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The Heroes' Journey:
Traces of Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) in Brandon Sanderson's *The Final Empire* (2006)

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Abstract — Resumen

The Heroes' Journey

The fantasy genre frequently uses the model of the Hero's Journey described in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). The protagonist of these stories must embark on a dangerous journey accompanied by his/her mentor figure, face numerous trials, defeat evil and restore the peace of the world. Some novels, however, modify that structure to enhance their narrative techniques and draw for inspiration at the same time. This is the case of Brandon Sanderson's *The Final Empire* (2006). This project analyses the use of the Hero's Journey and the stereotypes studied by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in Sanderson's *The Final Empire*, shows how those patterns are depicted in the novel and in which way the author tries to detach himself from them. The project studies the four main heroic or potentially heroic figures of the book presented in the narrative (Alendi, Lord Ruler, Kelsier, and Vin), then it compares their development to the stages portrayed in the Monomyth of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and concludes with an analysis of its effects in the narrative of the novel.

El viaje de los héroes

El género fantástico utiliza con frecuencia el modelo del viaje del héroe descrito por Joseph Campbell en *El héroe de las mil caras* (1949): el o la protagonista de estas historias debe embarcarse en un peligroso viaje acompañado de una figura mentora, superar numerosas pruebas, enfrentarse al mal y devolver la paz al mundo. Algunos libros, sin embargo, manipulan esta estructura para potenciar su narrativa a la vez que beben de ella como inspiración: es el caso de *El imperio final* (2006) de Brandon Sanderson. Este trabajo analiza el uso del viaje del héroe y de los estereotipos del libro de Joseph Campbell en *El imperio final*, estudiando cómo este utiliza dichos patrones y en qué maneras trata el autor de alejarse de ellos. El estudio hace un recorrido por las cuatro figuras heroicas o potencialmente heroicas presentadas en la narrativa (Alendi, Lord Legislador, Kelsier y Vin) y compara sus desarrollos con las etapas presentadas en el monomito de *El héroe de las mil caras*, concluyendo con un análisis de su efecto en la narrativa de la obra.

Introduction

Since J.R.R. Tolkien shook the fantasy genre with the publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), many works have search for inspiration into the lands of the Middle-earth. It only takes a casual reading into their pages to see that many famous fantasy books were inspired by Tolkien's land of hobbits and elves, from Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) to Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* (1982) series. Within Tolkien's universe and his creation of societies, languages and creatures, however, laid a basic structure that many creative works later tried to replicate and critical essays to analyze, known as the Monomyth, or the Hero's Journey, first exposed by Joseph Campbell in his anthropological study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

This structure has greatly permeated the fantasy genre, in no small part due to Tolkien's influence. As Brandon Sanderson—*New York Times* Bestseller and “premier American author of big, fat epic fantasy novels” (Barnes&Noble, 2017)—acknowledges, “Since the early days of fantasy, it's been a big part of the storytelling, and in my opinion, it's become a little bit overused” (Mormon Artist, 2009). It is this impulse to subvert the familiar that would lead him to write the novel that initiates the *Mistborn* series, *The Final Empire* (2006), in which he questions what would had happened if in the context of a traditional quest fantasy, the Dark Lord had won.

In this work I aim to analyze Brandon Sanderson's *The Final Empire* and the main heroes portrayed through the novel according to the Hero's Journey described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, what themes and motifs are depicted in each character and how they comply or reject the Campbellian stereotype of the classic hero of the monomyth. I begin with a short description of the main themes and the setting of the book, followed by a comparative analysis between the four hero figures described in the novel—two from a legendary past in the time of the story and

two from the time the novel is set—and end with a conclusion of how a reversal of this familiar structure enhances the plot and the characterization of the novel.

The Final Empire, Land of Duologies

The Final Empire, and in particular the city of Luthadel, the main setting for the book, constitutes a place of clear contrasts. In fact, dichotomy is one of the main strategies of the novel, applied both in the storyline and the characters: the book portraits, on the one hand, an opulent nobility, surrounded by luxury and vices, and on the other, the *skaa*, a working-class population who live in nearly-slave conditions. This is the background of a world covered by ash, a metaphor of the decadence that consumes everything, from the lives of the inhabitants of the city to the architecture and buildings of Luthadel. From Kelsier's focalization—one of the main characters of the book—the narrator comments that “every structure in Luthadel—virtually every structure Kelsier had ever seen—had been blackened to some degree” (34).

This empire is governed by a tyrannical godly figure called The Lord Ruler, who oppresses the city population in a theocratic feudalistic regime using monstrous priests known as Inquisitors and a bureaucratic elite to maintain control of the land and the people. In this context, Kelsier, once one of the most famous thieves of the underworld of the city, arrives at Luthadel offering a dangerous job to his previous companions: to overthrow the Final Empire and its ruler. Kelsier's revolutionary impulse is put in opposition with the defeatist attitude of the *skaa* and the members of Kelsier's own gang. Sanderson writes: “‘Kelsier,’ Ham said slowly. ‘The Lord Ruler is the Sliver of Infinity. He's a piece of God Himself. You can't kill him. Even *capturing* him will probably prove impossible.’” (77)

The acknowledgement of pragmatism versus the impossibility of total idealism is also a powerful theme in the novel. Vin, the protagonist of the book, lives a double life as part of her work in the band: she is a street urchin at first and a *mistborn* later (a powerful being even among the “magicians” of the world, the *allomancers*), a side that contrasts with her persona as Valette, a pretended rural noble whose goal is to infiltrate the nobility in order to discover their plans and alliances. She desires to keep living in those opposed worlds separately, but acknowledges the impossibility to maintain her two versions apart: “There probably wouldn’t be room for things like grand balls in Kelsier’s new kingdom, and that might not be a bad thing—what right did she have to dance while other skaa starved?” (414)

The Lord Ruler himself possesses powers beyond those considered normal for *mistborn* or *allomancers*. Moreover, he is said to have defeated The Deepness, an ancient, abstract incarnation of evil, thus effectively saving the world. This supposes a controversial fact for some of the characters of the novel, who question if those actions may bring some legitimacy to his rule. He is a deity, an absolute morality (165); trying to bring him down is perceived as an impossibility, acknowledged by the majority of the main characters with the exception of Kelsier, who shows faith in the revolutionary ideal of overthrowing the tyrant. This is in dispute with the morality of the classical fantasy works, in which every action of the “good guys” is categorized as good and vice versa.

Additionally, the novel also shows a mistreated majority at the hands of an abusive and despicable system, powering an image of, as Baker states, “sympathy/empathy—the reader is almost forced to identify with the protagonists” (2013). This alleged identification of readers with the oppressed minority may lead them to believe in the absolute morality commented earlier but, as the story progresses,

the apparent dichotomy of classical hero narratives of good versus evil is diluted into a more blurred division. Baker comments that “His [Kelsier’s] revolutionary method revolves around creating his *own* religion around his *own* martyrdom to proclaim his *own* message. It is this action (Kelsier’s death at the hands of the Lord Ruler) that spurs ordinary skaa into rebellion” (2013).

Examples are frequent as the story progresses: Vin feels at a loss at the duality of her identity, incapable of knowing if her persona is just an act or not; the Lord Ruler did, in fact, save the world, but doing so betrayed the true hero chosen to defeat The Deepness. The moral line is blurrier even more from a Campbellian perspective: Alendi, the original hero, fails his quest not only because the betrayal but because he was unfit for the role. The Lord Ruler becomes a tyrant but he is still protecting the land even in the last moments of his life: “You don’t know what I do for mankind. I was your god, even if you couldn’t see it. By killing me, you have doomed yourselves...” (520). Furthermore, the death of the godly dictator does not bring comfort to the world, nor restores the land’s purity. Instead, it makes Vin, the new heroine who has defeated the Lord Ruler, wary of the victory of the revolution: “That didn’t sound right to Vin. There was more. She remembered that fear in the Lord Ruler’s eyes. Terror.” (526)

Campbell writes of the final stages of the Hero’s Journey that “The hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir)” (322), which does not happen at the end of Vin’s journey. And while a bigger picture of this structure could be drawn along the three books of the series, *The Final Empire* is the basis to portray a playful subversion of the monomyth, where the Dark Lord is overruled and hope restored but a sense of dread dominates the last pages of the novel, an omen of the future threats that are to come to the world of the characters.

The Failed Hero

Along its pages, *The Final Empire* shows two primary points of focalization by means of a heterodiegetic narrator, but there is a third hidden perspective located outside the limits of the main story.

It is common in the fantasy genre to use epigraphs below the chapter titles to recount legends or give information about the world that would otherwise slow the narration of the book or that would be simply impossible to know for the focalized character. Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) already used this strategy and the trend has obviously persisted, to the point that Diana Wynne Jones made in her *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996) a parodic description of the fact by naming them Gnomish Utterances and stating that "the Rule is that no Utterance has anything whatsoever to do with the section it precedes. Nor, of course, has it anything to do with GNOMES" (28). Sanderson, however, tries to avoid gratuitous exposition by making the epigraphs of the novel an important part of the narrative. These epigraphs tell the story of Alendi, an homodiegetic narrator who relates his quest to become the Hero of Ages, the chosen one to defeat the evil. In the first pages of the novel, his journey seems to be disconnected to the main story, until the epigraphs appear to Kelsier's gang in the form of a book stolen to the Lord Ruler. This book is revealed as the diary of the Hero. Both the reader and the characters are led to assume that Alendi is the man who will become the Lord Ruler, thus they try to find in his diary the secret for his defeat.

The Journey of this hero begins "in a small, unimportant town whose name would mean nothing to you. It began with a youth, the son of a blacksmith, who was unremarkable in every way—except, perhaps, in his ability to get into trouble." (255). Alendi, then, starts his quest as an immature boy in a small village. Campbell describes the journey of the hero as a process of maturation, in which he obtains an "expansion of

consciousness and therewith of being” (228). Through his diary, the reader learns that Alendi meets Kwaan, the mentor figure who will announce him to the world as the Hero of Ages, by mere coincidence and states: “though, I suppose, he would use the word ‘providence’.” (261). This reflects the power of destiny as it “has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown.” (Campbell, 53). It is implied that Alendi, at first, refuses the call, and states that “You could say that circumstances forced me to leave my home behind - certainly, if I had stayed, I would now be dead” (243). This aligns with Campbell’s analysis of the Call of Adventure: “A series of signs of increasing force then will become visible, until [...] the summons can no longer be denied” (51).

Indeed, the journey will take him to “the highlands of Terris. This is said to be a cold, unforgiving place – a land where the mountains themselves are made of ice” (60). Campbell describes, in the chapter about The Call of Adventure, that the journey will take the destined one to “a distant land [...], lofty mountaintop [...] always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight” (53). This coincides with the description we are given about Terris, enhancing the familiar feeling of the structure. Alendi will have to travel to a dangerous cave in Terris, where he will supposedly destroy The Deepness and fulfil his destiny. What makes Alendi interesting as a hero, however, is precisely his unfitness for this role. He is doubtful—“When they see me, do they see a liar?” (288)—but, at the same time, chooses not to listen to the warnings of his mentor figure: “To this day, I don't know why he [Kwaan] suddenly decided that I wasn't the Hero. Why did he turn against me [...]?” (396) and “The others all think I should have had Kwaan executed for betraying me. To tell the truth, I'd probably kill him this moment if I knew where he'd gone.” (396). Kwaan, of course, will be proven right in later instalments of the series,

but it is this mix of self-doubt and pride what makes Alendi a powerful voice in the story. Alendi writes: “while I may wonder about my stature as the hero, there is one thing that I have never questioned: the ultimate good of our quest” (397). The quest has changed his life and his conception of himself, passing from a carefree and immature boy to a ruthless man without any self-confidence. It is clear that he does not wish to be the hero: “Perhaps someone else would have come to carry this terrible burden” (234). Nor is he convinced of having the judgement to accomplish the quest correctly: “will I be remembered as the man who protected mankind from a powerful evil? Or [...] as a tyrant who arrogantly tried to make himself a legend?” (424)

In fact, the novel wittily uses the duality of Alendi’s voice to draw red herrings to the reader, as at first sight it may seem that the author of the logbook is the Lord Ruler himself. In order to achieve this effect, the text presents numerous parallelisms of him with the Lord Ruler’s attitude: “Perhaps another person, reading of my life, would name me a religious tyrant. He could call me arrogant. [...] In the end, I’m the one with the armies” (26). This technique is not only used to surprise the reader, but also to highlight Alendi’s unfitness as the savior of humanity. It is also noteworthy that Alendi’s main flaw is arrogance, or *hubris*, which also connects with the Greek classics: *hubris* is Alendi’s fatal flaw, the one that, ultimately, will bring about his downfall. Campbell states of the hero: “where he is ignorant of his destiny, or deluded by false considerations, no effort on his part will overcome the obstacles” (316), and arrogance could indeed be considered a form of delusion. The Lord Ruler’s main flaw is also extreme arrogance, and for this reason he believes to have the Empire under his control, unaware that certain sectors of all social strata are finding forms to try to resist him: “You ask why I smile, Goodman Mennis? Well, the Lord Ruler thinks he has claimed laughter and joy for himself. I’m disinclined to let him do so. This is one battle

that doesn't take very much effort to fight" (20). Furthermore, the identification of the hero who saved the world and the Lord Ruler is not only intertextual but it is also pushed forward by the narrative. The people of the Final Empire are taught that the Lord Ruler "had saved them from the Deepness, then had brought the ash and the mists as a punishment for the people's lack of faith" (101); the ballrooms of the noble houses exhibit windows with religious motifs "like many scenes preferred by the aristocracy" (190) and the logbook is, at first, found in an altar inside the Lord Ruler's castle. Alendi catalogues as a failed hero not only for these reasons, but also because he rejects the quest for too long and is not virtuous enough to triumph and bring "The boon that he brings restores the world" (Campbell, 228). In his path to the navel of the world, the hero must face several challenges, but Alendi comes to his end being incapable of succeeding in the last of the trials encountered during his journey: the betrayal of his packman, Rashek. It seems that, as foreshadowed by Kwaan's words, he was predestined to failure.

The Dark Hero

Rashek is a man characterized by hatred. The second book of the series, *The Well of Ascension* (2007), reveals that he is Kwaan's nephew; his work is to impede Alendi to reach the end of his quest, a mission in which he will succeed. Rashek, however, is not moved by duty or altruism, but by a sense of envy and revulsion. Alendi writes of the man: "feeling Rashek's eyes on my back. Jealous. Mocking. Hating" (198). He is also an unfit choice for the prophecies, hence it is inevitable that upon stealing the destiny of the pretended hero, Rashek becomes "the tyrant ogre [...] the usurper from whom the world is now to be saved" (Campbell, 322), the Lord Ruler. Rashek is resentful for the election of Alendi as a chosen one, as "he does not believe that an outsider such as

myself – a foreigner – could possibly be the Hero of Ages.” (366). This attitude foreshadows the cultural unity that the Lord Ruler would try to strive for in his Empire. Sazed, the second mentor figure of the book, states: “The Lord Ruler’s unity movement of the fifth century made certain of that. The language people now speak is actually a distant dialect of Terris, the language of my homeland” (232). In fact, unity seems to be the Lord Ruler’s main preoccupation, in clear opposition to the duality of the world itself. The Lord Ruler, as the ash covering all the structures of the world, has forced a cultural mantle and a religious synthesis that he uses to enslave the population of the world. Sazed declares that the “Steel Ministry forbids the worship of anyone but the Lord Ruler, and the Inquisitors have quite diligently destroyed hundreds of religions” (156). In fact, upon encountering Alendi’s logbook, Sazed is pleased to discover that it contains information about the Terris culture, for it was nearly annihilated by the Lord Ruler along all other forms of distinctiveness. It is declared that the nobleman and noblewomen of the court “always follows him [the Lord Ruler] in fashion” (309), and the Lord Ruler himself tries to hide his own duality: he is both an *allomancer* and a *feruchemist*, the latter being a power native of the people of Terris. This unification process, characterized by lack of change and perpetual stillness, makes a connection with other works such as T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (1922): the world is dying, covered by ashes and in need of a rejuvenation. The birth of a new hero is required, for “only birth can conquer death—the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new” (Campbell, 15). The Lord Ruler tries to avoid this in a ritual that goes back to the slaughter of children in ancient myths: he commands any woman who the nobles rape to be killed, in order to avoid the birth of half-breed children, for only the nobility have the potential to be *allomancers* and *mistborns*. However, the birth of the new hero, as happens in the traditional myths of the killing of innocent people, is certain,

inescapable, and reasserted during various passages of the novel. In words of Sazed: “‘The Final Empire cannot last forever,’ [...]. ‘I do not know if Master Kelsier will be the one who finally brings its end, but that end will come’.” (156)

Rashek is, therefore, a hero who received the boon of the God and failed to give it to the world; he did not bring life or birth, but ashes and oppression. He did not fail, for he defeated The Deepness, but rather he used selfishly the powers that were bestowed upon him, changing himself into a Dark Hero, a destined warrior who completed the quest but did not return to mankind the blessings of its completion.

According to Campbell, “The hero is the one who, while still alive, knows and represents the claims of the superconsciousness” (241). Rashek then, impersonating the Dark Hero, is mystified in the same way as the Campbellian Hero, creating the figure of the Lord Ruler. The Lord Ruler is not human, but “a force, like the winds or the mists. [...] They didn’t live, really. They simply *were*” (78). This draws a parallelism with the form in which the epigraphs describe The Hero of Ages; he “shall be not a man, but a force. No nation may claim him, no woman shall keep him, and no king may slay him.” (287). The Lord Ruler, the Dark Hero, is therefore the shadow self of the destined Hero, his land “the waste land, the reign of the tyrant” (Campbell, 325). It is only when Vin learns of the Lord Ruler’s origins and his betrayal to the original hero that the revolution can succeed; the God demystified, his heroic nature called into question, is defeated by the new heroine blessed by the powers.

The Savior Hero

The Final Empire relies on its epigraphs to tell a background story, but the main points of view of the novel are those of Kelsier and, as the book progresses, Vin. Kelsier is

used as a mentor figure for Vin, but at the same time his characterization is pushed as the chosen one who will defeat the Lord Ruler. Kelsier is known as The Survivor, the only known person to escape the Pits of Hathsin, after which he obtained allomantic powers. Applying the structure of the Hero's Journey, it is possible to trace a clear parallelism in his background: Kelsier and his original gang were going to steal something from the Lord Ruler (Campbellian symbol of the Threshold). He failed, and was sent to the Pits of Hathsin, described by the book as a descent into certain death (the Belly of the Whale). Kelsier manages to escape, with visible scars in his arms as consequence of the time passed there—for “the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation” (Campbell, 84)—and obtains new powers, which makes him a *mistborn* (Apotheosis). Of this, we can deduce that Kelsier's journey still has to come to an end and, in fact, all of his later struggle can be interpreted as the Flight to escape Lord Ruler's influence and his effort in trying to restore the world to abundance and happiness. He also mentions a mentor figure who trained him on how to use his powers, and who is, as stated before, a relevant figure of the quest narratives.

Kelsier, however, is yet another imperfect character as much as Alendi is, the main difference being that Alendi is insecure, while Kelsier is overconfident. Otherwise, they share a lot of their characteristic traits: egotistical nature, ruthlessness, and leadership. Sanderson writes of him that “he is willing to do whatever he has to in order to see that his goals are achieved” (2007). But where Alendi considers the use of force, Kelsier wins thanks to his wit. He defends that “allomancy is nothing but tricks” (432) and that “strength isn't everything” (468), a notion that separates him from the hero-warrior and brings him closer to the figure of the Trickster or hero who disrupts the status quo and outwits his enemies. The duality in which the character is portrayed— “the happy, joking Kelsier mixed with the hard, ruthless rebel leader”

(Sanderson, 2007)—along with an indiscriminate hatred for the totality of the noble class reveals a shadow in Kelsier’s heroism that equates him to the figure of Rashek and, in particular, calls back Alendi’s description of the packman: “He does not know me, yet I can already see the anger and hostility in his eyes” (144). Vin assures Kelsier that there are few, rare exceptions that escape the cruelty of common nobility, yet Kelsier prefers to remain blind except in his last moment, in which, for Vin’s sake, he decides to save one of them.

However, the comparison between Kelsier and The Lord Ruler does not end here. Baker notes that exactly like “the Lord Ruler, Kelsier’s entire rebellion thrives on manipulation” (2013). He manipulates the skaa population elevating himself to a mystical figure, spreading half-truths and making them feel invincible, which, naturally, takes its price:

Me, Kelsier thought. This is my fault. He’d promised them supernatural aid. He’d set himself up [...] Was it any wonder that Yeden had thought he could attack the Final Empire head on [...] Was it any wonder the soldiers would go with the man, considering the promises Kelsier had made? (350)

Nevertheless, this does not stop Kelsier, but strengthens his resolve. As Sanderson describes him, “he is a dangerous man with powerful beliefs” (2007). And, ultimately, those beliefs lead him to manipulate his own band and all the population of the city so that, at his death, they will rise against the Lord Ruler. This scene, in particular, plays with the imagery and motifs of the Christian quest. Kelsier, after liberating some prisoners who were going to be executed, allows to be stabbed by the Lord Ruler with a spear without resistance. Later, in an annunciation of his resurrection, a man proclaims: “Lord Kelsier appeared to me this very night! He said that he would

always be with us” (479). The reader discovers the trick a few pages later: a metamorphic creature, under his command, has been impersonating him so the people would rebel. The creature declares: “he understood that they would never rebel... not unless he gave them a *new* god” (481). Kelsier uses religion and pretends to be “sacrificed” so a revolution can be born. As Łaszkiewicz states “to dethrone the old god a new one is needed, and the revolution [...] is of both a social and religious nature.” (2013). This also proves to be a point of connection with the Lord Ruler, as both are using the same means to achieve similar goals: the control of the population through religious lies. The difference is, however, that the Lord Ruler is a tyrant “not because he keeps the past but because he *keeps*” (Campbell, 311). The Lord Ruler represents perpetual immobility, while Kelsier thrives for change. Vin, at the beginning, questions if “would he really let the skaa rebellion take over? Would any man be able to relinquish that kind of power?” (279) and the rest of the gang grow in discomfort through the pages of the book upon learning the reputation that Kelsier is trying to create. By sacrificing himself for the rebellion, however, he is saved, and in doing so he saves the skaa from the dictator’s grips. As Campbell states, “The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today” (326).

The Wished-for Heroine

As the book progresses, Kelsier’s point of view becomes less relevant in favor of Vin’s focalization. This change of perspective can be read not only as a formal device to emphasize her importance in the plot, but also as a symbolic one: Vin gradually takes upon Kelsier’s role, culminating in her acceptance as the Heroine who will defeat the Lord Ruler.

Campbell talks of the hero as an exiled infant, as “the abused youngest son or daughter, the orphan [...]” (301). Vin complies with the archetype: her infancy is one of pain and mistrust, channelized in the illusion of her brother Reen, who instructed her to trust no one and taught her that “they’re all just going to leave you” (428). Although she is ignorant of it during most part of the novel, her brother was actually trying to hide Vin, as the Inquisitors were following her. Thus, as Campbell states, “the child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity. This is a time of extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace” (301). Consequently, for Vin the quest is not only physical in terms of narrative progression but also spiritual, a cycle of maturation and healing from her wounded, mistrusting self to a more confident one. Due to this mistrusting nature, the Call of Adventure for her is necessarily a forced one, and Kelsier has to bribe her with knowledge about her powers for she to accept it: “his knowledge was what bound her to him” (96). To escape her ordinary life and master these powers, she must embrace the path of the hero, but she does this reluctantly because of her values. Kelsier, then, is presented as a mentor figure to Vin. Not only that, he is also shown as a father figure to her and, in similar manner, it is implied that Kelsier sees her as something of a daughter. He confesses to Vin: “I wish that I had a piece of her [Kelsier’s wife] with me. A child. A daughter, perhaps [...]” (243). After sacrificing himself, Kelsier passes the legacy of his wife’s dream to Vin: a picture of a green plant, testimony of a world before the ashes. This symbolic gesture represents not only passing on the promise of a hope for the future, but the tacit acknowledgement of role continuation. Kelsier, the mentor figure, dies; having taught Vin all that he could, he passes the role of his hero journey to Vin, the child, thus making her the new heroine, free of Kelsier’s flaws and consequently having some possibility of victory. Sanderson states of Kelsier’s role: “The mentor figure always ends up getting killed. I nearly didn’t

do it simply for that reason” (2007). This commentary highlights the powerful influence the Hero’s Journey has as structural background in the novel; although it can be argued that Sanderson’s own flavor about the death of the character gives him a clear enough distinction from the dichotomized patterns of classic fantasy quests.

The rest of Kelsier’s band acts like helpers teaching Vin how to use her newly found powers. Once she has reached a point of mastering them, Vin approaches the threshold of adventure when she decides to follow Kelsier in a dangerous infiltration to the Lord Ruler’s fortress. Campbell anticipates that “there [s]he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage.” (227). Vin and Kelsier are separated, and she encounters herself facing an Inquisitor, who leaves her close to death. With the rest of the band unsure of her survival, she fulfills the conditions of the Campbellian hero’s defeat: the heroine is “slain by the opponent and descends in death” (227), the consequence being a symbolical dismemberment instead of a physical one, as she finds herself incapable of using her powers for a long time. The incursion is, however, partially successful, as she is capable of retrieving the item that will allow her future victory against the Lord Ruler: the logbook of Alendi.

As pertains the Campbellian hero, Vin also has to pass a number of tests, not only of force, but of spirit. This is represented in her infiltration among the nobility and the assumption of the persona of Valette. Her incapacitated physical self gives prominence to her spiritual self. She finds another mentor role for this particular Journey in Sazed: while Kelsier is impulsive and egotistic, Sazed is rational and modest. He will be the mentor figure in the next books and the one trying to soothe Vin’s doubts and preoccupations.

As stated before, Vin’s training in both the physical (alomancy) and the spiritual (the games of the court) causes her distress, as she desires both worlds to remain apart.

However, the physical and the spiritual are part of the same reality. As described by Campbell: “The two [...] are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world” (37). The actions of the gang and her *mistborn* self soon disturb the life of the court, coming together when Vin is forced to make her powers manifest in a ball in order to save her romantic interest, Elend, which puts her face-to-face to her antagonist in this spiritual world, Shan Elariel. Shan is the shadow self of Vin: an important noble and *mistborn* who pursues power and influence. It is the confrontation of Vin and Shan, and the defeat of the latter, which opens the final act of the book. After the battle and the posterior discussion, Vin obtains peace of spirit and a communion between her two selves that is finally manifested at the ending of the novel when she, in her *mistborn* form, appears and is accepted by Elend: “He smiled, throwing back his chair and grabbing her in a firm embrace. Vin closed her eyes, simply feeling the warmth of being held. And realized that was all she had ever really wanted” (528). This quote also emphasizes the circularity of the character, from a home where she wanted to be alone to a home where she can be herself around the people she trusts.

Having completed the test of both the physical and the spiritual world, and having attained the condition of hero from Kelsier after his sacrifice, Vin, the wished-for heroine, is prepared to enter the final dungeon, Lord Ruler’s castle, and face him. Where Kelsier tried to kill, Vin simply persuades the guards to let her in, the first sign that she is free from Kelsier’s defects. The guards, whom she convinces to join her, will later on lead Elend to her aid and guard her back while she battles the tyrant, a tradition, as Sanderson acknowledges, that serves as “a metaphoric nod to the fairy tale genre” (2007). Inside the castle, she will be captured and learn that Reen, her abusive brother, never truly betrayed her even under torture. At the end of the book, this fact will serve

to quieten the imaginary, intrusive voice of her brother, showing her maturation along the journey and her change as a character that has grown up from her child-self at the beginning of the novel.

In the final battle, the god-tyrant, usurper of the mastery of the world, must be first demystified in order to be defeated. Confronting him, Vin brings the power that will allow her to discover his weakness. Campbell writes: “The mythological hero, reappearing from the darkness that is the source of the shapes of the day, brings a knowledge of the secret of the tyrant’s doom” (311). The knowledge, obtained from this power and Alendi’s logbook, reveals the human identity of the Lord Ruler: Rashek, the packman who betrayed the hero. But the tyrant is still strong, and the heroine must become one with the land to defeat him: the mists bestow her with the powers to overthrow the Lord Ruler. She will later question that “whatever she’d done, she hadn’t been able to replicate it” (524). Indeed, Vin is implied as a *mistborn* “master of extraordinary powers” (Campbell, 35) in various occasions along the story: “‘But you’re strong,’ he [Kelsier] said. ‘Stronger than you have any right to be. You killed a full Mistborn tonight!’” (432) Thus, as Campbell writes, “the godly powers [...] are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time.” (36), although it will be only in the next instalments of the series where she will learn how and why she has these powers. Once the dictator has been defeated, Vin and Sazed stand above his body, the hierarchy reversed, and she impales him with a spear, in the same way Kelsier was, symbolizing the victory of the revolution.

However, the success against the Lord Ruler is only a temporary triumph, as stated in the first part of this project, for the land is not restored and the global threat continues to influence the world. Vin’s victory, then, only forms part of the microcosm of Luthadel, the one that has put her in the path of heroism and trained her. More

difficulties remain outside the walls of the city, as she acknowledges: “How many are there outside of Luthadel?” (525). The end of this novel has finally opened the path of the macrocosm to the heroine.

Conclusion — a familiar journey?

As contended along this work, Sanderson presents the reader with a narrative weaved through the pattern studied by Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but with some characteristics altered or subverted. Thus, the writer creates two distinctive stories: one with the main protagonists of the book, Vin and Kelsier, and another one as an embedded narrative which serves to contextualize the former, with Alendi and Rashek as protagonists. Moreover, each narrative presents a different type of Journey: Alendi’s quest, characterized by his disinterest on being the hero and Vin’s quest, a more typical Hero’s Journey which highlights the split between the spiritual and the physical realities of the heroine. Alendi’s Journey features the figure of Rashek but here the writer subverts his role as the Helper, making Rashek backstab Alendi and become the hero instead. In a similar way, Kelsier is portrayed as the hero during the first pages of the book, gradually passing that role to Vin and becoming for her a mentor figure. However, finally he is ready to sacrifice himself, regaining the hero-status at the same time in death by offering a parallelism with the figure of Christ.

It is precisely thanks to the familiarity and frequent repetition of Campbell’s patterns on the genre, and to the latter’s success due to its use in popular works such as Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* or Lucas’s *Star Wars*, that many people are able to identify Campbell’s pattern and thus anticipate the development of the story and the destiny and roles of the characters, somehow thwarting the narrative experience. The

popularity of the Campbellian structure may help to explain why Sanderson decided to effect some modifications on the Hero's Journey in *The Final Empire*: a patterned repetition is expected, thus an alteration in the already conventional pattern surprises and engages the reader. By presenting an embedded narration that acts as the background to the main story of *The Final Empire*, the epigraphs of the book become a powerful strategic device which helps Sanderson to defy the archetypal fantasy novel and its familiarity with the Hero's Journey. This is also achieved by the subversion of the physical aspect of the quest: the key events of the novel do not occur during a journey from one place to another—a recurrent trope in the genre—but in the city of Luthadel, a much more enclosed and atypical setting, as both the starting point and the final destination of the characters form part of the same space. The mystical aspect of magic is diminished, and the reader encounters instead a nearly-scientific system bound by rules, experimentation and limitations, represented by *allomancers*, *mistborns* and *feruchemists*. Additionally, the absolute either/or morality presented in works such as *The Lord of the Rings* series does not hold in *The Final Empire*: the good characters are not always good and not always right, and show reasonable doubts about their morals, methods and goals.

Thanks to these strategies which depart from the norm, with the aid of foreshadowing and red-herrings, Sanderson manages to add some very fascinating plot twists to the structure that, according to Joseph Campbell, has been repeated once and again since ancient mythic times to help us know about the meaning of our lives.

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