a man called "Menda" to defeat all demons and evil on Earth. This narrative forms a notable exception to Rothfuss' other stories: a mythic tale that does not actively challenge the existence of God. This departure makes sense given the storyteller's background as a former priest. Trapis, the storyteller, is depicted as a religious man who tends to the needs of the poor and orphaned children in the city of Tarbean. Despite the absence of overt skepticism in this particular tale, Kvothe's curiosity about Trapis' past, including his possible former role as a Tehlin priest, encourages readers to question the storyteller's own beliefs and intentions. Kvothe, and the reader, inevitably wonder why he is no longer serving as a priest, and why he resides in impoverished conditions taking care of orphans in a basement. He is wearing the remnants of an old gray cloak, reminiscent of the Tehlin robes. Trapis relates how Tehlu first shows himself to his "mother" in a dream. "He stood before her, and seemed to be made entirely of fire or sunlight. He came to her in splendour and asked her if she knew who he was" (Rothfuss,

2007, p. 156). To this, she answers confidently that yes, of course she does. This is different from the Christian narrative, where an angel comes to Mary and tells her of her child, whereas here, it is God himself who tells her that he will be her son. As we get to know Tehlu, however, we realize how little understanding and compassion he has for humanity. So much so that his earthly mother has to take on the role of a guide to human behavior and cognition: “Tehlu said that the man and wife were each other’s fitting punishment. They were wicked and wicked should be punished”(Rothfuss, 2007, p. 157). His mother then answers:

> ‘It’s not their fault that the world is full of hard choices and hunger and loneliness […] What can you expect of people when demons are their neighbours?’ But though Tehlu listened to her wise words with his ears, he told her that mankind was wicked, and the wicked should be punished” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 157).

As readers, we see how Tehlu offers no genuine forgiveness, and the idea of Earth as hopeless and Hell-like from Gnostic texts feels familiar. When Tehlu (incarnated as Menda) wants to save humans, he hits them with a hammer before “forgiving them”, but not everyone wants to participate in that: “In the end, seven stayed on the other side of the line. Tehlu asked them three times if they would cross, and three times they refused” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 160). This could be another origin story for the Chandrian, who are referenced as being seven people in most stories of them in Rothfuss’ books. Amongst these seven is a demon called Encanis. While Tehlu is told here to kill the other six, “Encanis ran free and did the work of a thousand demons, destroying and despoiling wherever he went. So Tehlu chased and Encanis fled” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 160).

Trapis’ story is one of two very different origin-stories for the Chandrian we come across. The other is told by Skarpi, the old man Kvothe meets in a bar, who then gets arrested for blasphemy. In this story, Tehlu is just a powerful magician, not a deity. The Chandrian are in many ways seen as the “darkness” of Rothfuss’ world, and the change Lanre goes through, though likened to the spiritual change of the pneumatics, is seen as something dark and evil here, whereas it is seen as something enlightened in Gnostic thinking. Their leader has his face hidden in a constant darkness, no matter where he stands or how the light hits him. This is similar to the demon Encanis as detailed by Trapis, the former priest, who is described as a demon “whose face was all in shadow” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 160). In Trapis’ story, Tehlu, as

Menda, end up dying whilst fighting Encanis, the “worst of them all”, who, just like the leader of the Chandrian in other stories, has his face hidden in darkness. Kvothe, and the reader, get a hint that the religious story told by Trapis is somehow connected to the other stories of the Chandrian and the Amyr that Kvothe comes across on his journey. This further connects to ideas of the ‘gods’ in Rothfuss’ universe as really being either just people or fae with an advanced understanding of magic whose reputations are transformed through stories told of them.

At one point, Kvothe’s fae companion, Bast, claims that, “You know there are no such things as demons. There is only my kind” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 661). This ties into the stories on deities like Tehlu, depicted by most as the one true God, and Aleph, claimed by Skarpi to be above Tehlu. If there are no such thing as demons, only Fae, then what about angels, or gods? Do they exist? There are parts of this narrative that hint at all these stories stemming from Fae and people who knew enough about magic (and “Naming”) to manipulate the world around them. The “Kingkiller Chronicle*”* thus involves the reader in an endless questioning of the origins of the myths that permeate every aspect of the story. For example, Kvothe demonstrates at one point how small incidents can create big stories. By eating a root that reduces bleeding for a short time, he misleads people around him who are ignorant of such things to think that he does not bleed at all, resulting in nicknames like “Kvothe the Bloodless”. The old stories on deities like Tehlu and Aleph *could* stem from similar circumstances: someone possessing knowledge of something beyond the ordinary, prompting stories about the origins and interpretations of these things, and making them seem more powerful than they are.

In Rothfuss’ work, the true nature of gods and fae creatures both historically and in the present context of the story are questioned, emphasizing the challenge of misinterpretation that comes with lack of certain knowledge. This approach contrasts sharply with Tolkien. Eru Ilúvatar, as depicted in the *Silmarillion*, remains unquestioned as the *one* God, Eru meaning “Allfather” in Tolkien’s constructed language. Furthermore, his angel-figures (the Ainur) are emissaries or regents of Eru responsible for governing the world (Arda). They are quite separate from the “Children of Ilúvatar”, Elves and Men, who are created directly by Eru with their own special destinies, hidden from the Valar. There is an underlying order and

hierarchy here, ultimately stemming from a monotheistic scheme of creation, that is simply not found in Rothfuss. However, Tolkien refrains from explicitly introducing religion in the *Lord of the Rings*, reserving such discussions for the *Silmarillion* and other texts. He comments on this saying the LOTR-saga is the religion itself. These narratives are both Christian and orthodox, in intention and spirit, as seen through his use of good versus evil, and of what feels like “an all-wise providence” (Caldecott, 2005, pp. 48-49). In contrast, Rothfuss intertwines mythology and religious stories throughout his whole narrative, deliberately blurring the lines between gods, fae, and mortal beings as much as he can. Even Tehlu, widely regarded as the supreme deity in his narrative, is portrayed in the story by Skarpi as a mortal or fae individual possessing powerful magic, later deified through misconceptions, storytelling, and lack of knowledge about magic. We will now further explore the concept of the faerie creature.

Faerie Creatures: Hierarchy or Fluidity

A key aspect of Tolkien’s and Rothfuss’ treatment of “faerie” lies in their portrayal of non-human creatures and the distinctions between them. In Tolkien’s world, “faerie” encompasses all non-human creatures, meaning his elves, hobbits, dwarves, and more. It is interesting to note how he seemed to view them in a distinct hierarchy, with the elves as “higher beings”, who had different rules regarding life and death (Donovan, 2022, p. 88), and creatures like dwarves and hobbits as “lower” beings. For Rothfuss, by contrast, the distinctions between different races are inherently blurred, as he uses them to emphasize the transformative nature of magic and knowledge. He does not distinguish between different faerie races, only between “fae” and “human”. Even within and between these two categories the lines are heavily blurred, where fae creatures can display human qualities and humans can become “fae around the edges” by learning and understanding magic. Rothfuss uses the word “fae” where Tolkien would have used “faerie”, though the way Rothfuss uses this word seems to be in mostly the same way. Tolkien does not use the word “faerie” to describe his beings in *the Lord of the Rings* directly, keeping this descriptor mostly to his writings outside the story, while Rothfuss uses the word “fae” heavily in his tale, to describe beings and processes. For both authors, the words “fae” and “faerie” denote not only the creatures themselves, but also the world they inhabit and the very essence of magic itself, which will be discussed further in the second part of this chapter.

The origins of creatures like the Amyr and the Chandrian amongst others are constantly questioned in Rothfuss' narrative, some talking about them being humans, others saying they are not. Their degree of "faerie"-ness depends on how their tales are told, and what each character views as the historic truth, making the very existence of fae creatures in Rothfuss a tool of metafictional reflection on truth and storytelling. Here, "fae" is everything and nothing depending on your point of view. In a certain way, this is reminiscent of Tolkien's view of faerie as more than fantasy, reflecting "tree and bird, water and stone", as quoted from "On Fairy-Stories" earlier. However, while Tolkien uses his fantasy to show the glory of real-world structures in nature, Rothfuss is more interested in the different ways we perceive things as people, reflecting on how our own perspectives shape the world we live in.

Tolkien defers to "the one true story", meaning the Catholic creation story, using faerie-imagery that ultimately reflect the glory and importance of nature-as-creation. Rothfuss, however, uses his faerie-imagery to question, more than to establish our place in the world. Tolkien says that every writer wishes to be a real maker, making use in an analogous way of powers derived from God (Tolkien, 1938). Rothfuss on the other hand, through highlighting people's differing perceptions and how this shapes their world, says that every person uses artifice to *make up* their own version of the world. In Rothfuss' fairy-world, perceptions and knowledge builds characters' views of the world and shapes them as people, meaning they are in some sense also their own creators. This is part of what blurs the lines between fae and human in his storytelling.

Exemplifying this theme, Kvothe is depicted as becoming "fae around the edges", a transformation noted by a young woman employed at an inn he visits following his encounter with a fae creature named Felurian that he spent time with away from the "human world". The woman remarks, "Look at him Penny, really look at him. He's got a fae look about him. Look at his eyes" (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 699). In Rothfuss' narrative, one might acquire or embody qualities associated with the Fae after gaining understanding and knowledge of faerie and magic, and perhaps also by spending time with fae creatures. Kvothe, through his journey, is the target of several such remarks, tying him to other mythologized characters in

the narrative, such as Lanre and Selitos. Alongside Kvothe and other such individuals who are seen as more than human because of their knowledge and mastering of different skills, we find exclusively fae creatures in Rothfuss' tale as well. One of these fae creatures is Felurian, as mentioned above, who can be compared to a "hulder" in Scandinavian mythology, through her description as a seductive forest-creature. The tale also includes Bast, who in most ways seem to act like a human by the way he is described, though he likes to remind others that he is not, as when he says to Chronicler, "This is a fairy story, because you are gathering it for me" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 659). This comes after Chronicler specifically refuses to make stuff up or manipulate the story he is collecting from Kvothe, calling such tales "fairy stories". Bast's answer effectively turns the concept of the fairy story on its head. Bast is saying that it is not just the contents of a tale that makes it what it is, but also the storyteller and whoever is responsible for the storytelling itself, highlighting another aspect of the metafictional nature of Rothfuss' narrative. Bast is saying that by getting Chronicler to write Kvothe's story, and being responsible for the tale being told, the tale itself becomes a fairy-tale. This could also be hinting at the fae-ness of Kvothe himself.

Like the immortal Elves portrayed in Tolkien's stories, fae creatures like Felurian and Bast in Rothfuss' narrative are depicted as seemingly immortal beings. In the "Kingkiller Chronicle", we encounter very few of these creatures in the main narrative, and they are mostly talked about in stories Kvothe comes across, not in actual encounters he has himself. The most notable one we meet, Bast, serves as a constant companion in the frame-narrative and exhibits human-like behavior and appearance for the most part. The other notable fae character we meet, Felurian, encountered by Kvothe and his companions in a forest, is described as possessing ethereal beauty and the ability to ensnare anyone who ventures into her domain, never to be seen again. Notably, both Bast and Felurian are introduced by name, and not by what kind of creature or race they may be. Where Felurian is described as magical and mystical, Bast is not. Despite their immortality and fae-ness, Bast and Felurian differ significantly from each other in most things, reflecting Rothfuss' diverse portrayals of fae beings. Similarly, the closest thing we have to wizards in Rothfuss is the people at the University, who are not seen as fae, but who sometimes become something in-between through acquiring knowledge and power. Where Tolkien delineates distinct races, Rothfuss presents fae creatures without clear distinctions, except for groups like the Amyr and the Chandrian, who represent opposing forces.

The Amyr and the Chandrian further illustrate Rothfuss' blurring between human and fae. They are depicted as people who transformed because of the knowledge of magic they have gained and the responsibilities they took on. The Amyr are seen as guardians, soldiers and possibly angel-like beings who protect the world from the Chandrian and other evils by any means necessary. The Amyr and the Chandrian are small, exclusive groups who are not born that way, but made that way by older magics and gained knowledge. While Tolkien's faerie creatures are inherently what they are from birth, their understanding of the world being unable to change their nature, most of Rothfuss' fae characters undergo transformation by using and understanding magic. Naturally born fae beings are here exceptions rather than the norm. In Tolkien's world, by contrast, creatures whose very nature is altered by magic – such as the Orcs, the Uruk-Hai, or Gollum – are invariably distorted or corrupted by the process. This contrast highlights the different approaches to depicting faerie and magic in the respective authors' works. By blurring the lines between human and fae characteristics, Rothfuss invites readers to question the nature of identity and existence within his story. The fluidity of magical transformation reflects the general transformation that happens to any human being through knowledge and understanding of the world. This makes it an effective metafictional tool to highlight the changes people go through throughout their lives because of gained knowledge and experiences.

Tolkien does not include any specific imagery of gods in the LOTR-saga, and the narrative does not go into the religious beliefs of the characters involved, despite his explicit creation stories told in the *Silmarillion*. By contrast, in the "Kingkiller Chronicle" ideas surrounding gods and demons are closely linked to faerie and fae creatures, and discussions surrounding these things are central to the narrative itself. Characters often challenge conceptions of creatures in stories and in their lives, like conventional notions of demons. This is exemplified by Kvothe's remark regarding a villager's interpretation of an event that happened at Kvothe's inn; "'For the boy it's a demon [...] That's the easiest thing for him to understand, and it's close enough to the truth"(Rothfuss, 2007, p. 638). Through this observation, Kvothe highlights how beings in his world are being categorized as deities and demons based on limited understanding, suggesting that these classifications stem from human interpretation rather than inherent qualities. The deities and demons encountered in

Kvothe’s tales all possess what we could call fae-like attributes and wield knowledge of magic, suggesting a correlation between knowledge of such things and being perceived as deity or demon. When Bast says “You are an educated man. You know there is no such thing as demons […]. There is only my kind” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 661) he further strengthens this notion. This idea goes even further when he says that “there’s a fundamental connection between *seeming* and *being*” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 657). So, in Rothfuss fae world, there is a suggestion that understanding and knowledge of magic changes people to become more “fae”, but also that understanding something in a way makes it so, tying fae, human and deity together in his narrative. This suggests a correlation between magic and understanding, and transcendent existence. This also parallels the Gnostic pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment, wherein knowledge elevates individuals beyond their flesh and bones, through becoming what is called “pneumatics”.

The foundational concept in Gnosticism, the notion of “pneumatics”, finds resonance in the myths surrounding Kvothe and the other characters in the “Kingkiller Chronicle”, offering insights into the characters’ quest for knowledge and the evolving identities present. In Gnosticism, the “pneumatics” are individuals who have attained complete “knowledge” (gnosis) and thereby established contact with their divine essence. They are then freed from conventional moral judgment and are known for their hostility towards the world and all mundane ties (Jonas, 1970, p. 46). This concept can be seen in several ways in the myths surrounding Kvothe in the “Kingkiller Chronicle” and can be partly compared to the villains in this narrative – the Chandrian, who originate from Lanre. Lanre was a man whose pursuit of knowledge changed him so much that he needed a new identity and name. We can also tie the concept of pneumatics to other mythic creatures in Rothfuss’ world, such as the Amyr. These interconnected myths serve as focal points in the story, prompting a closer examination of their significance within Kvothe’s world.

The Chandrian have been mentioned several times in this thesis already, as they are central to Kvothe’s quest and the metafictional elements in Rothfuss’ tale. They are the first faerie-creatures we are introduced to in the narrative and set expectations for the meaning of “fae” in Rothfuss’ world for the reader. They are on several other occasions talked about using as little direct reference as possible, because of their reputation (seemingly founded in truth) for

showing up and killing whoever spreads accurate information about their identities and names. Lanre, after having gone through his “gnosis”, changes name to Haliax and disappears in shadow, leaving mundane ties behind. This is not unlike the goal of the pneumatics in gnostic belief. His change also happens because of knowledge gained, which is how gnostic believers become “pneumatics”. Further, just like the pneumatics, Lanre/Haliax gains a newfound “hostility towards the world” as a result of his new knowledge (Jonas, 1970, p. 46). The Chandrian seems to have a strong connection to the identity of their own names, showing up and killing people who use them repeatedly, like Kvothe’s troupe did. This ties to the concept of “Naming”, an integral part of Rothfuss’ magic that will be discussed in the next part of this chapter. Before that we will have a closer look at the Amyr.

Though there are many similarities between pneumatics and the Chandrian, this is also true for Rothfuss’ Amyr. This is interesting because of the opposition between the Chandrian and the Amyr within the narrative. The Amyr, often depicted as soldiers of the Tehlin Church, are commonly referred to as “the Holy Order” and adhere to the motto “for the greater good”. Despite this, and their opposition to the Chandrian, they are not necessarily seen as “good”. The second time Kvothe visits the bar where Skarpi is telling stories, the Tehlin Church comes and arrests him for blasphemy. In the story Skarpi gets arrested for, both Tehlu (here seen as a man, not a deity) and Selitos volunteer to become Amyr, in front of another deity, Aleph. They both seem to have a deep understanding and respect for the Amyr’s mission, and for Aleph himself. In this story, Selitos (seen in other stories as a mythic, powerful magician and “Namer”) and Tehlu (seen in other stories as the one true God) appear as equals, both being portrayed as men with powerful magical abilities and knowledge, who get to become something more, Amyr, because of these abilities. The angelic, “enlightened” inspiration behind the Amyr is evident in their wingedness, reminiscent of traditional depictions of angels, but also drawing lines to enlightenment through gnosis. Further, they bear resemblance to the Gnostic pneumatics in their autonomy, as they are given free rule by Aleph in this story, to maintain peace by any means necessary. They do not punish bad deeds but rather are told to stop bad things before they happen. While both the Amyr and the pneumatics have considerable freedom in their actions, the Amyr do adhere to the will of a divine authority, and can in that respect also be compared to a form of agents of “the demiurge” (or botched creator), as a form of cosmic tyranny, from Gnostic beliefs (Jonas, 1970, p. 46). Pneumatics are portrayed as having achieved ultimate knowledge and contact

with the divine, rendering them exempt from divine laws. The Amyr, chosen by a higher power for their duties, exhibit a similar exemption from conventional rules and laws, but still answer to a deity of some kind. The Amyr have a duty to uphold in Rothfuss' world, whereas pneumatics are seen as having achieved what they could achieve.

Tolkien also uses winged, angel-like beings in his Silmarillion, called Ainur. Despite visual and conceptual parallels between Rothfuss' Amyr and Tolkien's Ainur, the Ainur operate within a hierarchical structure overseen by Eru, contrasting with the autonomy that is (for the most part) given to the Amyr. The Ainur have clear leadership, by an overseeing deity, whereas the Amyr are given free rule by one to do as they see fit. Tolkien's "Ainur" are described as "angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres"(Donovan, 2022, p. 80). Rothfuss' Amyr are seen as ruthless and brutal beings left to do their duty, fitting with the idea of them being agents of a botched creator, from Gnosticism. Rothfuss, following in Tolkien's footsteps, seems to take inspiration from Tolkien's Ainur in creating his similarly named Amyr, but chooses to give them a much clearer freedom, while also using them to further emphasize the fluidity and blurring of lines that is so important in his storytelling, for instance in their ruthlessness, contrasting to their angel-like appearance. The Ainur are what they are from their creation, while the Amyr become what they are because of their knowledge and gained power. These representations are good examples of real-life religious structures shaping fantasy narratives, reflecting it in its fairy-elements.

Humans, Nature, and Magic

In order to explore how Rothfuss views magic in his faerie-world, an introduction to Tolkien's views on magic in his narrative is necessary. While Tolkien uses magical elements like the One Ring as a metaphor for the destructive nature of the machine and humanity's quest for dominance over nature, Rothfuss employs magic and faerie-elements to comment on human nature as knowledge-seekers and inquirers, and how our perceptions change based on our understanding of the world and the stories we tell ourselves of its workings. Tolkien depicts human beings as "sub-creators" and tries to explain how this can lead to good choices or bad choices, depending on how much respect we have for the nature of what exists. Rothfuss uses his magical elements to further underline the epistemological uncertainty he

shows using his faerie-creatures, as argued above. We will look closer at how this is done using elements of magic in this section.

Both authors incorporate layers of meaning into their narratives, prompting readers to contemplate themes such as storytelling and truth, history, and nature, and their relevance to their own lives, philosophies, and beliefs, all conveyed through fantastical elements. When the hobbits in Tolkien's tale return from their quest, they find their home despoiled and polluted, indirectly reflecting the post-war England that Tolkien was living in himself at the time (Caldecott, 2005, p. 40), and he uses his tale to warn of the attempted dominance over nature as he saw in his own lifetime. He lived through both world wars, having been a soldier in the first one, meaning he saw the scale of suffering up inflicted by industrial warfare close (Caldecott, 2005, p. 12). Christopher Tolkien, as quoted in Kmita (2024), says that to his father, "the machine" was the wrong solution to what he called humanity's cleverness. The machine, to him, meant domination and coercion of nature and others, and it also meant the noise and destruction of cities. In his secondary world, the machine is mythologized: it becomes The One Ring. The ring was made for coercion, meaning the only solution to it was its destruction, according to Kmita (2024). Through using the One Ring as a metaphor for the machine and man's seeking for domination over nature through scientific exploration, Tolkien was trying to get the reader to reflect on man's role in nature (Kmita, 2024). Tolkien does not view all kinds of magic as necessarily involving this dominance and power over nature, however. He mentions in one of his letters that the magic (technology) of the Elves is a form of art that is in keeping with the inherent form of the natural world, whereas the magic of the Enemy is "domination and tyrannous reforming of Creation" (Caldecott, 2005, p. 44). The devices made by the elves work with the grain of nature, not against it. What Tolkien opposes in his stories is not technology itself, but using it to dominate and control, and to "bulldoze other wills" (Caldecott, 2005, p. 44).

According to Kmita (2024) and Caldecott (2005), Tolkien diverges from traditional interpretations of magic, employing it as a vehicle to comment on the modernization of the real world. Rothfuss does something similar, where he uses magic to comment on the power of education, understanding the world, and being able to use this understanding for good. However, Tolkien's outlook is one of warning, where Rothfuss' tale implies possibility and

opportunity. Tolkien viewed the desire to dominate nature and the thirst for power and domination with great concern. This is visible in his stories through highlighting the ancient beauty and wildness of nature, perhaps most clearly symbolized by those ancient guardians of the forest, the Ents, who overthrow the vicious regime of Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings*. Saruman is precisely guilty of using distortive evil magic in his mock-creation of the Uruk-Hai through perverse technological means. Tolkien's view on modernization is therefore conservative and pessimistic to a degree, connecting nature to good and the machine to evil. Rothfuss challenges this opposition. He was himself initially a student of chemical engineering at the beginning of writing the "Kingkiller Chronicle", before changing paths to get a degree in English (Rothfuss, 2023). Ultimately, he views magic and science in his secondary world as essentially the same thing, and through Kvothe he gives the reader an idea of people outside the University, who are not studying "magic" (science), as old-fashioned and behind the times. Where Tolkien draws lines from magic to real life machines, domination and evil, Rothfuss uses magic to point to hope and optimism in discovering and exploring the lines and connections of things in the world.

In Rothfuss' view, new knowledge and understanding of how things work gives opportunities and possibilities, and he focuses on this rather than being concerned with domination over natural forces. He shows this through all the things Kvothe learns on his journey that gets him closer to his goal of understanding and finding the Chandrian, helping people he meets on his way with his newfound skills and knowledge. Starting from Kmita (2024) and his suggestion that the One Ring symbolizes modernization and the dominance of the machine, we can contrast this idea to Rothfuss' universe and his optimistic view of science and new knowledge. Both authors explore the theme of science and technology in their faerie and magic-themes, but where Tolkien tells a tale warning people of meddling with nature, Rothfuss shows a more opportunistic view. People study the art of magic at The University in Rothfuss narrative, an exclusive, expensive place for the selected few. Rothfuss criticizes the exclusivity and the money-aspect of higher education through his "University", while he still speaks highly of the act of seeking knowledge and understanding of all things. Indeed, this is one of the main personality traits that drives his protagonist, Kvothe, as seen in quotes like this from when he first starts learning about magic and science as a child in the troupe:

> My mind was learning to work in different ways, becoming stronger. […] You feel exhausted, languorous, and almost Godlike. […] my intellect […] was weary and expanded, languid and latently powerful. I could feel my mind starting to awaken. I seemed to gain momentum as I progressed, like when water starts to wash away a damn made of sand (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 69)

Here, we see Kvothe's eagerness to learn new things, and the feeling it gives him. We could also say that where Tolkien connects magic to dominating physical nature through new knowledge, Rothfuss rather connects magic and knowledge to the nature of people – to their need to change and grow and inquire. The malignancy of the ring is unclear in Tolkien's narrative at first. The One Ring is identified as a piece of magic when it first appears, but so are Dwarf-made toys that entertain the Hobbit children. Further, in calling Gandalf a wizard, Tolkien also hints at the benign quality of his magic. In Tolkien's mythology, the "Istari", which are called wizards, are actually a form of angelic beings serving the creator (Holmes, 2014, p. 143), and not just humans with magical abilities. In Rothfuss' world, the word "wizard" is not in use, and what would qualify as a wizard are human beings learning different types of magic at the University. However, the interesting thing about this, is that Rothfuss describes people several times as becoming strange, in a way less human, the more magic they learn and understand. He makes it seem like the more magic you learn and use, the more you change as a person. An example of this is the character Elodin, who at one time was seen as the most powerful professor at the University where Kvothe is a student, with responsibility for the subject of "naming". He was later told to have "gone crazy", and when Kvothe becomes a student, Elodin is seen as a quirky, unreliable person who rarely shows up for the classes he is supposed to teach, and when he does, he asks his students seemingly unrelated questions to the subject at hand. Kvothe notes that Elodin seems to have striking eyes that look at you in a way other people do not, which fits with this idea. After learning and understanding more of magic, and especially the art of Naming, which we will discuss more in depth in the next few passages, Kvothe gets a deeper understanding of Elodin. At the same time, people around him start to note similar changes in him, with characters saying things like "'There's more changed here than a bit of beard can account for." Her eyes searched my face. 'Lord but you're right girl. There is a fae look about him'" (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 700), one of his friends even saying "You're starting to sound like Elodin"(Rothfuss, 2011, p. 343).

Before going more into detail on names in the stories, it is worth addressing the overarching theme of change in the stories overall, as the art of "Naming" appears to serve Rothfuss as a means to discuss transformations in people. Theories about Kvothe's search for knowledge changing him as a person, becoming something else, can be likened to the story of Lanre, told to Kvothe as a child. Lanre was reputed to be a hero and great warrior, but then his wife died, making him look for knowledge about magic to resurrect his wife. He fails in this but is entirely changed as a person through the process, eventually making him the leader of the Chandrian. We could compare this change of being that happens with multiple characters described in Rothfuss's work to that of Gollum's change in Tolkien's stories. Gollum was at one time a Hobbit but goes through a dramatic and horrifying change of being because of the influence of the Ring, a dark magical object. The ring corrupts and changes his very being, bringing out the worst, hiding away the good. Rothfuss also corrupts people with magic, however, this is always through understanding and gaining knowledge of a thing, and not plainly through use of an object. Rothfuss gives a view of change through experience and understanding, whereas in Tolkien's works, the Ring is feeding the petty desires and resentments that were already part of Gollum (Caldecott, 2005, p. 36). The stories about Kvothe and his nickname going from "Kvothe the Arcane" to "Kvothe the Bloodless" and "Kvothe Kingkiller" also shows a change that is not exclusively positive. While this change through magic is viewed with negative aspects in both tales, Rothfuss' narrative says that this change is in our nature, both good and bad, whereas Tolkien focuses on change that should and could have been avoided. The next passage will explore this change in people more closely, relating it to names and the act of "Naming".

Through the exploration of "Naming" as a concept, both Tolkien and Rothfuss delve further into different aspects of their magic. Tolkien connects naming with being, with gaining a sympathetic understanding of what is created. Caldecott describes naming in Tolkien like this:

> Naming is not merely the attachment of arbitrary labels to things, but involves us in the imaginative/intellectual grasping of *what they are.* To give a name to something is to therefore pick it out from its context, to identify it as a thing-in-itself, and to

> perceive at least something of its character and purpose in relation to ourselves (2005, p. 18).

Thus, Tolkien connects names as with the natures, or pre-existing essences of things. Rothfuss however, describes “Naming” as an art and a subject that aims for understanding a thing to the point where you gain power over it. In Rothfuss’ view, knowing the nature of a thing in his narrative gives you opportunity and power, which is exactly what Tolkien tries to warn about. We see this in passages like this one: “As names have power, words have power. Words can light fires in the minds of men. Words can wring tears from the hardest hearts […]” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 617). Here, Rothfuss explicitly talks about understanding the power of language, connecting it to understanding names, and the power they hold. In the story of Lanre, his wife Lyra is said to know “the names of things, and the power of her voice could kill a man or still a thunderstorm” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 176). She awakens Lanre from dead using his name. Rothfuss’ view aligns with more contemporary views on science and knowledge as ways to gain power, being able to utilize something, by knowing the essence of it. His view on this also aligns with Gnostic philosophies on knowledge as a way forward, to become something more than human.

There are several name-changes happening in Rothfuss’ tale that equates “Naming” to the nature of change, connecting it to gaining knowledge, Kvothe’s own name being one of them. Just like Lanre changes name to Haliax because of gained knowledge leading to change in character, Kvothe changes name after leaving his heroics and quest behind to start his inn. After becoming “Kote”, he seems to have changed as a person entirely, which is what Bast wants to change back by having Kvothe recount his story to Chronicler and thereby remembering who he is. On his name, Kvothe says that “[…] I was brought up as Kvothe. My father once told me it meant ‘to know’” (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 55), and the name is reflected in Kvothe’s quest for knowledge throughout his life. On the name Kote, we are told that it means “disaster”, when a teacher at the University says “Chan Vaene edan Kote” (meaning “expect disaster every seven years”, (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 455-456)). Several years after his teacher said this, Kvothe chooses it as his new name, hinting to the reader about a significant turn in his personal journey, for the worse. In this saying, we also see “Chan”, meaning seven, connected to the Chandrian. This section explains how both Rothfuss implicitly and

explicitly centers the meaning of names in his tale. Caldecott mentions instances where Tolkien does the same thing with names, as when Melkor's name is changed to Morgoth, meaning "the enemy" (2005, p. 82), and when Smeagol changes name to Gollum, though the meaning here is not explicitly discussed. The elves in Tolkien's world were the ones who started to name things and create language. Similarly, "Namers" in Rothfuss' world are often seen as fae creatures, and the more "Naming" a person understands the less human they seem, as exemplified in characters like Elodin and Kvothe. While Tolkien cautions against using magic to dominate nature even through his use of names and name-changes, Rothfuss employs it as a metafictional tool to illustrate the natural process of change in people and how understanding a things nature gives certain power over it, undermining Tolkien's entire point.

Conclusion: Navigating Narrative Realms

In conclusion, this chapter will have a brief look at how fairy and magic-elements are used to navigate the balance between metafictional storytelling and worldbuilding. Both Tolkien and Rothfuss navigate a middle ground between stories where the narrative planes intermingle and those where they remain separate. As Borges explains it, "There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of stories within stories: those where the two planes do intermingle, and those where they do not" (as referenced in Brljak, 2010, p. 20). Tolkien and Rothfuss both use metafictional tools that do not coincide with either of these extremes. Tolkien liked the idea of the found manuscript in the early days of developing his world, but these manuscripts depend on hyperrealism (Brljak, 2010, p. 20). As he abandoned his idea of creating a myth for England, he slowly moved away from the found manuscript as he developed his stories (Donovan, 2022, p. 79). This made him freer in his use of fantasy and faerie-elements. Rothfuss keeps his stories in their own universe but uses found manuscripts within this universe for the characters to interact with, not the reader. Tolkien's characters never read the LOTR-saga in the stories themselves, however, they are seen writing the stories. In Rothfuss' novels, Kvothe does sometimes comment on what Chronicler writes down and even one time tells him to "Cross that out", before he "tore the half-written sheet with slow care" (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 384-385). Where Tolkien's characters do not often comment directly on the stories they are in, Kvothe regularly says things like "It was a long night and I will not trouble you with any further details" (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 860). Tolkien's initial idea of the found manuscript could have been problematic for his use of magic and faerie-elements in the tale,

as he would have tried hard to make them more believable outside the narrative itself. However, walking away from this meant he was freer to use these concepts how he wished, without having to legitimize them in the real world and to the reader in that way. In Rothfuss' novels, the narrators (Chronicler and Kvothe) and protagonist (Kvothe) remind the reader several times that the story we are hearing is not made up (within their respective world), and that this fact makes it messier and less likely of "happy endings", referencing the categorical eucatastrophe talked about in Tolkien and others when referencing what a classic fairy story is (Tolkien, 1938; Wood, 2022).

Tolkien was seemingly preoccupied with defending the rational coherence of his fairy-world, and its place in our own world (McIntosh, 2009, pp. 5-6), and this feels very similar in Rothfuss' tales and views as well. Though the specifics of what they are trying to discuss and show the reader has different intentions, their view of fantasy and "faerie" and its place as a way to explore structures of our own world feels similar in both authors. By examining the way Rothfuss does this compared to Tolkien, focusing on the specifics of "faerie" and the concept of "magic" in both authors, this chapter shows how intrinsic metafictional elements are in the fantasy genre, and how the genre can be valuable outside its own secondary worlds and stories. Both authors, despite this, manage to create worlds the reader can escape into, with an "inner consistency of reality" (Tolkien, 1938) that leaves the reader reflecting on their own reality without exiting the secondary, fantastical one. As McIntosh explains it, an alternative reality is after all still part of our own reality, and therefore has the duty to "recover" the truth of that reality (2009, pp. 7-8). Rothfuss appears to draw inspiration from Tolkien's tales in many ways, while infusing each faerie- and magic-element with his own beliefs, that often diverge significantly from Tolkien's perspectives. They both agree that faerie has a place for discussion on "the real world", but Rothfuss emphasizes change, fluidity and opportunity in his faerie and magic-elements, where Tolkien is more focused on respecting nature as it is, warning against trying to dominate it.

Chapter 3: The Hero and the Quest Narrative

The story of a hero who undergoes a quest is central to the fantasy genre, and this chapter will examine how this structure is used to highlight the metafictional elements in Rothfuss' narrative, again in contrast with Tolkien's approach to the quest. This chapter is drawing upon ideas by Christopher Booker and his book *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004).Tolkien borrows elements and structures from the Christian savior-narrative to highlight their importance, although without using actual religious elements directly from the Bible. In contrast, Rothfuss writes a quest for knowledge mirroring elements from Gnostic myth, while focusing on understandings of myth and origin, and the connections of old tales and old truths.

This chapter uses Christopher Booker's analysis of key elements of the quest-narrative in his book *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004) to structure the discussion of Rothfuss and Tolkien. Beginning with how the concepts of free will and fate affect the hero's quest-journey, the chapter will show how the way Tolkien uses these concepts are effectively subverted in Rothfuss' works. Further, the chapter will explore what Booker calls "the call", and the elements of gains, losses, and companionships of different kinds as related to the quest-narrative. Then, the chapter will explore what Booker calls the "big bad" and how this looks in the respective works, before briefly discussing the concept of "endings" pertaining to the quest-narrative, which can be seen as connected to the previously discussed "eucatastrophe", from the chapter on Faerie and Magic. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the hero's motivations in a quest-narrative, and how this looks in Rothfuss' works compared to Tolkien. As already noted, Tolkien has made a quest-story that mirrors the Christian savior-narrative. Frodo is seen as echoing the pattern of a savior who sacrifices himself for the greater good of all even if he fails to enact that pattern fully in his choice to keep the Ring rather than destroy it on Mount Doom. Rothfuss on the other hand subverts this sacrificial pattern by making Kvothe's personal quest-story revolve mainly around Kvothe's own desires, though adding complexity by effectively trapping Kvothe in his own quest, bringing elements of fate into the discussion.

The Hero’s Journey: Free Will versus Fate

Booker argues that no story is quite as recognizable as the quest (2004, p. 69). The quest, or “the journey”, is a recognizable trope in most fantasy novels, but is also used in many other types of storytelling. The concept of free will versus fate adds complexity to the quest-journey, as the heroes must navigate choices and consequences amidst their quests. Both Rothfuss’ and Tolkien’s quest-narratives use elements that converge on the issue of free will. Donovan argues that characters in Tolkien’s stories who understand the implications of their free will are given authority to enact good or evil, and are thus less limited than other characters in his stories (Donovan, 2022, p. 87). Early in the *Silmarillion* (Tolkien, 1999), the music of Iluvatar is interrupted when Melkor interweaves “matters of his own imagining”. For Tolkien, angels too have free will, making the structure of the world a “drama of freedom and choice” from the beginning. Donovan explains the results of Melkor’s meddling in creation as not caused by Melkor’s free will, but precisely due to the choices he makes with it. Tolkien understood free will as something that could lead to unexpected good things, as God can bring about a deeper good even from evil choices (Donovan, 2022, p. 88). Through Frodo’s acceptance of his quest, Tolkien conveys a sense of agency and choice, in line with the Catholic belief in the will as redeemable through grace. We can see this in Frodo’s choice to take on the responsibility of the ring as well. As Caldecott (2005, p. 31) explains it, when Frodo says that he will take the ring, this is not because it is what he immediately desires, but he nonetheless chooses to do it because it is what he thinks is right. This moment of grace feels like some other will was using his body, yet at the same time his acceptance of the call transforms him into the best and most courageous version of himself. Here, he moves away from the selfish desire to stay home, towards what is seen as the good for all. Though there is hints of another will in this description, this does not dominate, as Caldecott (2005, pp. 31-32) says, but is rather a will that strengthens us when in need to make the right choices, which is very much in line with Catholic views. In Catholicism, the connections between free will and providence is complex, and it says that though our free will makes it so that we can reject Christ, he will “save us from our own evil will […], without doing violence to our freedom” (Caldecott, 2005, p. 102). Rothfuss, however, seems to view free will as an illusion in his narrative, being reminiscent of how “fate” is created by an evil deity to control all living things in Gnostic belief (Jonas, 1970, p. 205). The chapter will now explore how Rothfuss distances himself from Tolkien’s view on free will in several ways, for example by adding

deities that manipulate free will and fate within the story, effectively trapping Kvothe in his quest and removing the element of free will entirely.

Rothfuss portrays Kvothe as driven to go on his quest by one singular childhood event, which was when the Chandrian killed his parents and their troupe of performers. Kvothe is propelled forward by the weight of that shock and grief. In a way, the event of his parents killing as a child determines Kvothe's quest. He does not seem to have much choice in the matter, being fatefully driven by feelings of grief. Further, the introduction of the Chtaeh, a malevolent entity with omniscient knowledge of the future, introduces a troubling new dynamic to Kvothe's fated path after they meet, as shown in this interaction:

> '[…] the Cthaeh can see the future. Not in some vague, oracular way. It sees all the future. Clearly. Perfectly. Everything that can possibly come to pass, branching out endlessly from the current moment'. […] 'If it knows the future perfectly' he said slowly, 'then it must know exactly how a person will react to anything it says'. 'And it is vicious, Reshi.' (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 686)

This conversation between Bast and Kvothe (called Reshi by Bast, meaning "teacher") continues with the repercussions of this meeting:

> 'That means anyone influenced by the Cthaeh would be like an arrow shot into the future.' 'An arrow only hits one person, Reshi.' […] 'Anyone influenced by the Cthaeh is like a plague ship sailing for a harbor' (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 687).

Not only is Kvothe's free will significantly manipulated and shaped by his interaction with the Cthaeh, but the destinies of everyone he comes into contact with are also strongly impacted, in negative ways. This notion challenges the concept of free will, suggesting that individuals are merely vessels for the fulfillment of preordained destinies. The idea of the cosmic prison that Earth is seen as in Gnostic belief resonates well with Rothfuss' themes of fate versus free will. Looking at both the killing of his parents and the meeting with the Cthaeh, it seems Kvothe has no choice or will in his quest. Kvothe is tied to his quest like a fate, imprisoned within it. This is further instilled in the story by interactions like this:

> ‘What have I been these years except careful, Bast?’ Kvothe said, his irritation finally bubbling to the surface. ‘What good has it done me? Besides, if what you say about the Cthaeh is true, then things will end in tears no matter what I do. Isn’t that right?’ (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 846)

The introduction of the Cthaeh to the already pessimistic view of fate and free will in the “Kingkiller Chronicle” makes room for further reflection on these concepts and what they mean. Through these elements, the metafictional theme of how and why stories are pre-determined or pre-written are brought up. The analogy of a Christian or Gnostic God as writer of human stories can be drawn from this, and the idea of providence. In both the Bible and the *Silmarillion*, the world is created through the word of God (Caldecott, 2005, p. 71). In Rothfuss’ story, the Cthaeh seems to act similarly to a Gnostic “failed” or evil deity, using his words to shape the future.

The nature of agency and free will alongside fate and determinism are also questioned through the very notion of the quest-narrative itself, within the context of both stories and in the genre. According to Booker, once a hero embarks on their quest, they are driven towards their goal until it is achieved (2004, p. 69). While Tolkien emphasizes the role of individual choices in shaping destiny, Rothfuss presents a narrative where the hero’s journey feels determined by things out of his control, a path imposed rather than chosen. Both authors’ perspectives on fate and free will are influenced by their respective religious inspirations; Tolkien’s rational beings having been made in a perfect God’s image, and their good and bad decisions are being shaped by this while still being their own, in contrast to Rothfuss’ flawed beings, including flawed godlike beings, making the quest for enlightenment and true knowledge to escape a seemingly inescapable world necessary, and the only path forward and “out”.

Quest Dynamics: the Elements of the Journey

The *Lord of the Rings* can be seen as a typical quest-narrative in many ways. According to Caughey (2014, p. 405), Tolkien’s narrative was recognized as a quest-narrative as early as in the 60s, meaning people recognized it as a quest even before it was recognized as part of any

fantasy genre. Frodo gets the ring from Bilbo and must keep it hidden and safe from others. This casts him out from his home and his village, and sends him far away, in search for the place he can destroy it, so that he can return to his home. His goal is to get rid of the Ring, and thereby destroy its power. In contrast, Kvothe wants to gain knowledge on his quest, and thereby gain power. He says that "Revenge might be beyond me, at least for now. But I still had a hope of knowing the truth" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 186).

Booker does not highlight the acquisition of treasure as part of the quest-narrative, though several other theorists do. Flieger (1981, p. 42) calls Tolkien's story an "anti-quest" because of the known premise of acquiring treasure in the quest-narrative. Frodo is looking to destroy the ring, not to gain something. He is on a quest to destroy something deemed evil, where Kvothe is on a quest for knowledge about the world and its secrets. In other words, Frodo is on a quest to destroy and break power, where Kvothe is on a quest to attain power, through knowledge. We should recognize that Kvothe does not want to acquire "treasure" in that sense, either. He is looking for knowledge and ultimately, revenge, to remove something from the world, not to acquire something himself. However, through Kvothe attaining knowledge, with this comes some form of power, which is seen as a positive addition to Kvothe's life. In other words, knowledge could be seen as "treasure", in that sense. Kvothe's goal of revenging his parents by killing the Chandrian is then two-fold: he attains a kind of treasure in all the knowledge he gets on his quest, and the power that comes with it, while also getting closer to revenging his parents, and destroy the Chandrian's power and existence.

Caughey (2014) claims that Flieger, amongst others, have a too narrow view of the quest-narrative, and Booker (2004) agrees. Neither Frodo nor Kvothe come home from their quests unscathed or comfortable, despite one of them attaining power and the other destroying it. At the end of Frodo's journey, he says "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: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (Tolkien, 2011b, p. 1029), describing the loss Frodo is feeling after his quest. Kvothe, in the frame story, seems to have lost parts of himself as well, despite the many things he learns on his journey. Rothfuss shows the reader this by switching from describing Kvothe with his real name, to just calling him "the innkeeper", and by using the fake name he has given himself in the frame-narrative, Kote. This is a deliberate

narrative choice that reflects metafictional reflections from the reader, blurring narrative voice and character identity. An example is when Kvothe takes a break in his storytelling when two soldiers enter the inn asking for dinner. Kvothe then puts on his apron, and suddenly Rothfuss (or Chronicler) switches from describing Kvothe, to describing "the innkeeper", like this: "Kvothe picked his apron up off the bar and ducked his head into it. […] The innkeeper gestured to the empty room" (Rothfuss, 2011, p. 891), then further calling him by Kote until the apron is off again. We could interpret this as being a choice made by Chronicler, in his "Kingkiller Chronicle", and not Rothfuss the author. Chronicler, just like Kvothe, went to the University and studied "Naming", which could make his use of different names for Kvothe in his story deliberate. Effectively, this shows how good Kvothe is at hiding his identity, or how lost in this new one he is, while blurring choices made by Rothfuss, with those made by Chronicler. This encourages readers to reflect on narrative reliability and blurring lines of character, narrator, and author, making it an effective metafictional tool.

According to Booker, the quest always starts with "a call", a reason, a sense of urgency, almost a compulsion, that makes it impossible to continue as usual, or remain in one's comfort zone or home. For Frodo, this "call" is realizing that he must keep the world safe from the ring Bilbo gives him, and it is thus for the greater good that he starts his journey. In the "Kingkiller Chronicle", this "call" happens when the mysterious Chandrian violently kills the whole troupe Kvothe has grown up in while he is out gathering firewood. Orphaned and homeless, Kvothe is left with the burning question of why this happened. Why did the Chandrian kill his people, who are they and what are their motivations? What did his father's song contain that made it so dangerous? Finding the answers to this becomes Kvothe's calling. Alongside his natural thirst for knowledge, it is this deeply personal need to understand that drives him forward. For every answer Kvothe gets along the way, though, two new questions seem to arise, and he must keep looking. As we have seen in the other chapters, his constant quest for knowledge is reminiscent of the constant quest for knowledge highlighted in Gnostic beliefs.

Even though Kvothe dreams of revenge, and to kill the Chandrian, his main desire is still to know and understand the reasoning behind what happened. This, to him, is much more

important than revenge, though he hopes one will lead to the other. In Gnostic belief, true knowledge will lead to salvation, and in Rothfuss' story, only true knowledge of the Chandrian and a chance at revenging his parents feels like salvation for Kvothe. As readers, we might not agree with this, though Kvothe is entirely convinced. Kvothe several times worries that he will feel crazy forever, if he does not find out what he needs about them, like in this passage where he speaks to Denna after a sighting of the Chandrian by some villagers:

> Over the last year I'd held a silent fear in my secret heart. I worried at times that the memory of my troupe's death and the Chandrian had just been a strange sort of grief-dream my mind had created to help me deal with the loss of my entire world. But now I had something resembling proof. They were real. My memory was real. I wasn't crazy (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 521).

In this passage, we see Kvothe's longing for truth surrounding the Chandrian, but we also see fear of having remembered incorrectly, of being on a quest with no end-goal in sight. This further instills doubt in the reader about Kvothe's ability to correctly tell his own story and reminds us of how the human mind warps memories, meaning everything Kvothe is recounting could be completely different from what actually happened. This makes his quest for knowledge about the Chandrian even more important to him.

Another important part of the quest narrative, using Booker's (2004) ideas about it, is the accompanying of friends, or "companions" on the hero's journey. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam accompanies Frodo the entire time, and other members of the fellowship help along the way. In the "Kingkiller Chronicle", however, Kvothe is not accompanied by the same person or people through his quest, but rather different people at various times, with little or no tie to each other. Tolkien's story is taking place during a much shorter timespan than in Rothfuss' story, making Sam (and others) accompanying Frodo more natural than it would be in the "Kingkiller Chronicle", which goes through most of Kvothe's childhood into early adulthood. We follow Kvothe through his whole life all the way until as an adult man he is hiding away as an innkeeper in a small village inn, telling Chronicler his story. He has many companions during his life, who accompany him for longer or shorter periods of time, like his two best friends at the University, and Denna, his love-interest and friend who comes and goes as she

pleases, or Tempi, an Adem mercenary. There are teachers of formal or informal title, friends, romantic interests, all of whom tell Kvothe to be careful and not make rash decisions. In the frame-story, where Kvothe tells his tale to Chronicler, he has one constant companion, however, Bast. In the frame-story, Kvothe has stopped his quest, and though readers (and Chronicler) do not know why, Kvothe gives the impression of having failed his mission, and in the same process, started something new, and big, leading to his nickname, "Kingkiller". Bast, his companion, student and "house boy" at the inn, has his own mission, which is trying to get Kvothe back to himself, and his former quest. Kvothe has given up, but as readers, we get a feeling that we are just waiting for Chronicler, and Bast, to get him to realize how in the middle of everything he still is. The use of a frame-story to tell the story is inherently metafictional, as it creates a narrative within a narrative, allowing for commentary on the act of storytelling and the relationship between the storyteller, the story, and the reader. Having a constant companion, Bast, in the frame-narrative is also a metafictional tool, as he influences the narrative's direction. This is done directly, by threatening Chronicler to write it as he wants it written, as seen in this passage, where Bast has broken into Chronicler's room as he slept:

> 'You need to keep him from focusing on the dark things. If not…' Bast shrugged and repeated the motion of crumpling and throwing away a piece of paper. 'But I am collecting the story of his life. The *real* story.' Chronicler made a helpless gesture. […] 'Focus on the heroics, his cleverness!' He [Bast] waved his hands. […] 'It's really not my place to steer him in one way or another' Chronicler said stiffly. […] 'Piss on your story' Bast said sharply. 'You'll do what I say, or I'll break you like a kindling stick' (Rothfuss, 2007, pp. 659-660).

After this conversation, Bast further threatens Chronicler even more, which makes the reader ask the question of how much of the story is written down as it happened, or as Bast wanted it to be written. How much did Chronicler manipulate the story as he wrote it to make Bast happy, how much did he really encourage Kvothe to go into details of good or bad events in his story? Do we have all of it? We are also reminded that there are multiple people involved who want the story in their specific way, which further translates to real life history and myth and the concepts of historic truth and historiographic metafiction as discussed in chapter one on Creation Myth and Origin Stories. Kvothe is not only questioned as a hero in his own

world, and the truthfulness of his quest, but the reader, in the real world, also questions the same things. Bast also functions at times as a representation of the reader's perspective of wanting Kvothe to believe in himself and "snap out of it", at the same time. We have the suggestion that Kvothe failed his quest, leading to his nickname "Kingkiller", used in the title of the series. All these things play with narrative expectations and metafictional themes, prompting readers to question the reliability of the narrator and anticipate how the story will unfold, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Continuing from this discussion on companions, we will now look more at the concept of love in the quest-narrative.

Being either romantic or familial, love often works as a powerful motivator for the quests in the fantasy genre and the hero's choices (Booker, 2004, p. 83). Romantic love can be seen as different elements of the story: in the helpers or companions, as the treasure acquired, or, as in Rothfuss' case, as temptation and distraction from the goal. The next few paragraphs will look further at how the idea of "love" is handled differently in Rothfuss' narrative to that of Tolkien, further developing the theme of companionship.

Tolkien presents love in his stories as something unifying and romantic. At the same time, he also presents friendship as something vital. In his world, both of these types of love can lead to heightened achievements (Donovan, 2022, pp. 86-87). Nonetheless, Tolkien does not allow for protagonists like Frodo to explore any form of romantic love in *The Lord of the Rings*. This makes for a clearer view of Frodo as savior, having his whole focus be his quest and the friendships that help him get there. These friendships, like between Sam and Frodo, are also seen as a form of love, and is vital for the quest to move forward. Rothfuss, on the other hand, does allow his protagonist to have romantic interests, but through this shows an idea of love as distracting from true goals rather than helpful. Where friendships help Kvothe along his journey, romance is a hindrance.

In Rothfuss' narrative, love, especially romantic love, is presented as something distracting and conflicting, fitting more with Bookers idea's surrounding what he calls "temptations" in the quest-narrative (2004, p. 74) rather than companionship or romance. Though he still shows friendship to be helpful and contribute to good things, most of Kvothe's interactions

with women he has interest in, especially Denna, is shown as stressful and distracting from Kvothe's goals and the quest itself. Denna is portrayed as disappearing a lot, as giving fake names to people, and as mysterious and elusive. Kvothe is always thinking about every aspect of their interactions, in fear of startling her. Kvothe is always looking to find her, and it distracts him from his studies and his other tasks, and ultimately, from his quest for the Chandrian. In Gnosticism, seeking love is seen as purely sexual, and sexuality is seen as a sin because it distracts from the "original habitation, her true center, her eternal being" (Jonas, 1970, p. 63). According to this, love makes the Soul think it is part of a body versus separate from it, making the person seek the "pleasures of the body" (Jonas, 1970, p. 63), forgetting its true purpose to find enlightenment. The portrayal of Denna as distraction from Kvothe's true goals can be seen as correlated to this belief in Gnostic thinking. Kvothe's portrayal of her feels almost like worship. He introduces her like she is more than human, saying to Chronicler, "[…] trying to make you understand her with nothing more than words, you have never seen her, never heard her voice. You cannot know" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 321). He further says that singing colors to a blind man would be easier to him than describing Denna. His struggle to talk about her, and his constant search for her, no matter what else is going on in his life, makes her feel like a constant distraction. Rothfuss' portrayal of love in the context of the quest narrative explains it as working against the quest and goal of true knowledge, just like in Gnosticism where the notion of love is seen as a distraction from higher truths. In every way, Rothfuss' descriptions of love correlates with what Booker calls "temptations" (2004, p. 74), that will lull the protagonist into forgetting his quest and mission. In Tolkien's narrative, this "temptation" is not someone of romantic interest, but rather the object of the ring itself. Tolkien highlights companionship and friendships, and in this respect uses love to get closer to the goal of his quest, which is very different from Rothfuss' portrayal of love as temptation. Though Kvothe is described as only thinking good things of Denna, it does feel like Rothfuss himself has an almost ascetic view on love, as he clearly does not see Denna as a positive addition to the story, but a hindrance on Kvothe's way towards his goals. This can be seen in connection to other hindrances that will be further discussed below.

The journey itself is supposed to be easily recognizable in a quest narrative. The protagonist is supposed to go through several terrible things on his way, with guidance from friendly helpers (Booker, 2004, p. 73). The journey is supposed to contain phases of monsters, temptations (as mentioned above), and other things that need to be overcome as the journey

goes on. In Tolkien, this comes in many forms, like shadow riders, monsters, and Gollum, the first and most important terrible thing being the ring itself. The Ring is a constant in the narrative and needs to be "overcome" by Frodo, as he slowly gets more attached to it on his journey. He is driven from his home to hide the ring from people who want to use it for evil, and he is forced to take on the responsibility to find a place it can be destroyed. Kvothe, being a nomad by blood, does not have a physical place he calls home, but rather sees his people as his home. He is forced away from his home by the Chandrian killing his people. Here, the Chandrian are the obvious "monsters", according to Booker's categorization. It does take a while for Kvothe to start on his quest after this happens, as he is a traumatized child for the next couple of chapters. He tells Chronicler about it like this; "After my family was killed, I wandered deep into the forest and slept. […] In self-defense, a good portion of my brain simply stopped working" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 123). After being lost in the forest for a while, he also lives on the streets of the ruthless city called Tarbean, where he after a couple of years, through some stories told by people he meets, like Skarpi, he "wakes up" again, or hears "the call", if you will. He then starts his quest for the Chandrian and their origin. There is a big difference in how Frodo and Kvothe start on their quests in these stories. Frodo, while not being happy about the responsibility he is given, accepts it and starts planning his journey and his mission, bringing a couple trusted friends along. Kvothe is a child when his family is taken from him, while Frodo is an adult, making it much easier for him to accept the inevitable. Kvothe has his quest thrust upon him in a much more violent way than Frodo, who gets to accept it willingly to some degree. The way these two protagonists accept their quests in the beginning, ties to the concept of free will and fate, as previously discussed.

Tolkien did from the very beginning of his career insist on happy turns in his fantasy stories, and in fantasy and fairy-stories in general (Fimi, 2022, p. 330), tying to the concept of eucatastrophe as discussed in the previous chapter. This is also a recognizable trope in a typical quest-story. Booker (2004, p. 18) says that stories either end happily, leading to liberation and fulfillment, or unhappily, leading to frustration or even death. Tolkien said that the very purpose of fantasy-stories was to give hope and fulfillment even when real life did not live up to this standard. However, he makes sure that his "turn for joy" is accompanied with some loss or grief as well (Caughey, 2014, p. 404). Frodo's return from his quest, though surrounded by friends, is also a form of goodbye. Though Rothfuss has not yet released his ending, we as readers somehow feel like we are already there in the story,

through the frame-story. In that way, we as readers feel like we are already seeing how Kvothe's quest ended, as he himself insists that he is in it, when telling his story to Chronicler. However, we also get a feeling that this ending might be an illusion, and that Kvothe's insistence of it being the end, is just him having to overcome another hindrance, or "terrible thing", as Booker calls it. In the second book, Kvothe comments what he feels like is "the end" to his story to Chronicler and Bast like this:

> The red-haired innkeeper gestured at the empty taproom. 'This is the end of the story, Bast. We all know that.' Kvothe's voice was matter-of-fact, as casual as if he were describing yesterday's weather. 'I have led an interesting life, and this reminiscence has a certain sweetness to it. But […] this is not a dashing romance. This is no fable where folk come back from the dead. It's not a rousing epic meant to stir the blood. No. We all know what kind of story this is' (Rothfuss, 2011, pp. 688-689).

This passage comments on the structure and expectations in the narrative, making it a good example of Rothfuss' metafictional writing in his story. It reminds the reader that even though the story is not told all the way through, it is told from the perspective of what Kvothe feels is the actual ending, through the frame-narrative. After he says this, they try to remind him that he is alive, and if he is, this is not where his story ends, but he does not listen, dismissing them by calling them young and naïve. There exists a sort of expectation that something significant is waiting to happen in the frame-narrative, making it so that whenever Kvothe stops his storytelling, the story might continue in the frame-narrative, making for a happy (or tragic) ending after all. This, however, remains to be seen, if he releases the third book in this trilogy in the future. Where we get a clear view of Frodo's quest to be over after the destruction of the ring and his return home, Kvothe's narrative is told from two points, where we are on the quest with him, but also see the ending of it, or something pretending to be the ending. This way of structuring the narrative is different to the typical quest-story as Booker discusses it. It plays with the ideas surrounding expectations in storytelling and in a way puts a quest inside its own ending, making the story feel less linear, playing with narrative structures. Rothfuss seems completely indifferent to happy endings, maybe even any ending at all.

Caughey (2014, p. 410) says that Bilbo's quest in the *Hobbit* is a classic "there-an-back-again" quest, where Bilbo is free to live his life as he pleases when he gets home. However, she subsequently then calls Frodo a "broken hero" because he gains no treasure and does not get to live his life as he pleases when he gets home, having lost some of himself on his quest. This is very similar to Kvothe's journey, as when he tells it in the frame-narrative, he seems a broken man, drudging through routine to pass time and try to forget his wrongdoings. Frodo has been criticized for being a "flat hero", but Caughey says that through looking at his double, in Gollum, we see Frodo's potential at becoming enslaved by the ring (Caughey, 2014, p. 408), giving him more complexity. Similarly, we see interesting mirroring between Kvothe and his quest for knowledge and revenge, and the leader of the Chandrian and his own quest for knowledge that led to him becoming "corrupt", as told by Skarpi. However, where Gollum and Frodo are seen as opposites in some way, mirroring what their different choices made them, Kvothe and Lanre are seen as more similar in their choices and fates. It is told that Lanre "sought knowledge where knowledge is better left alone, and gained it at a terrible price" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 180). We see parallels to Kvothe and Lanre's similar stories towards the end of *The Wise Man's Fear,* where Kvothe without hesitation kills seven people, and in the aftermath seems confused and shocked at how easy it had been. Lanre, before becoming the leader of the Chandrian, seems similarly confused at his own ruthlessness in the stories told about him, as shown when he says things like, "I, considered wise and good, did all this!" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 179). The connection is further strengthened by the significance of the number of people Kvothe killed being exactly seven. The Chandrian are told to be seven people, and Lanre betrayed seven cities (or six, leaving one standing, depending on the story). In Gnosticism, the number 7 is also central, the world having been created by seven angels (Jonas, 1970, p. 132). This strengthens the idea of Rothfuss finding his inspiration there.

The Hero's Motivations: Selfish or Selfless Savior

Frodo and Kvothe both end their quests with feelings of emptiness, confusion, and loss, but their personal similarities seem to end there. Tolkien's orthodox views makes Frodo a savior-character mirroring Christ, where Rothfuss sends Kvothe on what sometimes feels like an ego trip. Gnosticism gives a view of people being on personal journeys to salvation and away from connection to body and earth, and Kvothe's quest shows a similar pattern. Kvothe's search for the truth surrounding his family's murder, and his general search for knowledge

and understanding of all things he comes across in the novels, is part of Kvothe's personality, but also the narrative's main theme. For Kvothe, there is a drive towards not only understanding how things work and how they are connected, but also to be able to use all things to his advantage and master them as an individual. Essentially, he does so to gain knowledge and power that will get him closer to the goal of his quest. This search for knowledge is connected to the idea of Gnostic myth, being the most important thing a human can do, and the only way to get salvation. In Gnostic texts, Jesus is said to say "All the world shall I journey through, all the mysteries unlock" (Jonas, 1970, p. 53), sounding very much like Kvothe in Rothfuss' works. There is no point in Kvothe being a true savior while taking inspiration from Gnosticism, as the world is seen as "false", its only goal being to gain understanding, and to ascend beyond it. Kvothe's search for knowledge is not connected to what is part of his own world, the Chandrian and the Amyr feeling separate from it in their descriptions. The rest of his world considers these people as mere "children's stories" and folklore, and they seem to be able to come and go from the physical realm as they please. In that way, Kvothe seeks truth's "beyond" the world as it is seen (Mackey, 1984, p. 112). Not only is his quest personal, but it is not connected to other people in his physical world since what he is searching is not completely part of it. This, connected to his quest as a purely personal one, makes him feel like a very non-traditional "hero". At one point, Kvothe thinks to himself that the goal of his education at the University and his quest for knowledge is to "become so powerful that no one will ever be able to hurt me again" (Rothfuss, 2007, p. 234), which is a good example of his motivations. Contrastingly, Frodo does not go on his quest for himself, but for the greater good. His journey affects everyone, as the ring can destroy the world, if he fails.

In many ways, Frodo's quest is a quest of selflessness and sacrifice for the good of the world, where Kvothe is on a self-centered quest for knowledge and power, maybe even revenge. However, Kvothe still sacrifices a lot for others along the way. The contrast here is that he often reminisces on these things by focusing on the reputation he gains from it, rather than the action itself. This is seen in reflections like this:

> 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, p. 453).

In this quotation, we see that even though Kvothe's actions are seen as selfless in the same way that Frodo's are in some instances, his thinking surrounding these things are still selfish, focusing on what he gains from it. Kvothe seem to do good things only for the reputation and opportunities it gives him. The "Kingkiller Chronicle" is a tale focused on individual motivations, which is very different to Tolkien's constant mirroring of the savior-narrative. Despite both characters assuming the role of the savior within their respective narratives, the receptions of their deeds differ, as do their personal motivations for them. Frodo's heroic actions are accepted without question and passed down through generations as revered tales. In contrast, Kvothe's actions provoke suspicion, which, based on the quote above showing his musings on his own actions, also seems justified.

Both Kvothe and Frodo do to some degree exhibit a certain distance to religious beliefs themselves. Kvothe, though being surrounded by religious myths, does not express any personal religious beliefs, and in Tolkien's work, neither Frodo nor any other character express personal religious beliefs. Despite this, Frodo is in most ways a very Christian hero. Caldecott compares Frodo's quest with that of Catholic saints, like Saint Therese who is carried by God, as Frodo is carried by Sam for parts of his quest (Caldecott, 2005, p. 67), and further, as Jesus was helped in carrying his cross on the way to his crucifixion, so does Sam help Frodo when carrying the ring when it becomes "to heavy" for him to bear alone (Caldecott, 2005, p. 34). Frodo does not use outward, physical strength, and neither does he use inner strength or intelligence in any spectacular way. He allows himself to be humiliated and crucified and goes on his quest "for God and for his neighbors" as Caldecott explains it (2005, p. 33). What this Christian hero tells us, is then that anyone can be a hero. In many ways, this is handled in exactly the opposite way in Rothfuss' story. Kvothe knows very well that he is more intelligent than average, and he uses this exceptional intelligence and charisma any time he gets the opportunity. Getting to join the University, and the magic he learns there, and the fighting techniques he learns from the Adem, are opportunities given to him based on this. These exclusive things, in turn, are used for his quest, and his quest

benefits only himself. The focus in all things he does, is on how it benefits him and his own personal journey. This fits with the Gnostic belief that each man is on his own, personal quest for salvation, and to "enrich the luminous spark he carries in his innermost being" (Jacques LaCarriere, as referenced in Mackey, 1984, p. 115). Consequently, the characterization of the protagonists differs significantly.

In all the twists and turns of Rothfuss' narrative, this is a story of stories, a quest for understanding of not only Chandrian, but all things that led up to the Chandrian, and all things after. These elements are inherently metafictional, making Kvothe, Chronicler and the reader reflect on several aspects of language, history, and storytelling. Everything Kvothe learns on his quest for knowledge of the Chandrian, gives him knowledge and understanding of the world around him, shaping his identity and perception in profound ways. Each encounter, each piece of knowledge acquired, adds another thread to the tapestry of his quest for the Chandrian. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident to the reader that the quest for understanding and knowledge extends beyond the confines of Kvothe's personal quest, resonating with larger themes of human curiosity and Gnostic belief and pursuit of truth as already explored in this thesis. Tolkien, on the other hand, as a devout Catholic, shapes his endeavors, infusing them with moral undertones and a clear struggle between good (nature) and evil (magic/machine).

Rothfuss seems very aware of how Tolkien has used the different elements of the quest-narrative in his stories and his motivations behind them. He critiques this biblically inspired fantasy-story by creating a gnostic-inspired, personal quest for both growth and revenge. Where Tolkien highlights free will to make good or bad choices, Rothfuss subverts this by adding the Chtaeh, an evil godlike figure who traps Kvothe on his path even more than he was because of his grief alone. Where Tolkien highlights the power of companionship in several ways, Rothfuss rather focuses on how romantic companionship stands in the way of Kvothe's quest and goals. Where both heroes are seen as being in some sense savior-figures, Rothfuss explores how the protagonist's motivations are not in line with his actions. Rothfuss still writes a recognizable fantasy story with many of the familiar traits of a typical quest, just like Tolkien did. He does, however, twist and turn most of the inner workings of these elements so that they feel very different from Tolkien's tale.

Fantasy Beyond the Page: Conclusion

In the acknowledgements to his first book, Rothfuss notes that his mother had “opened the door to Narnia, Pern and Middle-Earth” for him (Rothfuss, 2007). He does not try to hide the influence Tolkien’s works has had on his love for storytelling. However, he does not copy Tolkien’s format along the lines of many modern fantasy novels, often seen as “Tolkien knockoffs” (Attebery, 2014, p. 1). Instead, Rothfuss actively critiques, subverts, and distances himself from Tolkien in several ways, while at the same time responding to the use of mythological and metafictional elements as Tolkien used them.

This thesis has examined how different metafictional elements are portrayed in the “Kingkiller Chronicle”, seeing how they contrast with the fictional and literary-critical works of Tolkien. This comparison has been made to anchor the thesis in a wider discussion surrounding the fantasy genre and its use of metafictional elements. By examining specific themes in these authors, this thesis contributes to the discussion on this literary tradition and its place in contemporary literature. The exploration of metafictional elements in Rothfuss illuminates the genre’s capacity for nuanced storytelling and commentary on structures in the real world. Use of mythopoeia and other metafictional tools and techniques pull the reader into the story while also pulling the story out into the world. Both authors invite readers to reflect on themes such as the nature of truth in history and origin stories, the power of storytelling and its place in our world, and even on the human condition as such, through their use of fantasy-elements. As readers navigate the secondary worlds created by these authors, they are not only being entertained, but also challenged to reflect on their perceptions of reality and fiction.

The thesis has shown how both Rothfuss and Tolkien center much of their narratives on the concept of mythology and origin stories. The first chapter reviews some of the authors’ ideas on this, and how they frame their use of myth within their narratives, while also discussing the religious inspirations behind them. These religious inspirations frame the use of creation myths. We have seen how Tolkien is heavily inspired by orthodox Christianity. He calls human beings “sub-creators”, and suggests that by writing, we are mirroring the creation of a

monotheistic God. By contrast, I have made the case that Rothfuss takes inspiration from what is seen as a heretical branch of Christianity, Gnosticism. Tolkien uses his tale to try to give the reader a feeling of providence, where Rothfuss does his very best to create doubt and uncertainty surrounding the origin of religious structures and stories. Discussing religion and its place within fantasy worlds allow for reflections on these structures in our own world. This is often achieved by incorporating religious stories within the narrative, which are themselves influenced by our real-world religious inspirations, creating intriguing layers of metafiction. Both authors explore the concept of truths in storytelling, relating it to their thoughts on religion and myth. Rothfuss goes so far as to frame his entire narrative on this concept, which can be connected to Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction. For Rothfuss, no matter how made-up a story is, it carries a form of truth. This truth can reflect the motivations of the storyteller, historical contexts of the tale, the expectations and worldviews of the listener or reader, and much more. Examining these themes enables a form of narrative self-awareness, constantly problematizing its own truthfulness or lack thereof.

The chapter on faerie and magic bases its discussion on Tolkien's own view of what "faerie", is, how it relates to magic, and how these concepts are used as allegories for reflections on structures in our own world. Using these elements offers indirect parallels to real-world experiences and structures, while also addressing our desire to escape our own world. By using made-up elements to reflect on real-life structures, we get to explore subtleties in our own world from new perspectives, which is what the use of these elements do in the works explored. Rothfuss includes a number of semi-deities in his presentation of faerie characters, blurring the lines of what makes human beings, faerie figures and deities different from each other. This is very different from Tolkien's use of angelic beings and a monotheistic God in his narrative, keeping stories of creation separate from the narratives of the LOTR-saga. Where Tolkien uses the word "faerie" to explain his fairy-creatures and the world they live in, Rothfuss adopts the term "fae" instead. In fact, the structures of their faerie-realms are very different, as Rothfuss uses his "fae" to further instill the uncertainty and critical reflections surrounding what gods and people are, whereas Tolkien structures his creatures in distinct hierarchies. Where Tolkien uses the theme of magic (through the One Ring) as a metaphor for the machine and man's seeking for domination over nature, Rothfuss uses elements of magic to discuss science and knowledge, and the opportunities that true understanding of something gets us. Where Tolkien represents power and domination as bad,

deviating from God’s will, Rothfuss shows an optimistic view, using the gaining of knowledge and power to seize opportunities and further the characters’ goals.

Finally, this thesis has explored the quest-narrative as a key way of structuring storytelling that is often used in the fantasy genre. Using Booker’s discussion of the quest-narrative, the last chapter highlights further how Rothfuss uses his metafictional elements to give contrasting arguments and reflections to Tolkien’s works. Where Frodo is seen as a selfless savior, similar to Jesus in orthodox Christianity, Kvothe is seen as more self-centered. Frodo is on a quest to destroy the Ring for the greater good, whereas Kvothe is on a mission to gain as much knowledge as he can, concerning the Chandrian, but also about many other things. Kvothe’s wants to understand the Chandrian’s motivations, and perhaps to revenge his parents. However, it seems like his personal quest has led to some negative outcomes for others as well as for himself. Kvothe does do good for others on his quest, but these incidents are themselves instrumentalized to inflate his reputation amongst his peers, because of the stories that are subsequently told about him. The stories about him are rarely factual, but instead become exaggerated rumors designed to make Kvothe seem more clever than he actually is. Rothfuss uses this aspect of his story to hint at the possibility that the myths and deities in his world also stem from similar circumstances, that is stories that get out of hand and become bigger than the actual events. This further strengthens Rothfuss’ presentation of the epistemological uncertainty he reflects on in his narrative, which tends to subvert Tolkien’s idea of sub-creation as a kind of participation in the creative act of the one true God.

The impact of Tolkien’s legacy on the modern fantasy genre is strong. Rothfuss, while paying homage to Tolkien’s use of mythological and metafictional elements, also distances himself from it, expanding, critiquing, and subverting several elements, using them for his own purposes. One of the greatest obstacles of the fantasy genre is its seeming lack of relevance to our world, according to those who do not read it. However, through examining Rothfuss’ works against the background of one of the founders of the modern fantasy genre, this thesis hopes to show that this literary tradition has a lot to offer to the world outside of the pages it is written on.

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