

THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES USED BY PATRICK ROTHFUSS IN THE NAME OF THE WIND

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Abstract:

In current times, high fantasy writers have adopted different methods of storytelling that are attractive to contemporary audiences. The purpose of this paper is to explore the narrative techniques that the American author, Patrick Rothfuss, uses in his successful fantasy novel, *The Name of the Wind*. The paper examines how Rothfuss captures readers' curiosity by using techniques such as the Narrative Hook, which sets the scene for the rest of the story's progression. Another feature Rothfuss uses is the Frame Story, or 'Story within a story', that shapes the story's boundaries and explores the inner aspects within. The other two techniques Rothfuss uses is the flashforward and the flashback technique ,with both of them illustrating the narrator's shift and changes in addressing the story itself. Patrick Rothfuss's use of narrative techniques that engage the reader has created a well-rounded and successful high fantasy novel.

ملخص :

طرأت تغيرات عديدة ومتنوعة على القصص الخيالية العالية على مر السنين. بسبب استخدامها لبعض أساليب السرد القصصية، فقد عملت هذه الروايات على شد انتباه العديد من قراء القصص الخيالية الحديثة وعلى جذبهم. والباحثة في هذا البحث سوف تركز على تحليل الأنماط السردية المختلفة التي استخدمها الكاتب الأمريكي باتريك روثفوس في روايته الشهيرة " اسم الرياح".

ومن هذه الأساليب التي استخدمها روثفوس والتي ميزت روايته "أسم الرياح" عن الروايات الخيالية القديمة تقنية الترقب وهدفها إثارة اهتمام القراء وفضولهم مع تطور القصة. ومن التقنيات الأخرى التي استخدمها التأطير وتعتمد على وضع إطار للقصة وتعتمد على سرد قصة داخل القصة الأساسية. وكذلك استعمل روثفوس في روايته خاصيتي الاستباق والاسترجاع، وتعتمدان على التقدم الى لحظة زمنية معينة في القصة والتراجع الى أحداث سابقة أثرت على شخصيات معينة في فترات زمنية مختلفة. وباستخدام هذه التقنيات السردية المختلفة استطاع الكاتب روثفوس أن يكون رواية خيالية ناجحة استطاعت جذب اهتمام القراء.

Introduction:

According to *Routledge Encyclopedia*, high fantasy novels, “often quests or other journeys,function to structure a narrative as a series of encounters and conflicts that allow exploration of the fictional world as advancing the plot” (Herman, 2005). Reading high fantasy novels usually includes higher levels of “elegant prose, large casts of characters, arduous quests, and lots of magic” (Burcher, Hollands, Smith, Trott, & Zellers, 2009). The high fantasy genre came into prominence with J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, during the 20th century in the 1950’s, where he created his own language, unique characters and his own fantasy world.Tolkien is the one that most influenced writers of the fantasy genre, especially the 21st century authors, such as Ted Hughes, Ursula Le Guin, Terry Prachett and many more(Sinclair, Fantasy Fiction, 2008). Fantasy novels have taken a different approach, and have developed into a genre that is not only reserved for fairy-tale lovers; it has changed and become appealing to readers of all ages.

Garth Nix states, “Fantasy appeals to children in the same way that it appeals to adults as it offers an alternative to their normal life” (2002). The idea that fantasy stories are only told for a specific audience in mind is not entirely correct. However, in *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*, there is an obvious contrast between “the telling of a fairy tale to a small group of listeners and the writing of a work of popular fiction, which must enter into the maelstrom of the modern culture industry, where it is mass-produced, marketed and stacked on supermarket shelves. However, in each case ‘the tale must sense the aspirations and prejudices, the fears and hunger of its audiences’”. For authors to come up with a piece that wins their targeted audience, they must use simple forms

that appeal and address the reader's concerns and interest (McCracken, 1998).

Through using modern narrative techniques that engage the reader, while still maintaining the traditional 'hero quest' archetype in the story, an author can achieve a well-rounded and successful high fantasy novel. The author is the one responsible for creating and balancing out the techniques used in various storytelling. According to *Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing* "a good writer tries to employ as many strategies as possible to attract a reader's curiosity, interest, and involvement, and in that way, influences his or her readers" (McCormick, Walker, & Flower, 1987). American author, Patrick Rothfuss, in his novel *The Name of the Wind*, uses a number of these engaging strategies. In an interview with *Publisher's Weekly*, Rothfuss said he wanted to "avoid most of the fantasy clichés and focus on something simpler and more personal: the story of a man's life". For in Marina Warner's book, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, she comments on how stories, especially stories of the fantasy genre, have numerous opportunities of changing. These stories transcend the regularity of normal life, and give every-day life a sort of relief, while also pointing out the situations that people deal with in a way they can relate to. "The dimension of wonder creates a huge theatre of possibility in the stories: anything can happen. This boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tales, which is precisely to teach where boundaries lie". Warner also comments on how the anonymity of the traditional fantasy setting, such as having the castles, kingdoms, and characters' background as something not incorporated in real life. They all differ from the reader's basis of 'reality'. For according to Wallace Stevens, fairy tales 'helps us to see the actual world to visualize a fantastic one' (Warner, 1994).

The events in *The Name of the Wind* revolve around the tale of retired innkeeper Kvothe as he retells his story of magic, adventure and danger, striving to avenge his murdered family. The reader gets to follow the protagonist's life from early childhood until the narrator's current time. The reader goes through various alterations between the narrations of the story. The story starts with the all-knowing third-person narrator; objectively laying out the story for the reader, without giving a clear view into any of the character's thoughts. The narration then shifts to Kvothe's first-person view as he describes his own adventures the rest of the story. There is also the point of Rothfuss's alteration of the standard traditional hero in fantasy novels. He creates a protagonist that goes through the typical 'hero quest' of fantasy heroes. Kvothe goes through the same hardships and difficulties accompanying the 'hero'; such as being of a 'different breed' as regular people of the story, being smarter than children his age, the death of his parents and his strive for revenge. Rothfuss has Kvothe speak about himself in a way as if he is aware of the specific path he takes. Rothfuss uses several techniques that engage his readers and pulls them into the story. His techniques will be discussed in further detail in the upcoming pages.

As stated in *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*, "The artful weaving of several popular genres into one narrative can allow a more complex exploration of self-identity, while still giving the reader familiar boundaries within which to project his or her fantasies" (McCracken, 1998). The narration in high fantasy novels largely creates the story within it. It builds the setting, characters and the world it is based on. The ability to pull the reader into the story and gain their interest and curiosity is a highly effective technique. Patrick Rothfuss uses some of these techniques, such as the Narrative Hook.

The Narrative Hook is a technique used in literature to get the reader's attention. It is usually used at the beginning of a work of fiction, intending to capture the attention and curiosity of the reader. Authors use the narrative hook in a 'questioning' form. Such as asking a dramatic question that enraptures the readers to know the answer. On the other hand, even asking questions that lead to more questions being asked. Another form of using the narrative hook is to place the question during something that happened. Which makes the reader try to understand what is happening by reading further. The narrative hook is usually inserted in the first paragraph at the beginning of the novel. The intention of the narrative hook is not to be answered immediately. It should give the reader an engaging beginning of a story that is worth reading. The reader goes on to wonder 'why is the character in this situation?' 'How did this happen?' (Fiction Writer's Mentor, 2017).

Patrick Rothfuss uses the narrative hook at the beginning of his novel *The Name of the Wind*. He does not use a literal question; rather he goes on giving the reader a hint of the setting. The novel starts with "It was night again. The Waystone Inn lay in silence"(Rothfuss, 2007). The reader gets a glimpse of the time the story is set in, and the location of the story. After giving the reader the location and time setting, the next sentence forms the true hook. Rothfuss continues with, "and it was a silence of three parts" (Rothfuss, 2007). This sentence alludes to something a bit more complex happening in the story. It forms questions in the readers' minds. 'What is this silence? Why is it divided into three parts? What is going to happen?' Using curiosity keeps the readers interested in trying to understand what is about to happen next. Starting the story with these types of questions creates the path that the novel will follow. The reader gets an idea as to what to expect further on in the

novel (Narrative Hook, 2008). An example of such a captivating hook, as written by George Orwell in 1984, “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen”. These first sentences serve as connectors and elicitors of the imagination and curiosity of the readers. The narrative hook in this novel leads to the closely related technique Rothfuss uses, which is the Frame Story or ‘Story within a story’.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* a Frame story is “...also called frame tale, the overall unifying story within which one or more tales are related”(Frame Story - Literary Genre, 2017). Frame story is the existence of more than one story at the same time. It starts as one tale, and ends with the same tale. Whatever happens in between the first and last tales could be different. Frame story usually gives the story the setting needed to continue the rest of the story. It introduces the first form of action or interaction that that reader has with the story or characters. It also ends in the same vein, giving the reader context into what is happening in the story and it is consistent (Framing Narrative, 2008). A similar novel that uses the ‘Frame Story’ to tell a story closely related to each other is the well-known *The Thousand and One Nights* stories. The story moves back and forth between the main character’s narration of a story, and then going back to that character is supposed ‘present’ time.

Rothfuss uses the Frame Story at the prologue in *The Name of the Wind* and at the epilogue. The series *The Kingkiller Chronicles* is made up of a trilogy that is divided into three books; with *The Name of the Wind* being the first. The first two novels start in the same way, and follow the

division of ‘three’ parts. All the action that the characters go through happens right after the first time he says “... it was a silence of three parts” (Rothfuss). When he says it in the prologue, he goes on to describing as to ‘why’ there silence in three parts. However, when he uses the same sentence again in the epilogue, the reader has the impression of resolution. The repetition of the same lines from the beginning and the end, give the image of a circular motion that the reader follows. It all goes back to the beginning of where the reader started. There is a sense of end to the story that is told and a sort of continuation in the next novel in the series of three. This also follows the flow of storytelling that the main protagonist is known for. The protagonist, Kvothe, tells the story of his adventures in three nights. Rothfuss has the ‘three nights’ divided into the three novels of his trilogy. Rothfuss adds breaks to the story by having the reader go back and forth between the time at the beginning, in the Inn, and to the time where all the action is going on. By using Flashforward and Flashback, Rothfuss gives the readers the chance to form their opinions and thoughts on the characters. As if, it were a real storyteller telling the story. It also enhances the reader’s curiosity to know what happens next. To move from one story frame to the next, authors incorporate the use of various devices. Such as when moving from the character’s ‘present’ time to the story they are telling by using ‘Flashforward’.

The story then carries on usually in a completely different vein from the first story. Many actions can take place in the ‘forwarded’ story that usually has little connection to the ‘present’ story. The reader can connect the events and the occurrences after they reach the end of the novel. Then everything is clear, and links are made to connect everything to each other. The other method used is

the 'Flashback'. When the character propels the reader forward to another story, actions take place. The character usually must go back to the time of their own story. The reader goes back to another time that occurred in the character's past to give a more in-depth view on what has already happened.

Flashforward is "... a literary device in which the plot goes ahead of time i.e. a scene that interrupts and takes the narrative forward in time from the current time in a story" (Literary Devices, 2017). Flashforward is a technique that is used to foreshadow something that occurs in the story's present time. The narration often shifts from the storyline occurring to move forward in the story to an incident that already happened, creating the foreshadowing effect. As said in *Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing*, "the story drops hints about what has happened in the past to get the reader interested" (McCormick, Walker, & Flower, 1987). Rothfuss uses flashforward at various parts of the novel; mainly in the prologue and the epilogue. After the hook and the frame at the beginning, Rothfuss uses flashforward to take the reader forward to a different time and setting from the beginning. In *The Name of the Wind*, the story starts with the main protagonist as an elderly innkeeper, working through his day-to-day routine. Kvothe then meets a Chronicler who asks if he can write about his life story, which he accepts. The story then moves on to using the Flashback technique, as Kvothe reminisces about his past and retells it. The reader is propelled back into Kvothe's memories of his boyhood adventures, which is the bulk of the novel. The Flashback technique is when "... the author depicts the occurrence of specific events to the reader, which have taken place before the present time the narration is following..." (Literary Devices, 2010). Flashback is largely

used in movies as well. It gives the audience a view into the character's life in a previous moment in time.

In *The Name of the Wind*, the flashback technique is the method the protagonist uses to narrate the story. After meeting the Chronicler, he convinces Kvothe to tell his side of the story that revolves around his life. The flashback occurs when Kvothe narrates his story to the Chronicler and the readers. He goes on telling his story in the first-person narration, and every now and then goes back to the 'present time'. This technique forms a break in Kvothe's storytelling. It is as if Rothfuss and Kvothe are giving the readers a break from the occurrences in the story by going back and forth in the narration.

The story launches into a 'story within a story', and the narration shifts into the first-person perspective. The protagonist continues narrating his story until the end of the novel. There are two methods of narrating in this story. The first and reoccurring method is the 'third-person' narrative at the 'intervals' or 'breaks' between the flashbacks and flashforward. Rothfuss uses the 'third-person' narrative technique in an objective way. "Inside the Waystone a pair of men huddled at one corner of the bar. They drank with quiet determination, avoiding serious discussions of troubling news" (Rothfuss). The reader is an observer of how the story unfolds. Rothfuss gives the reader a general view on what the characters are experiencing or thinking; there is no implication to the character's thoughts yet. The reader is thus introduced to the idea of the story with a detached and neutral interpretation. Thus, according to *Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing*, the reader is in a more 'passive' position, believing whatever this all-knowing narrator says. There are also the reader's expectations regarding the narrative voice, where it must be "unified". Most readers also "have naturalized the conventional

expectations about fiction that they have accumulated in their literary repertoires and so have ceased to see them as conventional - unless they are challenged by stories that do not conform to these conventions”(McCormick, Walker, & Flower, 1987).

However, when faced with Kvothe’s untrustworthy and limited narration, the reader is forced to become more attentive and aware of what is being said. Regarding Kvothe’s narration of his own story, the action and the story is very subjective and does not fit in with the initial description of himself. At the beginning, the reader is introduced to Kvothe as an older, plain and regular man. He goes about taking care of his business at the inn, and mainly keeping to himself. Rothfuss alludes to something different about Kvothe by pointing out the slight ‘abnormalities’ around him. Such as referring to the sword, he has hanging on the wall above him. The fact that he is surrounded by silence and it is described, as “It was the patient, cut-flower sound of a man who is waiting to die”(Rothfuss, 2007).

The images given about Kvothe made him seem like a regular person, with something slightly different about him. However, Kvothe decides to tell his story, therefore giving his first-person narration of what happened. The reader is introduced to an almost completely contrasting character than the one described in the third-person narration. Kvothe describes and speaks about himself in a method most fitting the typical ‘hero’. Once he started talking about himself, the reader is then introduced to this heroic, grand, and outstanding character that seems completely different from the early description of him. Kvothe describes himself as such, “I have tread paths by moonlight that others fear to speak of during day. I have talked to gods, loved women, and written songs that make the minstrels weep. You may

have heard of me” (Rothfuss, 2007). For in *Reading Texts: Reading, Responding, Writing*, readers want to feel the uncertainty carried out by the character; so, they “adopt in reaction to such text strategies to allow the story to increase their sense of suspense but to remain relatively passive. Readers often don’t try to piece its confusing bits together because they feel confident that eventually the story itself will do that for them” (McCormick, Walker, & Flower, 1987).

Conclusion

Patrick Rothfuss’s use of narrative techniques that engages the reader, while maintaining the traditional ‘hero’ archetype in the story, has created a well-rounded and successful high fantasy novel. Through these techniques, he creates a story that is unique, yet carries the echoes of the traditionalistic high fantasy stories of old. The novel takes the reader through distinct phases of fascinating narrative techniques. *The Name of the Wind* begins with a captivating narrative hook that quips the reader’s curiosity and encourages reading the story further. The story’s beginning and end share the same phrase, creating the Frame story or ‘story within a story’ method. The reader is also propelled forward in the story, with the use of the flashforward technique, taking them deeper into the story and the character’s backgrounds. The shift back to the narrator’s ‘present’ is done through the flashback technique; where the reader then follows the stream of thought of the narrator and goes back to the starting point.

During the flashback and flashforward in the story, Rothfuss has his main hero, Kvothe, take the role of an unreliable narrator. Kvothe goes backward and forward in the story, as he recalls how he used to be when he was younger, then goes back to the ‘present’. This gives the reader the

impression that not everything is what it seems. This hero could be lying or exaggerating, thus the reader must be attentive and read further to know the truth. Rothfuss uses these techniques to complete the narrative of the story. Therefore, making the story end as it began as if in a circular motion; like the revolving circle of life. The reader moves between the third-person narration at the beginning, illustrating the setting and character background; and between the first-person narration of Kvothe's thoughts and memories. There is a distinct humanness to Kvothe's inner thoughts and actions. For even though he is the center hero of the novel, he still has human-like qualities that make him different from the regular courageously competent hero of older fantasy novels.

Rothfuss combines the standard image of the traditional fantasy hero to Kvothe's heroic path, adding a more humane side to his character. Kvothe goes through the changes paved for him by the hero archetype that Rothfuss stuck to; and yet Kvothe's cunning and trickery defy that specific path of heroism. For in the novel, Kvothe uses his wit to achieve what he wants, instead of going through the 'fair' route that most heroes choose to do. However, due to focusing mainly on the first novel of the trilogy, the researcher is limited to what is presented in that specific novel. There is the chance to understand more about Kvothe and his path in the next novels. For in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the hero is described as "the mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming"(Campbell, 1968).

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