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The Antique and Modern Dimensions of Fantasy Literature

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THE ANTIQUE AND MODERN DIMENSIONS
OF FANTASY LITERATURE

In 1856, William Morris published a short story entitled "The Hollow Land" and two years later, in 1858, George MacDonald presented the novel *Phantastes*. Little did both writers probably suspect at the time of the publication of their works that almost one hundred and fifty years later Richard Mathews would name them "the pioneers of fantasy as a modern literary genre."[1] Morris was fascinated by medieval literature and culture, which served as inspiration for his poetry and prose romances, whereas MacDonald, who was deeply concerned with religion, wrote fantasy narratives of allegorical nature which addressed religious and spiritual issues. Regardless of the differences in their choice of topics and styles, both writers diverged from realism in favor of their own imaginary lands.

Since Morris's and MacDonald's publications, fantasy fiction has gradually undergone several inner transformation that reshaped its form and structure, lured new writers who contributed to its development with their individual perception of the fantastic, and gathered an international audience. At the same time, fantasy literature has been struggling to obtain a position within the literary world dominated by the modern novel of realism. Part of that struggle is still visible today as modern fantasy fiction is still strengthening its position among mainstream genres. The discussion of fantasy's heritage as a mode of literary expression,

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[1] R. Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, Routledge, New York 2002, p. 16.

as well as of its contemporary form, will allow us to understand how ironic it is for the genre to be disregarded and excluded from mainstream literature.

1.   The historical development of modern fantasy fiction

To properly understand modern fantasy fiction it is necessary to investigate the genre's origins. Mathews acknowledges the importance of Morris and Mac-Donald for the creation of modern fantasy, but he also points out that though the modern genre may be less than two hundred years old, its origins reach back far into the times of antiquity.[2] Mathews is, in a way, right: though texts such as the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *Odyssey* and the Indian *Mahabharata* are by no means fantasy fiction, they do make use of certain fantastic elements–some of them have become staple elements of modern fantasy (semi-divine heroes, magic items, monsters, etc.). Moreover, fantasy fiction is a genre which transgresses international boundaries since, from the very beginning, fantasy has been present in the literature of various cultures. Thus, the aforementioned texts can be supplemented by the English *Beowulf*, German *Nibelungenlied*, Arabic *Thousand and One Nights*, Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and numerous other titles which, to a varying degree, incorporate elements of the fantastic. This list of titles which are not part of the fantasy genre, but which contributed to the continuing presence of fantasy within world literature, could be further supplemented by, e.g. Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Until the end of Renaissance, when realism and reason began gaining popularity as the dominant elements of a narrative, fantasy was an indispensable part of writing and permeated medieval romances (e.g. the tales of King Arthur's court and the quest for the Holy Grail). In medieval literature, the use of fantastic elements was one of the conventional modes writing, which was supposed to strengthen the overall message of a given text. However, the approaching Age of Reason soon forced a separation. It was in the Age of Reason that fantasy was excluded from the structure of mainstream narratives, because faithful depiction of the world around us became the most esteemed feature of writing. Neverthe-

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[2]   Ibidem, p. xv–xx, 1–11.

less, with the advance of the novel, fantasy, which also adopted this new form of expression, became a counterpoint to mainstream realistic literature. In addition, fantasy interwove with other modes of expression, such as horror, science fiction, satire and utopian novels, which produced a plethora of texts that contributed to the shaping of the modern fantasy genre.

While some of these works were clearly meant for adult readers, other texts that made use of the fantastic were initially targeted at a younger audience, which eventually led to the confused reception of fantasy. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and James M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* are examples of works which seem suitable primarily for children, but which can be equally appreciated by adults since only mature readers with a certain degree of knowledge will be able to decipher these books' various layers of meaning. Because of the imaginary worlds which they conjure and the feeling of fairy-tale enchantment which they evoke, all of these works can be considered milestones in fantasy literature, similarly to Tolkien's *The Lord the Rings* or Anne Rice's tales about vampires. Mathews firmly states that "[t]he interface between children's literature [which was a major influence on fantasy] and adult fantasy is a fruitful continuum that has led many younger readers into adult fantasy."[3] But even though certain links between children's literature and the fantasy genre do exist, these links cannot be the reason for treating the entire fantasy genre as a product of childish fancy, and for diminishing its literary position. Though some fantasy narratives are inarguably targeted at children, others display layers of symbols and allusions that can be comprehended only by a more experienced and mature audience.

2. The relationship between modern fantasy literature and myths

Mathews states that "[a]s a literary genre, modern fantasy is clearly related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore from all over the world."[4] His remark not only points to the genre's multiple sources of inspiration, but also strengthens its position in relation to other acknowledged forms of literature. The connection between fantasy fiction and myths is par-

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[3]   Ibidem, p. 17.

[4]   Ibidem, p. 1.

ticularly worthy of exploration. The brief introduction to the historical development of the fantasy genre presented in the previous part has emphasized the genre's immensely strong relations with myths and other sacred texts of antiquity. In these tales, exceptional heroes undergo several trials and brave fantastic adventures in order to achieve a miraculous object or fulfill a mission that will preserve their community and/or their world. Some of the motifs and narrative patterns established by these ancient texts can still be found in modern fantasy. It is worth mentioning that their presence in the genre is one of the reasons why fantasy fiction has become a means through which fantasists can explore issues related to spirituality and religion. Mathews argues that the presence of fantasy in the ancient texts was both an "an aboriginal human impulse toward fantasy"[5] and a narrative necessity: since the first stories had to address the nature of the divine and the universe in a way that could be comprehended by the human mind, implementing elements of fantasy and the supernatural was an inevitable solution. Thus, from the very beginning the mode of fantasy has been used by people to conceptualize the sacred.

Because myths and modern fantasy share a set of motifs and archetypes, the pattern of monomyth identified by Joseph Campbell within numerous ancient narratives has become a framework applied to the study of the genre, as well as an axis used for the creation of fantasy novels. According to Campbell, the monomyth, i.e. "[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure," consists of three major stages (separation–initiation–return), which might be further subdivided into minor phases.[6] During each stage, the hero is faced with certain tasks that need to be fulfilled before s/he may enter another stage of the process. The trails endured by the hero are compulsorily of a fantastic nature because it is crucial for the hero to gain experiences beyond the common scope of perception, so that s/he may achieve the seemingly impossible object of the quest, and – at the same time – undergo spiritual development, which is the greatest success of the monomyth. Though the hero parts with his/her society in order to obtain an object that will aid the entire community, successful spiritual transformation is the true objective of the quest, and the more troublesome goal to achieve. The heroes must abandon their previous lives, they often experience self-sacrifice and false death to learn more about themselves, and in the end, despite successfully finishing the quest,

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[5]   Ibidem, p. 10.

[6]   J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford 2004, p. 28.

they may be unable to return to the original society due to the greatness and extent of their inner transformation.

Campbell identified the monomyth pattern in various myths and in such ancient tales as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*. Fantasy literature, a descendant of those texts, has inherited the monomyth together with other generic features; Campbell's pattern (or elements of it) can be identified in such fantasy novels as, e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Guy Gavriel Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry*, and Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*. The impact of the monomyth on fantasy fiction has perhaps been even too great. Some critics argue that the focus on the monomyth has generated a score of very predictable and formulaic fantasy novels. Brian Attebery explains: "Campbell's theory may sometimes be too powerful: it tends to remake all traditional narratives into its own heroic image and to obscure relationship between […] sacred and secular stories."[7] The question of the genre's relationship with the monomyth is a topic that requires separate research.

3. Contemporary problems of the modern fantasy genre

So far we have explored the antique dimension of fantasy literature and studied its origins, development and heritage, which allowed us to place fantasy in a spatial and chronological context, up to the birth of the modern fantasy genre. The analysis of the modern dimension of fantasy fiction will concentrate on three issues: realism, audience, and classification. The lack of realism has long been one of the chief arguments against fantasy fiction. While mainstream literature is extolled for its thorough and detailed study of human life, fantasy writing is scorned for inventing its own fantastic realms instead of depicting reality as we know it. In the eyes of those who perceive literature as a mirror that should reflect the world subjected to human senses, narratives that part from reality and rely only on the author's imagination become secondary literature: a pleasant form of entertainment which seldom displays serious literary depth and is, therefore, doomed to remain in the sphere of mass (popular) culture. Consequently, some would like to think that since fantasy writing does not adhere to reality, it is

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[7] B. Attebery, *Exploding the Monomyth: Myth and Fantasy in a Postmodern World*, [in:] *Considering Fantasy. Ethical, Didactic and Therapeutic Aspects of Fantasy in Literature and Film*, J. Deszcz-Tryhubczak, M. Oziewicz (eds.), Oficyna Wydawnicza ATUT, Wrocław 2007, p. 207.

nothing more than a product of the writer's childish fancy and an embodiment of the writer's desire for magic and wonder. The act of writing thus becomes a mode of substitution that allows the writer (and later the reader as well) to attain the unattainable, i.e. introduce magic and wonder into the everyday world of average duties and obligations. Such arguments are closely connected with the ideas of psychoanalysis which claims that the act of writing grants the author the power and freedom to obtain what s/he deeply, and often unconsciously, desires. Thus, fantasy literature, just like any other daydream, becomes the substitute for unfulfilled yearnings and an opportunity to fulfill wishes that would otherwise remain beyond an individual's reach. This line of thinking strongly highlights fantasy's escapist qualities. However, this escapist potential of fantasy may also explain the genre's success in popular culture.

As far as the issue of audience is concerned, fantasy literature is still frequently treated as a synonym of children's literature, even though several of fantasy's topics are, in fact, too demanding for the younger audience. Of course, works of such writers as, e.g. Laurell K. Hamilton (her series about Anita Blake the Vampire Hunter) or Charlaine Harris (her series about Sookie Stackhouse that was adapted into an immensely popular television drama *True Blood*), with their recurring themes of sex and violence, are undoubtedly targeted at adult readers, and it is evidently not necessary to prove that their prospective audience are adults only. The case is different with other subgenres of fantasy fiction, ones that do not combine supernatural romance with explicit sexual scenes and reappearing themes of violence, but opt for other themes and means of expression. These subgenres of fantasy, which feature young protagonists, showcase magical creatures, and rely on a clear dichotomy between good and evil, can all too easily become stereotypically categorized as literature meant for children. Though such categorization is in many cases misguided, the tag of "children's literature" may, nonetheless, discourage some "serious" adult readers from exploring the depths of fantasy fiction. Unfortunately, any dispute whose aim is to draw a definite boundary between fantasy literature and children's literature must sooner or later come to the conclusion that such a task is not really feasible, since these two categories constitute a fluid continuum rather than completely separate literary entities (Barrie's *Peter Pan*, for instance, can be considered both fantasy fiction and children's literature). Though this fluidity and lack of clear-cut boundaries allows writers to move freely between the two genres, it may facilitate misunderstandings about the nature and prospective audience of fantasy fiction.

These and other concerns about the position of fantasy were addressed by J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," originally presented as the Andrew Lang lecture at the University of St Andrews in 1939, and then published in 1947. Though the essay is a couple of decades old, its claims are still more than valid. The text investigates the fairy-story as a mode of literary expression, but, at the same time, presents Tolkien's ideas on fantasy writing and introduces his concept of sub-creation – a concept which became immensely significant for the whole body of fantasy literature. Tolkien was greatly interested in exploring the storytelling potential of fantasy and establishing certain boundaries between fantasy and children's literature because of his own books. His first published novel, *The Hobbit* (1937), was born as a story for his children. Because of the book's immense popularity among young readers, Tolkien's publisher urged him to write a continuation. However, what was originally meant as the sequel to the adventures of Bilbo Baggins evolved into an intricate heroic epic addressed to adult readers – *The Lord of the Rings*.

At the beginning of "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien elaborately discusses the forms and origins of fairy-stories and addresses some misconceptions and misunderstandings about this form of literature. As he does so, he slowly approaches the notion of sub-creation which, for him, is inseparably connected with myth and fairy-stories–two modes of storytelling present in human culture. Yet before Tolkien delves any deeper into his notion of sub-creation, he concentrates on the relations between children and fairy-stories. Immediately, Tolkien discards as sentiment the idea that fairy-stories (and thus, fantasy in general) are meant only for children and argues that both children and adults may enjoy such literature or may find no pleasure in it at all. Tolkien perceives fairy-stories just as any other form of art: they are composed by adults, so they cannot be separated from their creators and left to the use of children only or else they will deteriorate (Tolkien illustrates his idea with a striking metaphor of a microscope carelessly left in a schoolroom).

According to Tolkien, Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation are four concepts inseparably linked with the mode of fairy-stories. Fantasy (Imagination), through the means of Art, can achieve Sub-creation, i.e. a process in which the Sub-creator (the writer) evokes to life a Secondary World. Everything inside that World is considered true, because the World functions (or at least should function) according to certain laws established by the author; without restrictions and limitations the Secondary World would become chaotic and senseless.

In order to enter the Secondary World, the reader must temporarily suspend his/ her disbelief. If s/he does not do that, s/he cannot enter the new realm; Tolkien argues that Secondary Belief is indispensable for the proper reception of fantasy. A properly established and law-governed Secondary World is ready to receive the reader, whose belief is the crowning touch needed to breathe life into the imaginary realm. Consequently, it might be argued that it is the disbelief of the reader that robs fantasy of realism.

By exploring the concept of sub-creation, Tolkien arrives at some striking conclusions. He declares that fantasy is elevated among other forms of Art by its "freedom from the domination of observed 'fact'" and the quality of "arresting strangeness."[8] He also argues that because it takes great skill to sub-create a Secondary World that is convincing and fully believable, if a writer succeeds, then his achievement is an exceptional form of Art.[9] In his final conclusion, Tolkien states that human ability to create is grounded in our likeness to God in whose image mankind was created. Artistic creation is, therefore, a minute reflection of divine creation.[10]

Tolkien supports these and other claims with the other qualities of fairy-stories: Recovery, Escape and Consolation. Thanks to the feature of Recovery, readers of fairy-stories may gain a new perspective on objects and events from their own surroundings, which are all too familiar and may be taken for granted. The quality of Escape offers readers temporary freedom from everyday routine and obligations, from technology and lack of connection with nature, from such maladies of the society as hunger and poverty, and, finally, from death. Escape from death is, according to Tolkien, the "oldest, deepest desire, the Great Escape,"[11] and it is a theme reworked by several tales of fantasy. The Consolation provided by fairy-stories is always connected with Happy Ending and Eucatastrophe, i.e. "a good catastrophe."[12] Though fantasy narratives may present sorrow and despair, they simultaneously provide moments of true Joy which is greater than anything else and may provide moral and emotional consolation that will reach the reader even in the real world. It is worth mentioning that Tolkien,

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[8]   J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, [in:] *Tree and Leaf*, J.R.R. Tolkien, Unwin Hyman Limited, London 1988, p. 45.

[9]   Ibidem, p. 46.

[10]   Ibidem, p. 52.

[11]   Ibidem, p. 61.

[12]   Ibidem, p. 62.

a devout Catholic, considered the Birth of Christ the most significant Eucatastrophe in human history – a story that is the source of the greatest sorrow but also of the greatest joy.

If the artistic creation of a Secondary World is a reflection of divine creation when the writer assumes the role of God the Maker, and the qualities of Recovery, Escape and Consolation have such deep psychological significance as it is postulated by "On Fairy-Stories," than fantasy should by no means be disregarded or rejected. Tolkien's claims transform fantasy from childish books devoid of realism into literature of great value and similarly great responsibility, as well as into one of the most potent modes of storytelling ever known. Another aspect of fantasy fiction which deserves some investigation, because it reveals the value of the genre, is the presence of mythopoeia (Greek "myth-making"), which constitutes a fragment of sub-creation. In fantasy fiction, mythopoeia is understood as creation of artificial mythologies which often blend and reconstruct symbols and archetypes borrowed from existing traditions, and which then function in a given Secondary World. If mythology is perceived as a key element of a society's cultural identity and as something indispensable for the society's proper functioning, it is not surprising that a Secondary World also requires a mythological background, if the World is to become fully believable. Again, Tolkien's achievement is one of the greatest in this field. While *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* provide only glimpses of the intricate world of Middle-earth, *The Silmarillion* (published posthumously in 1977) describes Middle-earth's divine creation and presents a detailed history of the land's cosmology and development. Because Tolkien's complex vision was the outcome of years of laborious studies, the magnitude of his creation can hardly be matched by other works. Nonetheless, other notable examples of mythopoeia are present in the works of, e.g., Lord Dunsany, H. P. Lovecraft, Neil Gaiman and Guy Gavriel Kay.

The ubiquity and prominence of linguistic creations appearing in fantasy narratives is yet another aspect of sub-creation. Character names, place names, names for the author's original inventions, and local dialects are all elements of sub-creation in the field of linguistics. Interestingly, these linguistic inventions often enter the already existing lexicon of words. The Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling is a case in point. Quite a few of the words invented by the author have entered the English language and enriched it, all because of the series' immense popularity among younger and older readers. The same happened in the case of other languages in which the Harry Potter series became avail-

able after translation. Consequently, today words such as muggle and quidditch
have become internationally recognized. This process of linguistic enrichment
operates in two directions: new words enter the lexicon due to a given series'
popularity, but by doing so, they simultaneously enhance the series' popularity
and strengthen its impact on (popular) culture.

Tolkien's achievement should again be mentioned, because, as Stanton
points out, ''Tolkien's love of languages as the bedrock foundation for his story''
cannot be ignored.[13] Tolkien equipped each of his fantastic races with a separate
language possessing its own vocabulary, grammar and phonetics, for which he
drew material from ancient and modern languages he had mastered himself. Thus,
his high elves speak Quenya, the orcs use the Black Speech, while the dwarves
communicate in Khuzdul. The sub-creation of Tolkien's world of Middle-earth
encompasses linguistics, because Tolkien always believed that a language is an
indispensable part of every culture. His method of creating fantasy literature
has become so influential that while some writers, e.g. J.K. Rowling, limit their
linguistic creations to a few words and phrases, other fantasists invent entire
languages. Given this intricacy and versatility of (successful) fantastic sub-crea-
tion, it should not be surprising that Tolkien perceived the act of creating fantasy
worlds as akin to divine creation.

4.   Subgenres of fantasy fiction–attempts at classification

Apart from discussing the potential of fantasy literature and refuting argu-
ments brought against the genre, scholars of modern fantasy have been trying
to address the topic of the genre's inner classification. Because of the diversity
of the genre's topics and styles, construing one proper division is an enterprise
worth of many more pages than this paper may provide. Still, three different
classifications should be briefly discussed, because they allow both readers
and writers of fantasy to understand the scope of the topic. In *Writing Fantasy
and Science Fiction* (2005), Lisa Tuttle presents a condensed typology of fantasy
based on features which she perceives as most characteristic for a given subgen-
re. Thus, Tuttle singles out the following categories: heroic fantasy (also called
sword and sorcery, with narratives usually following the pattern of a standard

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[13]   M. N. Stanton, *Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards*, Palgrave, New York 2001, p. 147.

quest), high/epic fantasy (longer than a heroic epic and with a wider spectrum of significant characters), dynastic fantasies (an extension of epic and heroic fantasies where the books cover the adventures of the original hero's descendants), humorous fantasy (whose unquestionable master was Terry Pratchett), dark fantasy (with a pervading sense of horror, the occult and the supernatural), time-slip fantasy (with a prominent motif of time travel), magical realism (fantastical elements suddenly appear in the ordinary world), and romantic fantasy (fantasy and romantic storyline are of equal significance).[14]

　　A different approach is provided by Farah Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008). By focusing on the dynamics between the fantasy world and the real world, Mendlesohn introduces four classes of fantasy books: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal, which are "determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world."[15] Portal-quest fantasy presents both the reader and the protagonist with an unfamiliar fantastic reality ready for discovery during the quest/adventure. In the portal-quest type only one interpretation of the world and the events is valid; what is presented about the fantastic realm is rarely questioned, and most of the time it is accepted as truth *per se*. Portal-quest fantasies can be recognized by their extensive and detailed descriptions of the imaginary reality in question; thus, the quest is, at the same time, a form of exploration of the new world. The second type, immersive fantasy, is not so descriptive and explanatory; the reader is thrown into the new reality and while accompanying the protagonist, s/he should speculate about the nature of the surrounding world, and accept what is revealed. Any additional explanations would suggest that the world is not fully shaped or real, whereas a semblance of realism is one of the aims of immersive fantasy. What is more, immersive fantasy allows the hero to question his/her reality, so that the protagonist becomes, at times, the antagonist of the imaginary world. In the third category, intrusive fantasy, fantastic elements suddenly appear in the mundane fictional world, interrupting its stability. As the intrusion is a surprising novelty, there are several descriptions available, so that both the reader and the protagonist may learn about the occurrence. Again, one interpretation of the events tends to prevail; however, only the events experienced by one's own senses are a reliable source of information for the hero. The fantastic intrusion that disrupts the normality must be then faced

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　14　L. Tuttle, *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction*, A&C Black, London 2005, p. 10–13.

　15　F. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 2008, p. xiv.

and dealt with (e.g. defeated or controlled). Mendlesohn points out that amazement, horror, and escalation of sensations are the most prominent narrative elements of intrusive fantasy. In the category of liminal fantasy, latency is the key factor: fantasy lurks somewhere in the back, in some works not even completely revealing its presence. Moreover, even though fantastic elements might be a novelty in the fictional world, they do not surprise the characters at all. This doubles the feeling of amazement for the reader: firstly, the reader is amazed by the fantastic appearance and, shortly after, confused by the characters' lack of reaction. Liminal fantasy is the fantasy of equipoise of the everyday and fantastical worlds, and often employs irony for their presentation.[16]

Yet another attempt at classifying fantasy is proposed by John Timmerman in *Other Worlds*. Comparing to the more recent theories presented by Tuttle and Mendlesohn, Timmerman's work may be initially viewed as slightly outdated since the book was published in 1983, but after a short investigation, it becomes clear that the author's claims are still valid. Timmerman identifies six features which, for him, encapsulate the core of fantasy literature. The Story – the central element – allows the reader to enter, even if just for a moment, a new realm. The reader enters that new reality and experiences it through the Common Character who displays particular attributes: "common" means it is an ordinary person displaying a readiness for adventure, acceptance of novelty and vivid imagination like that of a child (though it is not necessary for the character to actually be a child). Heroism is another virtue recognized by Timmerman as a trait of the hero and as a generic feature of fantasy fiction. Other features include the existence of Another World in which the adventure takes place, the presence of Magic and the Supernatural which may manifest themselves in various form, the ubiquitous presence of the Struggle between Good and Evil as the main motif of the story, and the presence of the Quest, i.e. a set of trials and adventures which the hero must experience to realize the Story.[17]

Inarguably, the classifications devised by Tuttle, Mendlesohn and Timmerman approach fantasy from significantly different angles. Tuttle's analysis concentrates on the motifs and styles of fantasy books (e.g. quest/adventure, time travel, romance, horror), as well as on the structure of the works in question (the length, spectrum of characters etc.). Her division is probably the most use-

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[16]   Ibidem, p. 1–245.

[17]   J.H. Timmerman, *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre,* Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green 1983, p. 5–103.

ful for readers and writers of fantasy, because it allows them to decide which subgenre of fantasy fiction they might prefer. In contrast, Mendlesohn devotes her cross-sectional research to the construction of the narrative, explaining how fantasy is introduced into the plot, and how it cooperates with the rest of the story. Finally, Timmerman proposes a structural approach towards fantasy, deconstructing the entire genre into six most significant features.

Each of these classifications is convincing and, to a certain degree, captures the nature of fantasy writing. Simultaneously, each is incomplete. Tuttle's clear division into eight categories is distorted by texts that display features transgressing her established boundaries; as a result, some books can belong to more than one category, which she herself acknowledges.[18] Mendlesohn's strategy focuses on the relationship between fantastic elements, plot and readers, but it does not account for other features which could further diversify fantasy, e.g. topics addressed by and motifs used by a particular work. Finally, Timmerman's six attributes of fantasy fiction give rise to various questions. Does every attribute need to be present for a work to be considered fantasy? If not, how many are necessary? Are some more important than others? The multitude of currently existing subcategories of fantasy can hardly be narrowed down to Timmerman's six features, so perhaps the proposed skeleton should refer only to a particular subcategory of fantasy, e.g. epic or heroic fantasy. When studied separately, these three attempts at classification seem incomplete. Perhaps the best results will be achieved if all three systems are simultaneously implemented to decode the structures and categories of fantasy literature.

5. Conclusions

Fantasy fiction is a greatly diversified genre which, by no means, can be placed under one heading of children's literature. It is worth repeating that this variety has developed during less than two hundred years. Morris and MacDonald could not have envisaged that their works, today described as high fantasy and, as such, constituting only one of the several modes of expression available for fantasy, would father such a variety of offspring.

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[18] L. Tuttle, *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction...*, p. 11.

Mathews is convinced that "[f]antasy is a literature of liberation and subversion. Its target may be politics, economics, religion, psychology or sexuality. It seeks to liberate the feminine, the unconscious, the repressed, the past, the present and the future."[19] Because of its ability to combine the power of imagination with a vast literary heritage, which can be then harnessed for the benefit of subcreation, fantasy fiction offers infinite possibilities for the human mind, regardless of the age of readers. In *How Literature Works*, Kenneth Quinn writes that "[i]n literature nothing is impossible […]. Things happen that no one in his right mind would accept."[20] Quinn applies this statement to literature in general. However, if literature in general can pride itself on such unrestricted possibilities, then fantasy simply extends the infinite freedom of thought. As Timmerman argues, "[i]t is this intellectual prison of one's own mind, commonly accepted as unavoidable, that modern fantasy seeks to liberate."[21] Fantasy offers a temporary alternative to the material reality which the reader already knows. By entering, exploring and analyzing a Secondary World, the reader may gain fresh awareness that will alter his/her perception of the world s/he experiences on a daily basis. Such was once the role of myths and storytelling, and fantasy literature is a modern heir to that ancient tradition.

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[19]   R. Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination...*, p. xii.

[20]   K. Quinn, *How Literature Works*, Macmillan, London 1992, p. 87.

[21]   J.H. Timmerman, *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre ...*, p. 47.

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THE ANTIQUE AND MODERN DIMENSIONS OF FANTASY LITERATURE

Abstract

The following paper presents the ancient roots and modern dilemmas of fantasy literature. The first part discusses the genre's origins in the religious and mythological texts of the antiquity, and the genre's development until its emergence as modern fantasy literature. The second part is devoted to analyzing the modern critique of the genre (lack of realism, synonymy with children's literature), and establishing the genre's categories. The second part investigates the theories of J.R.R. Tolkien, Lisa Tuttle, Farah Mendlesohn and John H. Timmerman. The paper also touches upon such issues as the presence of monomyth in fantasy, the potential of sub-creation and mythopoeia, in order to explain how fantasy literature is the modern successor to storytelling.

Keywords: fantasy literature, development, monomyth, sub-creation, subgenres

DAWNE I WSPÓŁCZESNE WYMIARY LITERATURY FANTASY

Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu są literackie korzenie i współczesne problemy literatury fantasy. Część pierwsza omawia początki gatunku sięgające starożytnych tekstów o tematyce religijnej i mitologicznej oraz rozwój gatunku aż do wykształcenia się współczesnej literatury fantasy. Część druga poświęcona jest analizie współczesnej krytyki fantasy (brak realizmu, przyrównanie do literatury dziecięcej) i ustanowieniu wewnętrznego podziału gatunku. Część druga przedstawia teorie opracowane przez J.R.R. Tolkiena, Lisę Tuttle, Farah Mendlesohn i Johna H. Timmermana. Ponadto, artykuł porusza takie kwestie jak mitopeja, wykorzystanie monomitu w literaturze fantasy oraz twórczy potencjał wtórnego stwarzania (ang. Sub-creation).

Słowa kluczowe: literatura fantasy, rozwój, monomit, wtórne stwarzanie, podgatunki