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Fantasy: A Portal to Contemporary Literature

Abstract

The basic role of this paper is to describe the theoretical background of the fantasy genre and to explain the importance of fantasy for the younger readers. This genre can serve as a direct gateway (a portal) into the realm of literature and timeless stories worth visiting. Since fantasy functions as a multi-layered collection of literary works, it comes as no surprise that its significance cannot be disregarded within the scope of contemporary genre studies. Furthermore, fantasy is described as an interesting 'super-genre' which encompasses various other sub-genres. The paper predominantly differentiates between the so-called high and low fantasies, however the paper also focuses on the Harry Potter franchise, as J. K. Rowling's works represent a piece of fantasy which cannot be easily defined. This paper presents different sub-types of fantasy, as well as the (dis-)similarities existing among science fiction and speculative fiction. It also explores the significance of genre evolution and transformation from fairy-tales. Fantasy is portrayed as a highly complex and serious genre which younger readers can access via classic fairy-tales. In conclusion, this study serves as a comprehensive introduction to a better theoretical understanding of the convoluted fantasy genre.

Keywords: *fantasy; high and low fantasy; genre studies; super-genre; fairy-tales*

INTRODUCTION

The basic aim of this paper is to explore how fantasy can be used as a portal to literature for the younger readers. The genre of fantasy represents a unique and important piece of literary heritage and the influence of fantasy on contemporary fiction cannot be disregarded. The fantasy genre cannot be easily categorised. Facets of other (sub-)genres overlap and create confusion among different readers. This paper will analyse the background of fantasy and disseminate the key pieces of information which are necessary for a better understanding of the literary form. Since fantasy has become a commercial success and has been adapted into various media, thus venturing outside the realm of literature, its significance should be taken into consideration. Motion pictures, television shows and video games all depict the genre of fantasy in numerous ways, but the genre remains prominent in literary achievements, as well.

Fantasy, as we know it today, dates back to the ancient period, during the time of myths and legends, while modern fantasy appeared in the mid-19th century. It began to reach a larger audience in the 20th century. The development of contemporary fantasy began with George MacDonald who wrote *The Princess and the Goblin* and *Phantastes* in 1858. The first narrative is a book for children which relates a story about goblins, magic and giants. The second book is now considered the first fantasy novel ever written for adults. It has been a major reference for Tolkien and C. S. Lewis later on in their own writing careers (Ribordy, 2015). Tolkien's influence on the development of fantasy and other authors is immense visible in contemporary literature. Tolkien appears as 'the Bard of Fantasy' to contemporary writers and audiences alike. His influence can be perceived in various pieces of literature, such as in G. R. R. Martin's major contemporary franchise *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The theoretical background of fantasy will be explained through three major focal points: high and low fantasy, differences between fantasy, science fiction and speculative fiction, and the literary evolution of the genre.

UNDERSTANDING HIGH AND LOW FANTASIES

One of the best explanations of fantasy can be traced in Abrams's *A glossary of literary terms* (7th edition). In his work, Abrams (1999) argues that "in pure fantasy—an explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society" (p. 279). Furthermore, Abrams (1999) also states that "among the notable recent writers of fantasy are C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*), whose works incorporate materials from classical, biblical, and medieval sources" (p. 279). Both Lewis and Tolkien in their respective fantasy works incorporate elements of the supernatural, warlocks, dwarves, elves and magical objects. Yet, not all fantasy-related tropes can be found in either Lewis or Tolkien. The absence of particular tropes and even the setting itself should be considered when defining fantasy and its sub-categories.

The Epic Scope of High Fantasy

From the perspective of literary theory and genre studies, a particular narrative work which encompasses elements of the 'unbelievable' can be perceived as a work of fantasy, whereas the work is furthermore divided through the setting. High and low kinds of fantasy include characters who are capable of supernatural feats and often there are goblins, dragons and other enchanted creatures inhabiting the story. Nonetheless, only high fantasy is set in a 'make-believe world'. The counter-part of high fantasy, the previously-mentioned low fantasy,

is placed within a real-life setting, however it does not mean that the overall story is any less fantastical:

Any novel that includes a level of the unbelievable (be it magic or monsters) is described as fantasy. The difference between high fantasy stories and low fantasy is simply the setting. Whereby all fantasy fiction includes characters who are doing unbelievable things (from talking to goblins and flying, to fighting dragons and performing magic) – only high fantasy is set in a make-believe world. Low fantasy, on the other hand, takes place in a real-world setting – although that doesn't mean it has to be any less fantastical. (Simmonds, 2022)

High fantasy is usually convoluted and particularly difficult to create. Such literary works render epic stories within an alternative, fictional world, or rather a secondary world filled with magical elements. For example, in Tolkien's *magnum opus*, all the enchanted objects and characters are placed within a secondary universe, which is in this case Middle-earth. The setting or rather the creation of the secondary world in high fantasy is significant. Namely, it is important for the author to create a plausible secondary world which upholds consistency. In her work *In Defence of Fantasy. A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945*, Swinfen (1984) explains:

To create an imaginative and imaginary world it is necessary to observe faithfully the rules of logic and inner consistency which, although they may differ from those operating in our own world, must nevertheless be as true to themselves as their parallel operations are in normal world. The writing of successful fantasy, then, is amongst the most demanding forms of literary creation. (pp. 3-4)

In order to further substantiate the argument about the narrative setting, Swinfen applies the terms 'primary and/or secondary' realism(s) which in turn denote the primary and/or the secondary world(s). Considering high fantasy, the inner consistency is important in the secondary realm because the internal rules and events placed within the fantastical setting, as well as the emotional responses, must appear feasible. The readers need to believe and retain their interest in the secondary world: "Our normal experience of the primary world thus leads us to give primary belief to primary realism, while successful sub-creation induces secondary belief in the secondary realism of a secondary world" (Swinfen, 1984, p. 5). Furthermore, high fantasy is particularly influenced by Greek and Norse mythologies, since rhapsodists and skalds were in their own right masters of allegories and tales of valiant heroes. Such narratives are not historically accurate, however they remind different readers of the mediaeval period, as such stories depict sword battles, taverns, knights travelling on horses and similar motifs. Therefore,

it should be noted that high fantasy includes the following elements: a fantastical (secondary) world, a map which helps the readers imagine the world's landscape(s), a considerable number of written pages (i. e., a large scope), a set challenge or quest, a plethora of fictional individuals (most of which have unusual names), mythical creatures and races, magic, battles and adventures, high stakes, an engaging plot with various twists and turns. Some of the best examples of contemporary high-fantasy fiction include *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Discworld*, *To Kill A Kingdom*, *The Last Wish* (Simmonds, 2022). Such pieces of literature do not necessarily render majesty and awe through literary devices portraying magic and battle. As Angelskar (2005) argues, through stylistic realism, "high fantasy can seem as real as reality itself, and thus show the necessity of our particular reality to be an illusion. This can be done completely without an allegorical relation between the secondary fictional world and our primary reality" (p. 49). Suffice it to say, the realm of high fantasy is not simply reserved for spectacle and imagination effects. It is, in fact, a multi-layered, serious and complex form of literary writing which has found its rightful place in the 21st century.

The Intrusion/Low Fantasy

Low fantasy is set within our primary world and it is sometimes known as the 'intrusion fantasy' as the fantastical elements of the novel intrude into the real world. It should be noted that other forms of sub-fantasy fall under the category of low fantasy, such as: urban fantasy, historical fantasy, time slip, dark fantasy, superhero, contemporary fantasy, magic realism and paranormal fantasy. Within the realm of low fantasy, readers can detect monsters or characters with magical powers, yet such characters inhabit the real world. Such a world can exist in the present or past time (Simmonds, 2022). The readers can discover how characters in low fantasy get displaced from the original world of fact and transported into the realm of fiction. As Stableford (2005) argues, "the reader is led away from the mimetic world-within the-text into a 'secondary' world, either by undertaking a journey into terra incognita or by passing through some kind of portal" (p. xlviii).

Novels which present low-fantasy tales are particularly interesting to write since there is no need for the creation of a separate universe, whereas our own reality can be twisted to fit the author's imagination. The defining characteristics of low fantasy are: a modern life full of fantasy elements, a magic system hidden in our own world, characters with supernatural elements living a modern life, normal human characters who may, or may not, be aware that magic and monsters exist in our world. Moreover, low fantasy does not require epic battles or big quests as the 'magic-in-our-own-world' element is often intriguing enough for many

readers. Some examples of low fantasy include *Good Omens*, *The Atlas Six*, *Vampires of Moscow*, *Ninth House*, *The Binding* and the *Harry Potter* franchise (Simmonds, 2022). It should be noted that there is not always a clear-cut division between the two sub-categories of fantasy. Sometimes, their features overlap, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* is a suitable example of contemporary fiction which entwines both sides of fantasy. Younger readers can opt for Tolkien's high fantasy *opus* or they can enjoy works such as *Good Omens*. In either case, younger readers will be able to explore a world of the supernatural. Fantasy can help younger readers to develop their imagination. Some readers may enjoy majestic world-building and some may prefer the collision of the real and the magical world. Also, some younger readers may enjoy an interesting combination of both, so they may take up works such as *Harry Potter*.

The Issue of Harry Potter: High or Low Fantasy?

Although it is usually perceived as low fantasy, *Harry Potter*'s world encompasses different high-fantasy nuances. In order to examine the presence and magnitude of high-fantasy traits in *Harry Potter*, we focus on three major tropes: the setting, the heroic characters and the villain of the story. *Harry Potter*'s narrative takes place half in the real world and half in Harry's world of magic. Evidently, the story setting changes throughout the novels. Harry moves to the actual, contemporary world of Great Britain and he comes back to the veiled world of fantasy and magic which is located in Scotland. Thereby, it can be stated that if the setting changes throughout the story, a particular novel can be considered as both high and low fantasy (High Fantasy Vs Low Fantasy: The Complete Detailed Guide, 2022). In Alsharab's (2019) paper, the author explains that the primary and secondary realms of *Harry Potter* co-exist. The enchanted realm appears to be similar to our own reality and their methods of living do not indicate any dissimilarities with the world of ordinary people, the so-called 'muggles'. For example, it has shops, markets, railroads, and schools – such as Hogwarts School. Despite it being similar to our reality, it suffers from a lack of numerous contemporary commodities (pp. 1602-1603). Harry and his friends predominantly live in an enchanted, mediaeval castle, far away from almost any sign of modernity.

Another feature which exists in high fantasy (e. g. *The Lord of the Rings* or *Narnia*) and which is vividly exemplified in Rowling's story are the main characters. Harry, Ron and Hermione are a small group of heroes which are reluctantly pulled into the great struggle, and as Martin (2005) argues that these foolhardy and oddly matched characters "chase about the countryside in search of powerful talismanic objects: rings and swords, books of enchantment,

answers to riddles. Possession of these things will change the balance of power, causing the whole kingdoms to triumph or collapse” (p. 125). Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings* and in *Narnia* the readers can find small groups of protagonists who go on an adventure while searching for or using magical talismans or weapons. Villains in such stories try to convince people to join the dark side and fight with against all other, good, characters (Alsharab, 2019, p. 1062). The triumph of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth over the Dark Lord Sauron, the victory of Aslan’s forces over the White Witch or the students’ victory over Voldemort and his Death Eaters becomes a shared trait which adds another layer of high fantasy to Rowling’s novels. Due to this fact, the *Harry Potter* franchise remains an appealing reading material for younger and more mature readers. It is a story which stands in between the two worlds of fantastical writing, whereby simultaneously it is a story which may welcome younger audiences to the world of imagination and adult readers to the realm of emotional, cathartic and serious literature.

Rowling’s narratives basically altered the course of reading history for many readers around the globe. Rowling’s magical *opus* remains a prominent gateway to contemporary fiction, or more specifically contemporary fantasy. Her stories represent a symbiosis or a hybridity of fantasy sub-genres. In the latter part of her magical franchise, the world of magic and the primary world become profoundly intertwined due to the events occurring around Harry Potter and his friends. Nevertheless, the two universes are never fully merged and they remain isolated. The overall story-line is focused more on the protagonists and the antagonists than on the world-building techniques. In Rowling’s case, Harry Potter is isolated from modern technology and he uses archaic items. He mostly lives in a castle, venturing into the Forbidden Forest or exploring Hogwarts grounds. Albeit simultaneously, Harry is capable of using contemporary technology and he understands the ‘ordinary’ world of Britain perhaps better than most other characters. It becomes apparent that through his struggles Harry encompasses the best of both worlds. He can function in ‘realism’ and in ‘magic’. Harry’s quest and his success will shape the future of the urban world; the fate of our reality is directly influenced by Harry’s journey and his personal coming-of-age story. By reading about Harry’s numerous adventures, younger readers are able to find inspiration. They may become more inquisitive and begin to explore the world around them in a similar way like Harry and his friends. Also, Rowling’s work may help younger readers in their own coming-of-age story, because they may be able to learn a lot about overcoming their fears and what is the true meaning of friendship.

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

In order to gain a better understanding of the term fantasy, we need to be able to differentiate it from 'science fiction and 'speculative' fiction' literary genres it is frequently mixed with. Considering science fiction and fantasy, Abrams (1999) argues that these terms encompass novels and short stories that represent "an imagined reality that is radically different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience. Often the setting is another planet, or this earth projected into the future, or an imagined parallel universe" (p. 279). When examining science fiction, we need to observe its literary evolution:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is often considered a precursor of science fiction, but the basing of fictional worlds on explicit and coherently developed scientific principles did not occur until later in the nineteenth century, in such writings as Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. Recent important authors of science fiction include Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Ray Bradbury, J. G. Ballard, and Doris Lessing. Science fiction is also frequently represented in television and film; a notable instance is the *Star Trek* series. (Abrams, 1999, p. 279)

Science and Magic

Science fiction is often associated with space, time-travelling, robots or advanced technologies, whereas fantasy is usually connected to the aspect of the supernatural and the occult. The genre of science fiction is also associated with dystopian settings, often placed in a far-away future. The genre applies advanced technology such as "time travel or space travel, and/or a dystopian setting, where society embodies grave injustices or suffering. These science fiction elements allow readers to explore important, often scary, ethical or theoretical questions from the safety and comfort of their sofas" (Day, 2022). Science fiction, with its futuristic depictions, can raise serious questions among readers. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the genre of fantasy predominantly deals with the impossible, whereas science fiction actually deals with possible events. Fantasy is grounded in imagination, while science fiction deals with scientific principles. Both genres require strong internal consistency and sets of rules, however in fantasy different rules are portrayed by different authors while in science fiction the rules are dictated by nature and physics. Although there are notable differences, a particular degree of overlapping features prevails. Science fiction and fantasy imagine worlds different from our own, and both deal with hypothetical elements. Occasionally, the authors can blend both categories resulting in a genre known as 'science fantasy' or 'fantasy science' fiction. A great example of this is *Star Wars*. The setting of the story, within its own media of representation,

is predominantly space, yet the Force is more or less completely magical (Day, 2022). For this reason, it comes as no surprise that the two genres are often used interchangeably among readers. It is hard to define where one genre begins and the other finishes. To put it in simple terms, events in science fiction may be true, but not in fantasy:

In other words, science fiction is about what *could* be but isn't; fantasy is about what *couldn't* be. In the main, this boundary works pretty well. As rational people, we know that magic doesn't work and superstitions are meaningless. So if magic works in your story, if superstitions come true, if there are impossible beasts like fire-breathing dragons or winged horses, if djinns come out of bottles or mumbled curses cause disease, then you're writing fantasy. (Card, 1990, p. 22)

As Card (1990) argues, the truth is that good fantasies “carefully limit the magic that is possible. In fact, the magic has to be defined, at least in the author’s mind, as a whole new set of natural laws that cannot be violated during the course of the story” (p. 23). Science fiction can also be associated with the terms ‘magic realism’ and ‘science fantasy’. In the first case, writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and John Fowles apply magic realism, use real-life, ordinary events and interweave them with mythical, fantastical and dream-like elements: “Writers interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales” (Abrams, 1999, p. 196). In the case of science fantasy, science fiction and fantasy are combined into a narrative hybrid. The narrative presents beauty, awe and terror connected to desires, dreams and the feelings of dread. Malmgren (1988) explains the following:

Like “magic realism,” another narrative species enjoying a burgeoning interest, science fantasy is an oxymoronic form. In the counternatural worlds of science fantasy, the imaginary and the actual, the magical and the prosaic, the mythical and the scientific, meet and interanimate. In so doing, these worlds inspire us with new sensations and experiences, with “such beauty, awe, or terror as the actual world does not supply,” with the stuff of desires, dreams, and dread. (p. 274)

It is safe to assume that science fiction and fantasy, although being separate narrative species, can work together and create literary worlds which will captivate readers’ minds. They are, in fact, much closer than we anticipate. Evidently, many people do not necessarily make an error if they switch science fiction with fantasy, and vice versa, since fantastical elements can be housed within science-fiction literature. Various elements of magic realism, science

fantasy, fantasy (low or high) and science fiction come together to create contemporary literature. Finally, another term known as ‘speculative fiction’ should also be considered.

Speculative Fiction As the Super-genre of Literature

Speculative fiction can be perceived as a ‘super-genre’, due to the fact that speculative fiction does not fit into literary fiction, science fiction or even fantasy. It is a particularly broad term. Speculative fiction incorporates fantasy, science fiction, horror, dystopian fiction and many others genres. Speculative fiction is complex because it encompasses a plethora of different literary genres and thereby it connects their different features.

The term ‘speculative fiction’ was originally coined by the writer Robert Heinlein in 1941 during the time when poets and fiction authors started reimagining reality for their art. Speculative fiction features stories that portray human misery. George Orwell’s *1984* is arguably the most popular dystopian representation (Iwunze-Ibiam, 2020). Besides Orwell, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* and especially nowadays Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* have all gained large popularity. Atwood’s novels have been adapted to film and television. In speculative fiction, *dystopia*, i. e. the bad place, is applied to works of fiction, including science fiction. It primarily represents a very unpleasant imaginary world where ominous tendencies of our contemporary socio-political and technological order in one way or another are projected into a disastrous future culmination:

The term dystopia ("bad place") has recently come to be applied to works of fiction, including science fiction, that represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination. Examples are Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986). Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) contains both Utopian and dystopian scenarios. (Abrams, 1999, p. 328)

Oziewicz (2017) argues that literary sub-categories, like speculative fiction, exist as a fuzzy, super-category, combining and housing other genres which depart from imitating reality and this scope incorporates basically everything “from fantasy, science fiction, and horror to their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres, including the gothic, dystopia, zombie, vampire and post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, weird fiction, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream” (p. 2). Due to the multi-layered nature of fantasy and speculative fiction, particular readers may understand the two categories interchangeably. Likewise, with all the elements which science fiction can bring into this picture, it comes as no surprise that

the borders between such literary sub-groups are vague to say the least. This super-genre allows everybody to find something for themselves. In other words, younger readers are able to explore their favourite genre traits, for example from horrors or dystopias, and fully immerse themselves into the experience of reading speculative fiction. Additionally, younger readers can develop their own critical thinking if they observe the ominous motives in such stories. They are able to examine and better understand repercussions behind socio-political upheavals, dangerous technological breakthroughs depicted in speculative fiction. By analysing such motifs in speculative fiction, the readers can understand the dangerous of the contemporary society and enhance their own awareness concerning such topics as geopolitics, ecology, the role of women, racial issues, but also many other things. While some readers may enjoy reading speculative fiction because of the interesting, ominous and macabre subject matters, they are simultaneously able to learn something from such forms of literature. Speculative fiction provides different readers with thrilling stories, but it also prompts them to constantly re-evaluate the contemporary world.

FAIRY-TALES AS PRECURSORS OF FANTASY

Since childhood, facets of folklore, primarily fairy-tales, play a significant role in children's upbringing. Stories which begin with the ever-so-famous line 'once upon a time', or which end with another famous line 'they lived happily ever after' are closely related to the realm of fairy-tales. The question remains whether the magic of fairy-tales appears in contemporary fantasy literature. Readers are often unable to separate the two, mistakenly associating them with literature for children. Occasionally, the two genres may be perceived as a single unity. From ancient and early mediaeval myths, to early modernity and dramas such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, fairy-tales and fantasy elements have merged into fiction. Nowadays, they are perceived as narratives which portray tricksters, fairies, goblins, damsels in distress, chivalrous knights and ugly crones. Just as it was the case in previous chapters, this section of the research also describes the notion that fantasy is not easily definable and that it connects to yet another sub-genre of literature.

From Folklore to Fairy-tales

Fairy-tales are analysed as one of the sub-types of the wider literary genre known as folklore. Folklore encompasses myths, legends, tall tales, fables and fairy-tales. Fairy-tales are presented as shorter tales with magical events or characters (Children's Literature (Fairy Tales, Folklore, Myths, and Legends), 2022). The influence of mythos cannot be disregarded in either

case. Fairy-tales and fantasy are marked by numerous mythological motifs. Be that as it may, the influence of fairy-tales on the genre of fantasy is rarely acknowledged: “This is largely because of J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote an analytical essay called *On Fairy Stories*, (1947, based on a conference given in 1939), in which he distanced himself from the sentimentality of what he described as “the age of childhood sentiment”” (Besson, 2014). We should primarily note that several key differences exist between fairy-tales and fantastical pieces of literature.

Namely, the first aspect that we have to draw our attention to are the different varieties of supernatural characters appear in these genres:

Fairy tales and fantasy have certain characters (dwarves, elves, monsters and more) and elements (such as magical items) in common, as well as structures and archetypes, since fantasy aims to be the latest avatar of timeless stories. Fantasy covets fairy tales’ “origin narrative” aura, as those narratives lend themselves to bringing intimate impulses and existential interrogations to the surface, enabling access to invariants that are no longer simply narrative, but anthropological and psychoanalytic. (Besson, 2014)

Fantasy may also contain particular elements of the coming-of-age story, which can also be tackled in fairy-tales. For example, a poor, unloved orphan such as Harry Potter or Lyra can be reminiscent of fairy-tale characters such as Cinderella or the Ugly Duckling. Such characters, through the narrative structure, find their rightful place in the world and often such fictional individuals are honoured and become famous:

Fantasy may contain traces of initiatory, coming-of-age structures – such as quests and other trials – as well as examples of narratives’ compensatory role in Freudian “family novels,” fantasies of “magical” powers that are always put into perspective. In *Harry Potter* (J.K. Rowling, 1997-2007), for example, a poor, unloved orphan who is reminiscent of fairy-tale characters like *Cinderella* and *The Ugly Duckling* soon takes his rightful place in the world where he belongs, and where he is honored and respected like a rich, famous prince. But his journey is far from over, and that euphoric, fairy-tale path turns out to be largely misleading. In that sense, Harry also illustrates the “initiatory” trajectory, in the weak sense, whose prototype can be found in fairy tales’ plot lines, including, most notably, a symbolic death, which turns out to be a decisive stage. (Besson, 2014)

Fairy-tales carry important messages to the child’s mind. Bruno Bettelheim (1976) argues the following:

Fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with

universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures. (p. 7)

Fairy-tales somewhat function as a transitional phase for younger audiences. On one side, they are initially meant for children, but younger readers start reading more complex forms of literature once they grasp the thematic framework of the fairy-tale stories.

The Evolution of Fantasy

The fairy-tale *Beauty and the Beast* should be considered. Beauty, her father's favourite daughter, asks the father for a (white) rose rather than a more costly present. However, it should be noted that Beauty is unaware that she is asking for too much. Her father steals the rose from the Beast's garden and her father is thereafter captured and taken prisoner. The girl insists to take her father's punishment. She ventures to live in the enchanted castle with the Beast for three months. Afterwards, her father falls ill and she secures permission to go to him, yet because Beauty delays her return to the Beast, she discovers that the Beast is dying. Beauty promises to wed him if only he will not die, whereas the Beast turns into a handsome prince. In analysing this story, the Beauty is equated with any young girl or woman who has entered into an emotional bond with her father. The girl's request for a rose shows that she is at the beginning innocent and unreasonable. She must eventually break away from her father. By learning to love the Beast, Beauty awakens to the power of human love. This complexity of fairy-tales as precursors of fantasy indicate that fantasy literature is not trivial. It must instead be taken quite seriously (Aquino, 1977, p. 13-14). This argument indicates that fairy-tales, if analysed as the underdeveloped form of contemporary fantasy, carry significant amount of seriousness and they directly or indirectly affect the younger readers. Once children venture outside the fairy-tale realm and segue into the realm of fantasy, they are able to better understand the emotional complexities of fantasy, which can mimic real-life expectations, thoughts or events. Just as in the case of high fantasy, fairy-tales present plausible emotional responses which help the readers retain their belief or interest while reading a fairy-tale book.

However, particular problems in literary theory and genre-classification still exist when analysing fantasy and fairy-tales. Some distinguishing traits are only necessary for theoretical purposes. Contemporary fantasy literature, in theory, can be derived from old fairy-tales. Particular story-tellers, such as the Grimm brothers or Andersen, may convey a personal touch, whereas each version may reflect its own time or society. On the other side, fantasy literature is a conscious creation, wherein fantasy authors choose the form that suits them best for a

particular purpose. This purpose may be instructive, religious, philosophical, social, satirical, parodical, or entertaining. Fantasy has distinctly lost the initial sacral purpose of traditional fairy-tales. Fantasy is an eclectic genre, since it borrows traits not just from fairy-tales, but from myth, romance, the novel of chivalry, the picaresque, the gothic novel, mysteries, science fiction, as well as other sub-genres, blending seemingly incompatible traits. For instance, it blends pagan and Christian images, magic wands or lightsabers (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 139). The element of hybridity appears yet again in the relationship between contemporary fantasy and older fairy-tales. Fantasy undertook a process of development on the basis of formal evolution and genre transformation (Kahrić, 2022, p. 165). It means that fantasy gradually developed as a genre from fairy-tales, but it also formally evolved to fit the desires of youngest readers and more mature audiences. Such a development shows that fantasy is not a static genre. As many other stories and types of genres, fantasy rapidly grows and spreads. Many readers who are children can venture from fairy-tales to more mature topics of fantasy once they become young adults. This indicates that as many readers grow so do their reading preferences. For example, some younger readers can opt for fantasy later on in their life because they enjoyed the supernatural first discovered in famous fairy-tales.

The Readers of Fairy-tales and Fantasy

Authors, such as Robert Holdstock with his *Mythago Wood* series, venture into human psychology, Clive Barker and his horror narratives encompass graphic imagery, whereas Charlaine Harris with her supernatural romance series about Sookie Stackhouse, which includes recurring themes of sex and violence, are all undoubtedly targeting adult readers. It becomes evident that their prospective audiences are adults only. The case is different with other sub-genres of fantasy, especially the ones which do not combine supernatural romance with explicit sexual scenes and reappearing themes of violence, but opt for other images. Fantasy and fairy-tales constitute a fluid continuum and are not utterly separate entities of literature. The fluidity and lack of clear-cut boundaries both equally allow writers to move and to venture freely between the two genres (Łaszkiewicz, 2019, pp. 14-15).

It is no wonder that ‘the Bard of Fantasy’, that is to say Tolkien, influences so many contemporary writers since the *opus* of fantasy is particularly flexible, open and progressive in its own right. Fantasy serves as an effective portal to contemporary literature. Young readers may learn to love fairy-tales at the beginning of their reading adventure, but *en route* they may embrace the genre of fantasy which will be their own pathway into contemporary literature. Thus, readers may discover Lewis, Tolkien, Rowling or Martin and profoundly kindle their

imagination and the innate sense of creativity. For this reason, it is safe to assume that fantasy and fairy-tales share many common features and that two groups of story-telling rely much on each other. Fantasy and fairy-tales are undoubtedly generically related groups of narratives which leave their mark on contemporary audiences, for it can be argued that fantasy emerged from fairy-tales, while older fairy-tales slowly emerged from folklore. Going even further back, we can safely assume that folklore emerged out of oral traditions, traditions of old legends and rudimentary forms of different European and non-European myths. In our research, we conclude that younger and more mature readers are able to find something in both fairy-tales and different forms of fantasy. Fantasy is the literary genre which has something for everybody. It functions on the basic *dulce et utile* principle and as such it allows numerous peoples, from varying literary and cultural backdrops, to immerse themselves into the world of imagination, creative and critical thought.

CONCLUSION

The world of magic and awe, of the supernatural and the macabre, is no longer reserved simply for the realm of literature. The contemporary period allows readers to experience vast developments in medicine, technology, industry and science which can sometimes appear totally unreal, almost fantastical. Since the 19th century, our reality has been vividly altered. Many inventions and events described only in books of fantasy or science fiction came true. The genre of fantasy, therefore, allowed numerous generations of readers to experience the world of reality in different ways, because one has never been enough. Many younger readers start by reading fables and fairy-tales in their younger years and they get introduced to the world of magic. In case they enjoy the supernatural, they can develop interest for another genre, which is in this case fantasy, and thereby start reading authors such as Tolkien or Rowling. Additionally, younger readers can get a better access to literature, as such, and begin to research other writers. The readers are able to expand their horizons and they can get interested in exploring literary genres such as fantasy, science fiction and speculative fiction. Sometimes, literature can have a significant impact that younger readers begin to write or creatively express themselves by writing. They can discover a potential profession in life by reading, e. g. science fiction stories, and afterwards they may decide to become an engineer, a scientist or an astronaut. Fantasy, science fiction, speculative fiction, but also all other forms of contemporary literature, allow the readers to widen their horizons and to navigate their own interest more clearly.

Fantasy serves as a portal to contemporary fiction. It is an imagined world which could, at one point or another, come to be. Elements of contemporary reality which in the past seemed highly unlikely or out-of-this world very much appeared in modern reality through science and progress. This study may serve as fertile ground for many readers who are willing to discover the world of fantasy and understand its theoretical nature more clearly, since the world of fantasy can intrigue many scholars and admirers of literature.

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Fantazija: Portal za savremenu književnost

Sažetak

Osnovna uloga ovog rada je opisati teorijsku pozadinu žanra fantastike i objasniti važnost fantastike za mlađe čitatelje. Ovaj žanr može poslužiti kao izravan prolaz (portal) u carstvo književnosti i bezvremenskih priča koje vrijedi posjetiti. Budući da fantazija funkcionira kao višeslojna zbirka književnih djela, ne čudi što se njeno značenje ne može zanemariti u okviru suvremenih studija žanra. Nadalje, fantazija se opisuje kao zanimljiv 'superžanr' koji obuhvaća razne druge podžanrove. U radu se dominantno razlikuje tzv. visoka i niska fantazija, no rad se fokusira na Harry Potter franšizu, jer djela J. K. Rowling predstavljaju djelić fantastike koji se ne može lako definirati. Ovaj rad opisuje različite podvrste fantastike, te sličnosti i razlike koje postoje između znanstvene fantastike i spekulativne fantastike. Također, rad istražuje značaj žanrovske evolucije i preobrazbe iz bajki. Fantazija je prikazana kao vrlo složen i ozbiljan žanr kojem mlađi čitatelji mogu pristupiti putem klasičnih bajki. Zaključno, ova studija služi kao opsežan uvod u bolje teorijsko razumijevanje zamršenog žanra fantastike.

Ključne riječi: fantazija; visoka i niska fantazija; studije žanra; superžanr; bajke