

EXPLORING  
FANTASY LITERATURE

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following book contains a selection of critical articles exploring different aspects of contemporary fantasy literature. These articles, originally published in a number of journals and volumes of collected essays, have been gathered and edited so as to form a coherent book whose aim is to familiarize readers with the genre of fantasy fiction. All articles are revised and reprinted with permission. I would like to express my gratitude to all publishers for their kind permission to reprint the chosen articles in this publication.

Chapter 1 is a revised version of my article “The Antique and Modern Dimensions of Fantasy Literature,” which was published in the journal *Annales Neophilologiarum* (7/2013, pp. 103–117). Chapter 2 is a revised version of my article “Longing for the Enchantment of the Old World: Fairies in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Literature,” which was published in *Dwelling in Days Foregone: Nostalgia in American Literature and Culture*, edited by Weronika Łaszkiewicz, Zbigniew Maszewski, and Jacek Partyka (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 103–112). Chapter 2 also contains revised fragments of my Ph.D. dissertation entitled “In Search of Christian Values, Motifs and Symbols in North American Fantasy Literature,” which was defended at the University of Białystok in 2016. Chapter 3 is a revised version of my article “Finding the Way through Fantasyland: Maps and Cartography in Modern Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *Visuality and Vision in American Literature*, edited by Zbigniew Maszewski, Weronika Łaszkiewicz, and Tomasz Sawczuk (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2014, pp. 143–155). Chapter 4 is a revised version of my article “Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature,” which was published in the journal *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* (1/2013, pp. 24–36). Chapter 5 is a revised version of my article “The Anti-Christian Dimensions of Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *The Light of Life: Essays in Honour of Professor Barbara Kowalik*, edited by Maria Błaszczewicz and Łukasz Neubauer (Libron, 2017, pp. 203–216). Chapter 6 is a revised version of my article “The Reinvention of Lycanthropy in Modern Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited*, edited by Andrzej Wicher, Piotr Spyra, and Joanna Matyjaszczyk (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 91–103). Finally, Chapter 7 is a revised version of my article “Peter S. Beagle’s Transformations of the Mythic Unicorn,” which was published in the journal *Mythlore* (33.1/2014, pp. 53–65).

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WERONIKA ŁASZKIEWICZ

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Selected Topics



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## INTRODUCTION

Not so long ago, the academic world tended to regard fantasy literature with a certain dose of skepticism or even suspicion: its marvelous adventures and larger-than-life protagonists offered a pleasant form of escapist entertainment, but they could not be the object of serious scholarly investigation. Nevertheless, the proliferation of fantasy novels and short stories, which developed particularly after the publication of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the 1950s, demanded some critical attention, and many scholars who accepted that task soon discovered the vast potential hidden in the yet unexplored material. Today, though a dose of skepticism is still present, the academic world is generally open to the study of fantasy literature, and numerous investigations of the genre's literary, cultural, political, sociological, and other contexts have produced a rich body of scholarly works. The following book is the result of my own study of fantasy literature conducted over the last few years.

While researching the field of literary fantasy, I have particularly focused on the historical development of the fantasy genre in Britain and the United States, as well as on the genre's complex relationship with religions, myths, and fairy stories. Some of that research was eventually published in book format as *Fantasy Literature and Christianity* (McFarland, 2018), while other ideas were explored in separate articles printed by a range of publishers. I believe that these articles, when collected and properly edited, can serve as an informative introduction to and exploration of the mechanisms of contemporary fantasy literature and the critical theory that has been produced in response to the genre's development and popularity. Readers new to research on fantasy literature, particularly students who wish to support their interest in fantasy fiction with a more critical and scholarly perspective, will find in this book an accessible discussion of several concepts indispensable to the study of the genre. More advanced readers, who are already successfully researching fantasy literature, might be interested in the case studies of specific topics, which are also included in this publication. Since every chapter is a self-contained piece, readers interested in a particular topic need not read the entire work to fully comprehend its argument. Any cross-references to a related topic which is addressed elsewhere in this book and suggestions for further reading are placed in the final section containing chapter notes.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the study of the origins and present condition of fantasy literature. It examines the genre's relationship with ancient mythology, its development until its emergence as a modern genre, and its exclusion from mainstream literature (for its supposed lack of realism and its childish fancy). This chapter also investigates some attempts at classifying fantasy literature (classifications developed by John H. Timmerman, Lisa Tuttle, and Farah Mendlesohn), and explains the meaning and significance of such concepts as sub-creation and mythopoeia (J.R.R. Tolkien), the monomyth (Joseph Campbell), and the degradation of myth in fantasy fiction (Bogdan Trocha).

Chapter 2 focuses on American literature before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Part one discusses fantastic elements present in the works of canonical American authors, which were published between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. the works of Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne), in order to prove that long before the emergence of the fantasy genre *per se*, American literature was already filled with various instances of the fantastic. Part two focuses on the elements of European legends and fairy stories preserved in a range of American texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which also contributed to the evolution of American fantasy fiction. The ways in which John Milton Harney, Joseph Rodman Drake, James Kirke Paulding, and Charles M. Skinner incorporated fairies into their works reveal the impact which the legacy of the Old World had on the sensibility of American writers.

Chapter 3 investigates maps of imaginary worlds so often included in fantasy novels. It explains how and why fictional maps became an inherent feature of modern fantasy (particularly in the context of J.R.R. Tolkien's notion of sub-creation), and analyzes their role as a channel of communication between the writers and readers of fantasy fiction. The critical discussion of the role of maps in the genre is then followed by a comparative analysis of more than twenty maps found in a range of American fantasy novels (e.g. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series, Patrick Rothfuss' *The Kingkiller Chronicle*, Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series, and Piers Anthony's *Xanth* series). This analysis allows to form certain conclusions about the functions and flaws of the genre's imaginary cartography.

Chapter 4 examines how and why fantasy literature addresses the topic of religion. Part one explores the reasons for the presence of religious themes in fantasy (such as the genre's dependence on myths and the authors' individual choice to use the genre as a means of religious criticism). Part two analyzes a selection of fantasy novels—the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, C.S. Lewis, Guy Gavriel Kay, Celia S. Friedman, Jack Vance, Poul Anderson, Philip Pullman, Dave Duncan, George R.R. Martin, and Brandon Sanderson—in order to discuss the different ways in which fantasists may approach



religious themes, i.e. by inventing secondary (i.e. fantastic) religions that enrich their imaginary realms, by reworking particular religious themes and transforming them into prominent components of the quest and the entire narrative, and by supporting, promoting or criticizing a certain faith or religious institution through the means of fantasy fiction.

Chapter 5 complements the previous section by investigating the anti-Christian dimensions of fantasy literature. The fantasy genre allows writers to create alternative worlds which can challenge established beliefs and customs. Yet these subversive, alternative worlds are not the only means through which fantasy fiction can oppose, or even rebel against, Christianity. In some cases, fantasy fiction challenges Christianity by displaying a strong preference for the mythic past and its pagan religion(s) revolving around old deities and nature worship, and by presenting Christianity as the antagonistic element in the narrative. Such are the premises of, for instance, Robert Holdstock's "Thorn" and "Scarrowfell," Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, Charles de Lint's *Moonheart* and *Greenmantle*, and Clive Barker's *Weaveworld*. The analysis of these works reveals a different dimension of the relationship between fantasy literature and religion (Christianity in particular).

Chapter 6 is a case study of the image of lycanthropy delivered by contemporary fantasy fiction. After a brief introduction to the mythological, psychological, and social readings of lycanthropy, this chapter analyzes the unconventional werewolf figures appearing in Stephen King's *Cycle of the Werewolf*, Torill Thorstad Hauger's *Varulven og Iselin*, and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, as well as the female werewolves present in Peter S. Beagle's *Lila the Werewolf* and Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series. The analysis of these works demonstrates how fantasists have transformed the motif of lycanthropy, which is indicative of a greater process within the fantasy genre—the transformation of myths.

Chapter 7 analyzes how and why Peter S. Beagle's four works—*The Last Unicorn*, "Julie's Unicorn," *The Unicorn Sonata*, and "Two Hearts"—transform the traditional image of the unicorn. The analysis is developed in reference to Bogdan Trocha's study of the degradation of myths in modern fantasy literature, i.e. the processes of elimination, reduction, condensation, and transposition of borrowings from mythology, as well as the process of mythopoeic speculation. Similarly to the image of lycanthropy discussed in the previous chapter, Beagle's extensive reconstruction of the unicorn mythos can be regarded as indicative of larger mechanisms underlying the entire genre. The extent of his reconstruction can also serve as inspiration for further research on the presence of mythological figures and patterns in contemporary fantasy.



## CHAPTER 1. THE ANCIENT AND MODERN DIMENSIONS OF FANTASY LITERATURE

While various elements of the fantastic have been present in world literature since ancient times,<sup>1</sup> the development of the fantasy genre *per se* started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the works of two Victorian writers: William Morris and George MacDonald.<sup>2</sup> Morris' early short story "The Hollow Land" (published in 1856) was soon followed by a number of more acclaimed epic poems (e.g. *The Earthly Paradise*, 1868; *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung*, 1877) and "pseudo-medieval romances"<sup>3</sup> (e.g. *The Wood Beyond the World*, 1894; *The Well at the World's End*, 1896; *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*, 1897), which were inspired by medieval tradition and depicted semi-fantastic worlds filled with magical objects and occurrences (Clute and Grant 821). MacDonald, who was deeply concerned with religion and thus wrote narratives of allegorical nature that addressed spiritual matters, began his literary career with the oneiric novel *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858), which was succeeded by his other notable works of fantasy (e.g. *The Princess and the Goblin*, 1872; *Lilith: A Romance*, 1895). Consequently, Richard Mathews recognizes both British writers as "the pioneers of fantasy as a modern literary genre" (2002, 16). As far as American fantasy is concerned, Brian Attebery traces the genre's beginning back to L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and its complex secondary (i.e. imaginary) world in which Dorothy of Kansas experiences all kinds of fantastic adventures (1980, 83–108).

The works of Morris, MacDonald, and Baum helped to open British and American literature for the development of what is today recognized as modern fantasy fiction. In subsequent decades, fantasy fiction underwent several transformations which reshaped its form, lured new writers who further contributed to its evolution with their individual perception of the fantastic, and gathered an international audience. All along its development, fantasy literature has been struggling to secure a position within the literary world largely dominated by the realist novel. Part of this struggle is still visible today. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the genre's modern dilemmas through the prism of its ancient roots in order to reveal the irony behind its exclusion from mainstream literature.

### THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN FANTASY LITERATURE

To properly understand modern fantasy it is necessary to investigate the genre's early origins. Mathews acknowledges the importance of Morris and MacDonald for the creation of modern fantasy, but he also argues that while the genre is less than two hundred years old, its origins reach back far into the times of antiquity (2002, xv–xx, 1–11). Mathews is 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 numerous supernatural figures and elements, many of which—semi-divine heroes, magical items, and fearsome monsters among them—became staple components of modern fantasy. Scholars of fantasy literature widely agree that the genre is greatly indebted to mythological traditions of the past. What is more, when Mathews writes 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” (2002, 1), his statement not only points to the genre's multiple sources of inspiration, but also strengthens its position in the vast body of Western literature. Mathews argues that the presence of the fantastic in ancient narratives was both a fundamental “human impulse toward fantasy” (2002, 10) 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 the fantastic (supernatural) was an inevitable solution. The fantastic present in mythological traditions was used to conceptualize the sacred, and the same is still partially true of the fantasy genre since it frequently serves as a medium for discussing existing religions (Łaszkiewicz 24–31, 42–56). The complex relationship between the fantasy genre, myths, and religion will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

It is worth noting that fantasy literature transgresses international boundaries since, from the very beginning, fantastic elements have been present in the narratives of various cultures (Hartwell 367). 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.<sup>4</sup> Mathews' list of titles which are not part of the fantasy genre, but which contributed to the continuing presence of the fantastic within world literature, is then further complemented by such distinctly different works as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (2002, xv–xx). The range of genres (e.g. epic poetry, prose satire, dystopian fiction, and several others) as well as

literary traditions embraced by Mathews' list illustrates the diverse roots of the modern fantasy genre.

In fact, until the end of Renaissance when realism began gaining popularity as the dominant narrative mode, fantastic elements were an indispensable part of writing. They permeated the marvelous adventures depicted in Arthurian poems and romances (e.g. Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*), strengthened the spiritual dimensions of medieval and Renaissance works concerned with matters of religion and morality (e.g. the medieval poem *Pearl*, John Bunyan's allegorical *Pilgrim's Progress*), and featured prominently in many plays (e.g. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*). It was only in the Age of Reason that the fantastic was excluded from mainstream narratives, because faithful depiction of objective reality was considered the most desirable mode of writing. Nevertheless, elements of the fantastic resurged in the Romantic period (particularly in Gothic fiction), and with the advance of the novel as a literary form, Victorian fantasy narratives eventually became a counterpoint to the mainstream literature of realism. Other modes of expression, such as satire and utopian novels, horror and science fiction also contributed to the shaping of the modern fantasy genre.

It needs to be pointed out that while some of these works were clearly meant for adult readers, several texts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that made use of fantasy were initially targeted at a younger audience, which eventually led to the confused reception of the modern fantasy genre. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1882), L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and James M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904) are examples of narratives which seem suitable primarily for children, but which can be appreciated also by adults since only mature readers with a certain degree of knowledge will be able to decipher and appreciate their various social, political, and cultural allusions. Given their imaginary worlds and mood of fairy-tale enchantment, all of these works can be considered milestones in the development of fantasy literature, similarly to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord the Rings* (1954–1955). Mathews firmly states that “[t]he interface between children's literature and adult fantasy is a fruitful continuum that has led many younger readers into adult fantasy” (2002, 17). Yet 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 significance. Though some fantasy narratives are inarguably targeted at children, others display layers of symbols, metaphors, and allusions which can be comprehended and enjoyed only by a more experienced audience.

### CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS OF THE MODERN FANTASY GENRE

Given the prevalent presence of the fantastic within European literature of subsequent periods as well as the multi-faceted development of the modern fantasy genre in Anglophone literature since the works of Morris, MacDonald, and Baum, it is rather surprising that the genre is still regarded with some suspicion by literary scholars and critics. The analysis of the genre's contemporary problems is going to concentrate on three separate issues: realism, audience, and classification.

The lack of realism has long been one of the chief arguments against the fantasy genre. While mainstream literature is extolled for its thorough and detailed study of human life, fantasy fiction is often scorned for its bizarre adventures, larger-than-life heroes, and imaginary realms. In the eyes of those who perceive literature as a mirror that should reflect the world subjected to human senses, fantasy narratives are, at most, a pleasant form of escapist entertainment which seldom displays serious literary depth and is, therefore, doomed to remain in the sphere of mass (popular) culture. At worst, fantasy literature is deemed as nothing more than the product of the writer's childish fancy and embodiment of the writer's desire for magic and wonder. Thus, the act of writing becomes a mode of substitution which allows the writer (and later the reader as well) to attain the unattainable, i.e. introduce magic into the world of daily duties and obligations. This line of thinking strongly highlights the genre's escapist qualities. However, this escapist potential of fantasy may also explain its success in contemporary culture. To quote Eric S. Rabkin, "The real world is a messy place where dust accumulates and people die for no good reason and crime often pays and true love doesn't conquer much. In one sense all art is fantastic simply because it offers us worlds in which some order, whatever that may be, prevails" (3).

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 its topics are too demanding for the younger audience. Of course, works of such writers as, for instance, Robert Holdstock with his *Mythago Wood* series which ventures into human psychology, Clive Barker with his horror novels which contain very graphic imagery, and Charlaine Harris with her supernatural romance/mystery series about Sookie Stackhouse which includes 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, particularly 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 or individual fantasy narratives 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 fiction meant for children (e.g. L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*). Though such categorization is, in many cases, misguided, the tag of "children's literature" can effectively 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. Though fluidity and lack of clear-cut boundaries allow writers to move freely between the two genres, they also facilitate misunderstandings about the nature and prospective audience of fantasy fiction.

These and other concerns are addressed by J.R.R. Tolkien in his seminal 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 comes from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its claims are still more than valid. Tolkien investigates, among others, the fairy-story as a mode of literary expression which deserves proper recognition. Tolkien was interested in establishing certain boundaries between fantasy and children's literature most probably because of his own books. His first published novel, *The Hobbit* (1937), was born as a story for his children. Because of its immense popularity among younger readers, Tolkien's publisher urged him to write a continuation. However, what was originally meant as the sequel to the adventures of Bilbo Baggins eventually evolved into an intricate heroic epic informed by Tolkien's medieval and linguistic studies, and addressed at adult readers—*The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55).<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien elaborately discusses the forms and origins of fairy-stories, and examines some misconceptions pertaining to this form of literature. Immediately, he discards as sentiment the idea that fairy-stories (and fantasy in general) are meant only for children, and argues that both children and adults may either enjoy such works or find no pleasure in them at all (34–36). Moreover, Tolkien believes that since fairy-stories are composed by adults, they cannot be separated from their creators and left to the use of children only, lest they should deteriorate—Tolkien illustrates this idea with a striking comparison to a microscope carelessly left in a schoolroom (35).



Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation are four concepts which Tolkien regards as inseparably linked with the mode of fairy-stories. Through the means of Fantasy (Imagination) and Art, writers can achieve Sub-creation, i.e. evoke to life a Secondary World.<sup>6</sup> Everything inside that World is considered true, because it functions (or at least should function) according to certain laws established by the author, without which the imaginary reality would become chaotic and senseless. In order to enter the Secondary World, readers must temporarily suspend their disbelief; Tolkien argues that Secondary Belief is indispensable for the proper reception of fantasy. In other words, 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” (45). He also claims that because it takes great skill to sub-create a Secondary World, such an achievement is, in fact, an exceptional form of Art (46). In his final conclusion, Tolkien states that mankind’s ability to create is grounded in its likeness to God in whose image people were created. Artistic creation is, therefore, a minute reflection of divine creation (52).

Tolkien further supports these claims when he investigates the other qualities of fairy-stories: Recovery, Escape, and Consolation. Thanks to the quality of Recovery, readers of fairy-stories may gain a new awareness of objects and events from their surroundings, which might have become all too familiar. The quality of Escape offers temporary freedom from everyday routine and obligations, from technology and lack of connection with nature, from such social maladies as hunger and poverty, and, finally, from death (61). The Consolation provided by fairy-stories is always connected with a Happy Ending and Eucatastrophe, i.e. “a good catastrophe” (62).<sup>7</sup> Though fantasy narratives depict sorrow and despair, they simultaneously provide moments of true joy and offer moral and emotional consolation that will reach readers even in the real world. It is worth noting that Tolkien, a devout Catholic, considered the birth of Christ the most significant Eucatastrophe in human history—a story which is the source of the greatest sorrow, but also of the greatest joy (65).

If the artistic creation of a Secondary World is a reflection of divine creation in which the writer assumes the role of the Maker, and the qualities of Recovery, Escape, and Consolation have such deep psychological significance as it is postulated by “On Fairy-Stories,” then fantasy fiction should, by no means, be disregarded or rejected. Tolkien’s essay transforms 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.

The genre's vast potential of sub-creation is particularly noteworthy. Acclaimed fantasists such as Steven Erikson (*Malazan Book of the Fallen* series), George R.R. Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire* series), and Brandon Sanderson (*The Mistborn* series) have created intricate worlds characterized by complex (and very realistic) political, cultural, social, and religious structures, which are informed by a range of sources (including world mythology, medieval tradition, and contemporary politics). Two levels of sub-creation which deserve separate mention here are the genre's propensity for language-making and myth-making (mythopoeia). As far as language-making is concerned, fantasists regularly invent names for their fantastic characters, locations, and inventions. Interestingly, these linguistic novelties may then enter the already existing lexicon of words. The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is a case in point. Due to the series' immense popularity, quite a few of the words invented by Rowling have enriched the English language (and other languages after the series was translated). Today, words such as "muggle" and "quidditch" are items recognized almost internationally. Still, while Rowling's creation has had a considerable impact on language and popular culture, Tolkien's achievement is, arguably, far greater. Given that Tolkien equipped each of his fantastic races with a separate language possessing its own vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics (for which he borrowed material from ancient and modern languages that he had mastered himself), Michael N. Stanton is right when he points to "Tolkien's love of languages as the bedrock foundation for his story" (147). The sub-creation of Tolkien's Middle-earth encompasses linguistics, because the writer believed that language is an indispensable part and embodiment of every culture; thus, Tolkien's world-building is grounded and immersed in fantastic languages.<sup>8</sup> Tolkien's approach to writing fantasy has become so influential that many fantasists, even if they are unable to design entire languages, still insists on inventing at least a set of words and phrases to enrich their imaginary worlds.

The myth-making aspect of the fantasy genre is perhaps even more complex than its linguistic creativity. Embedded in ancient traditions, fantasy literature continues to recast ancient myths in new settings and to generate artificial mythologies that often reconstruct symbols and archetypes borrowed from existing traditions, which are then combined with the author's original ideas.<sup>9</sup> If mythology is perceived as a key element of a society's cultural identity, it is not surprising that a fantastic 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) is a detailed account of Middle-earth's cosmology and development. Because Tolkien's complex vision was the outcome of years of laborious studies, there are not many works which can match the magnitude of his creation. Still, the continuing and varied presence of myths—be it Roman, Greek, Celtic, Norse or secondary (i.e. invented by the writers)—in the works of other authors also deserves acknowledgement.

However, it has to be noted that the reconstruction of mythological material in fantasy narratives is a multi-faceted process. Bogdan Trocha's *Degradacja mitu w literaturze fantasy* (*Degradation of Myth in Fantasy Literature*, 2009)<sup>10</sup> is an extensive study which examines mythological borrowings within the fantasy genre in order to demonstrate that the genre (and, presumably, the entire body of popular fiction which reconstructs mythological material) both destroys the original ancient heritage by recycling its elements and, at the same time, preserves its remnants in contemporary literature (8–14, 48–83). In his study, Trocha explores an impressive number of fantasy novels and determines several areas of borrowings (e.g. mythological deities, figures of power, fabulous creatures, magical artifacts, religious concepts, etc). The study allows him to discuss the ways in which writers of fantasy approach—and also appropriate—mythological traditions: elements of the borrowing, if unnecessary, are reduced or even entirely eliminated (the borrowing is limited to a few characteristic features which form an incomplete image of the chosen entity); condensed (the fictional entity consists of layers of mythological references); and transposed (the features originally characteristic for one mythological entity are moved onto another). The end result is an entity inspired by or rooted in ancient myths, yet different from the original, because it can be further transformed by the writer's vision of the secondary world. Trocha uses the term "mythopoeic speculation"<sup>11</sup> to describe the writer's creative attempts to incorporate mythological borrowings into the narrative (197–213). Of course, the complexity of mythopoeic speculation depends on the skills and imagination of a given writer. Trocha's remarks on different approaches to mythological borrowings will be useful in subsequent chapters examining the images of werewolves and unicorns present in contemporary fantasy. Below, I suggest to divide Trocha's concept of mythopoeic speculation into certain levels.

The first—and most basic—level of mythopoeic speculation includes works which adopt and rework mythological material, but (secondary) myths are not among the central elements of the narrative. Such works frequently rely on the mechanisms identified by Trocha (elimination, reduction, etc.), because mythological borrowings are employed to quickly and effortlessly enrich the

story and strengthen its fantastic dimension. Aside from that, they are of little significance, e.g. gods appearing in the narrative might resemble those from the Greek or Norse pantheon, the protagonist might be fashioned as a mythic hero, and the names given to people and places might be derived from one myth or another, yet the writer does not further explore the implications which these borrowings might create for his imaginary world. Such a treatment of myths is characteristic of less accomplished and mass-produced formulaic fantasy novels identified by Attebery (1992, 9). Arguably, the value of such reconstructions lies in the possibility that they will motivate readers to conduct their own research on myths whose traces and remnants they encounter in a given novel.

The second level of mythopoeic speculation includes works in which the element of fantasy is introduced primarily or solely through mythological borrowings, and these mythological borrowings frequently appear in the narrative as intrusions of myth/fantasy into the ordinary world. Such narratives frequently offer new readings of ancient symbols, figures, and conflicts. A perfect example of such a work is the *Mythago Wood* series (1984–2009)<sup>12</sup> by Robert Holdstock, in which mythic and folk figures suddenly disrupt the protagonists' ordinary lives and lure them into the mysterious forest where they need to face the horrors lurking not only in the wilderness, but also in their own minds. Holdstock's incarnated mythic figures (the so-called mythagos) are a compelling combination of the speculative potential of the fantasy genre and mankind's ancient heritage which, as Holdstock implicitly argues, is still alive in the (collective) subconscious. Another fine example of mythopoeic speculation at this level is Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001) in which the protagonist, a modern man, is entangled in a conflict between old European gods and new gods created in America, who struggle for existence and dominance in the New World.

The third level of mythopoeic speculation includes works whose imaginary worlds heavily rely on secondary mythologies—these mythologies, with their various rules and prophecies, condition both the life of the communities depicted in the narrative and the development of the plot. This category is exemplified, for instance, by *The Black Jewels* (1998–2011),<sup>13</sup> a popular romantic fantasy series by Anne Bishop. The protagonist, Jaenelle Angelline, is the incarnation of the prophesied Witch (i.e. the most powerful female in Bishop's world) who will defeat Dorothea SaDiablo and end her reign of violence. Emulating some elements of the journey of a mythic hero (the monomyth) described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949),<sup>14</sup> the first three volumes show Jaenelle's difficult childhood, maturing, and rise to power, until she is ready to fulfill the prophesized role of a savior (after the

protagonist is finally recognized as Witch, she is frequently described as the dream incarnate and the living myth).

The importance of secondary mythology is even more explicit in Robert Jordan's multi-volume high/epic fantasy series *The Wheel of Time* (1990–2013). While subsequent volumes of Bishop's series put less and less emphasis on Jaenelle's mythic role and instead describe her other adventures, in *The Wheel of Time* the entire story revolves around the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy which announces the coming of the mythic Dragon Reborn who will battle the evil Shai'tan and save the world from destruction. In the most basic sense, Jeanelle and Rand (the Dragon Reborn) share the same story of prophesied birth, difficult path to maturity and power, and long-awaited battle. Yet the difference in scope and complexity of both narratives is incomparable. While Bishop's series provides only fragments of the mythological background of her imaginary world, Jordan's world overflows with accounts of the past, including historical and mythological sources retelling the Dragon's first battle with Shai'tan, the fall of humanity, and the development of new civilizations (which then establish their own prophecies regarding the coming of the Dragon Reborn). Nonetheless, both series provide the same testimony: worlds of fantasy fiction thrive on myths and are driven by myths, driven not only by fragments borrowed from existing mythological traditions, but also by secondary myths which writers invent to anchor the protagonist's quest and to enhance the believability of the imaginary reality.

These three levels of mythopoeic speculation are not, of course, clear-cut categories which account for all the nuances of the genre's relationship with mythological traditions. Other aspects of this relationship, e.g. the applicability of Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth to fantasy fiction and Marek Oziewicz's claims about the restorative potential of mythopoeic fantasy, have been addressed in my previous work.<sup>15</sup> Arguably, the most complex and compelling fantasy narratives can rekindle readers' interest in myths and redirect their attention to their ancient heritage which is still significant for the postmodern world, since it is myth, not technology, that can provide answers to different questions regarding human existence. All in all, the intricacy of the (successful) process of sub-creation explains why Tolkien perceived the act of establishing fantasy worlds as akin to divine creation.

### SUBGENRES OF FANTASY FICTION—ATTEMPTS AT CLASSIFICATION

Apart from discussing the potential of fantasy literature and refuting arguments against it, scholars of the genre have tried to address the topic of its inner classification. Because of the diversity of contemporary fantasy

fiction, construing one proper division is an enterprise requiring more pages than this chapter may provide. Still, three different classifications should be briefly discussed, because they allow both readers and writers of fantasy to grasp the scope of the problem. In *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction* (2005), Lisa Tuttle presents a condensed typology of fantasy fiction based on features which she perceives as the most characteristic for a given subgenre. Thus, Tuttle singles out the following categories (10–13): heroic fantasy (also called sword and sorcery; its narrative usually follows the pattern of a standard quest), high/epic fantasy (longer than a heroic epic and with a wider spectrum of significant characters), dynastic fantasy (an extension of epic and heroic fantasy, which covers the adventures of the hero's descendants), humorous fantasy (whose unquestionable master is Terry Pratchett), dark fantasy (with a pervading sense of horror and presence of the occult), time-slip fantasy (with the motif of time travel), magical realism (in which fantastical elements suddenly appear in the ordinary world), and romantic fantasy (in which the fantastic and romantic dimension are of equal significance).

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 narratives: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal, which are “determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world” (xiv). The portal-quest fantasy confronts, both the reader and protagonist, with an unfamiliar fantastic reality ready for discovery during the quest/adventure. In the portal-quest fantasy usually only one interpretation of the world and 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; 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 explanation provided by the author 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 protagonist 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 protagonist may learn more about the occurrence. Again, one interpretation of the unfold-

ing events tends to prevail; however, only the events experienced with their own senses serve as a reliable source of information for the protagonists. The fantastic intrusion that disrupts normality must be then faced and dealt with (e.g. defeated or controlled). Mendlesohn states 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 background, in some works not even completely revealing its presence. What is more, even though fantastic elements might be a novelty in the fictional world, they do not surprise the protagonists at all. This doubles the feeling of amazement for the reader: firstly, the reader is surprised by the fantastic appearance and, shortly after, confused by the protagonists' lack of reaction. Liminal fantasy is the fantasy of equipoise of the everyday and fantastical worlds, and it often employs irony for their presentation. (Mendlesohn 1–245)

Yet another attempt at classifying fantasy is proposed by John H. Timmerman in *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre*. Compared to the more recent works of Tuttle and Mendlesohn, Timmerman's book may be initially viewed as slightly out-dated since it was published in 1983. However, a closer look proves that the author's claims are still valid. Timmerman identifies six features which 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 realm and experiences it through the Common Character: “common” means it is, at least initially, 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 protagonist 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 adventures unfold, the presence of Magic and the Supernatural which may appear in various forms, the choice of the Struggle between Good and Evil as the main motif of the narrative, and the presence of the Quest, i.e. a set of trials and adventures which the protagonist must endure in order to complete the Story. (Timmerman 5–103)

It is clear that the classifications designed by Tuttle, Mendlesohn, and Timmerman approach fantasy from significantly different angles. Tuttle's analysis concentrates on the driving motifs and styles of fantasy narratives (e.g. quest/adventure, time travel, romance, horror), as well as on the structure of the works in question (their length, spectrum of characters, etc.). Her division is probably the most useful for readers and writers of fantasy, because it allows them to decide which subgenre of fantasy fiction they prefer. In contrast, Mendlesohn devotes her cross-sectional research to the construction of the



narrative, explaining how fantasy is introduced into the plot, how it cooperates with the rest of the story, and what degree of involvement it demands from the reader. Finally, Timmerman proposes a structural approach and deconstructs the genre into its six most significant features.

Each of these classifications is convincing and, to a certain degree, captures the nature of fantasy literature. 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 Tuttle herself acknowledges (11). Mendle-sohn's strategy focuses on the relationship between fantasy, the plot, and the reader, but it does not account for other features which could further diversify fantasy fiction, e.g. topics addressed by a particular work. Finally, Timmerman's six features of fantasy fiction give rise to various questions. Does every feature need to be present for a work to be considered fantasy? If not, how many are necessary? Are some features more important than others? Moreover, the multitude of currently existing subgenres 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. high/epic or heroic fantasy. When studied separately, these three attempts at classification seem incomplete. Perhaps the best results can be achieved if all three systems are implemented simultaneously to decode the structures and categories of particular fantasy narratives.

All in all, contemporary fantasy fiction is a greatly diversified genre which, by no means, can be placed under the heading of children's literature. 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" (2002, xii). Because of its ability to combine the power of imagination with a vast literary heritage, which can be then harnessed for the benefit of sub-creation, fantasy literature offers infinite possibilities for the human mind, regardless of the age of readers. In *How Literature Works*, Kenneth Quinn writes: "In literature nothing is impossible [...]. Things happen that no one in his right mind would accept" (87). Quinn applies this statement to literature in general. However, if literature in general can pride itself on such unrestricted possibilities, then fantasy literature further extends the infinite freedom of writerly imagination. To quote Timmerman, "[i]t is this intellectual prison of one's own mind, commonly accepted as unavoidable, that modern fantasy seeks to liberate" (47). Fantasy literature offers a temporary alternative to the material reality which the readers already know. By entering, exploring, and analyzing a Secondary World, readers may gain fresh awareness that will al-

ter, upon return from the imaginary realm, their perception and understanding of the world experienced on a daily basis. Such was once the role of myths and storytelling, and fantasy literature is a modern heir to that tradition.



## **CHAPTER 2. FANTASTIC ELEMENTS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE BEFORE 1900**

Though it was William Morris and George MacDonald who initiated the development of the fantasy genre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then C.S. Lewis (the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) and J.R.R. Tolkien who largely defined its form and style in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the contemporary market of fantasy fiction is dominated by American writers who have relentlessly explored and expanded the boundaries set by Lewis and Tolkien. In the previous chapter, following Brian Attebery's research, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) was indicated as the work which initiated the development of the fantasy genre in the United States. Since I have already investigated the development of American fantasy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in my previous work,<sup>1</sup> the aim of this chapter is to complement that study with an analysis of fantastic elements present in American literature before 1900, since those early works became the foundation that facilitated and conditioned the development of fantasy literature in the US.<sup>2</sup> The proposed analysis is divided into two parts: part one identifies fantastic elements in the works of canonical American writers between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and part two focuses on elements of European legends and fairy stories preserved in a range of American texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which also contributed to the evolution of American fantasy literature.

### **FANTASTIC ELEMENTS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE BETWEEN THE 17<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

Before the arrival of European colonists in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, America already possessed a culture—the oral cultures of Native American tribes whose stories are replete with otherworldly figures and supernatural events (e.g. spirits, tricksters, shape-shifters, talking animals, magical encounters, and transformations into plants and animals). These stories, grounded in the tribal practices of shamanism and vision quests, were meant to teach members of a given community about their history, identity, and culture as well as to offer guidance and consolation (Kuiper 11–15). Thus, similarly to ancient European myths, indigenous stories should not be regarded as works of fantasy

in the present definition of the word, but as sacred narratives which preserve a given community's beliefs and knowledge about the creation and existence of humanity, nature, and the universe. It needs to be added that indigenous stories were construed, performed, and preserved in different ways than European myths, since indigenous communities relied on oral culture and shaped their stories according to their considerably different assumptions about the world (Kroeber 1–8). Dismissed by the evolving mainstream American culture because of their worldview contrasting with Christianity and neglected for being the product of a “primitive” and conquered ethnic minority, indigenous stories seldom had an impact on the development of American culture, and it would be incorrect to claim that they significantly influenced the evolution of the fantasy genre in the US. Nonetheless, indigenous stories, similarly to European myths, eventually became a repository of motifs readily adopted and reconstructed by contemporary fantasy, horror, and science fiction—yet this practice would deserve a separate study since it raises complex questions about the mechanisms of cultural transfer and the harmful practices of cultural appropriation.

As far as the literature of colonial American is concerned, fantastic elements appeared primarily in the religious works of the Puritans as ubiquitous references to the existence of the supernatural—witches, demons, and magic—that supposedly threatened the safety of the pious Puritan communities. This belief in the reality of the supernatural world, which eventually led to a series of witch trials, was best expressed by Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693). Divulging the devil's plan to retrieve the land that had been his domain before the arrival of Christian colonists, Mather's work voices Puritan beliefs in the reality of the otherworldly as embodied by God and the devil, and reflects the community's tangible fear of witchcraft and evil spirits that may corrupt godly people and destroy their ideal of the City on a Hill, i.e. the model of a Christian community that other settlements in the New World should emulate. To support Mather's claims, *Wonders of the Invisible World* recounts testimonies given during the Salem witch trials (1692–1693), which abound in descriptions of sinister magic practices, demonic possession, and malevolence inspired by the devil.<sup>3</sup> Though the Salem witch trials were eventually condemned and the colonists became more concerned with matters of politics, economy, science, and national liberty, the Puritan heritage—with its supernatural dimension—had a considerable impact on the imagination of subsequent American writers.

Among the critics who condemned the paranoia of witch-hunting was Robert Calef whose text—*More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700), an obvious mockery of Mather's publication from 1693—firmly refuses to give

credence to the belief in witchcraft unless that belief can be supported by rational evidence. Calef's stance can be considered the beginning of the Enlightenment's skepticism of the supernatural,<sup>4</sup> which had a major impact on the presence of fantastic elements in American literature. Brian Attebery writes:

Early national writers concentrated on the rational and practical problems of nation building and for the most part ignored such superstitions—beliefs, that is, that transcended direct experience and common sense—as remained in oral circulation, and evidence indicates that tradition, too, began to slight the supernatural. (1980, 24)

The 18<sup>th</sup> century “slighting of the supernatural” was both a reaction to the obsession with witch-hunting and part of the process of rationalization which initially encompassed many of the European ballads and folktales brought to the New World (Attebery 1980, 17–19). By and large, the period of the Enlightenment, with its focus on the formation of national identity, the struggle for American independence, and preference for science and objectivity, significantly reduced the presence of the fantastic in American literature.

The Enlightenment's dismissal of the fantastic changed with the onset of American Romanticism. The works of Charles Brockden Brown, who is considered the precursor of American Gothic fiction (*Gothic Literature*, vol. 2, 155), indicate this shift in perception. In *Wieland; or, the Transformation* (1798) readers follow Clara Wieland's account of the tragic events which ruined her family. On the one hand, the narrative is a genuinely Gothic story: though there are no haunted castles, the text includes an unreliable narrator, mysterious deaths, religious delusions, threats of insanity, and pervading sense of doom—all firmly embedded in an American setting (*Gothic Literature*, vol. 2, 153). On the other hand, Brown explains at the beginning of his work that the incidents described find support in medical evidence. Thus, *Wieland* becomes a mixture of the rational and the otherworldly, and as such illustrates the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. Similarly, the fantastic dimension of Brown's next major work, *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799), can also be reasonably explained as the delusions of a sleep-walker and stealthy attacks of vicious Native Americans. Nevertheless, since both works evoked images of shadowy landscapes, featured protagonists plagued with dreams and doubts, and hinted at the presence of unidentified supernatural forces, they successfully blurred the lines between the rationally explicable and the otherworldly. Consequently, though critics recognize the structural shortcomings of Brown's works, they also “express admiration for his intense artistic vision and his struggle to reconcile his Romantic imagination with the Enlightenment ideals of reason and realism” (*Gothic Literature*, vol. 2, 153).

The period of Romanticism eventually reinstated the fantastic into American literature. Brown's works became an inspiration for the most prominent Romantic writers, including Washington Irving, whose best-known short stories—"Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)—combine supernatural motifs with elements of fairy tales, and firmly situate them within the American landscape. In "Rip Van Winkle", the eponymous character sleeps for twenty years after drinking a magic liquor, and upon awakening has to reestablish his life in America after the Revolution. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" reworks European folktales of headless horsemen in the story of Ichabod Crane, a schoolteacher who is pursued by a headless rider, one of the many apparitions apparently present in Sleepy Hollow. Neither ruled by the Puritan dictum nor fully akin to Gothic fiction, Irving's short stories entertained readers with their supernatural events and, by filling American landscapes and minds with fairy-tale enchantment and ghostly presence, strengthened the presence of the fantastic in American literature (*Gothic Literature*, vol. 2, 442–443). Consequently, according to Paul Kincaid, Irving is the writer "with whom the story of American fantasy really begins," because he "showed his successors that America itself was a suitable and appropriate home for the fantastic" (37).

Alongside Irving, other key writers of American Romanticism—Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne—also made use of fantastic elements, though for vastly different purposes. Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic short stories abound in menacing apparitions, atrocious deaths, haunted spaces, and maddened protagonists, whose role is to evoke ubiquitous terror. By clashing the rational and irrational, Poe explores the hidden dimensions of human unconsciousness and suggests that there is something beyond the earthly existence.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, his stories often rationalize the supernatural events as hallucinations, clever hoaxes, or the narrator's unreliability, which strengthens the reader's confusion regarding the true nature of events. Taking all of these elements into consideration, Robert T. Tally calls Poe a fantasist and his multifaceted *oeuvre* a type of fantasy (125). Tally believes that the fantasy genre and Poe's Gothic stories possess the same ability to question the dictates of our world through the means of alternative realities (125). He explains: "For Poe, the fantastic mode offers the opportunity to see differently, to apprehend reality not in the arrogant sense of the amateur social scientist, [...] but as fantasist who can better grasp an alternative to the images held up before one's eyes in order to call them into question" (Tally 132). This line of argument transforms Poe into a literary predecessor of such modern fantasists as Tolkien who frequently emphasized the ability of the fantasy genre to question and recast in new light ideas often taken for granted (see Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories").

What is more, some of Poe's works are actually more driven by the notion of fairy-tale enchantment rather than the menace of the Gothic supernatural. For instance, in the essay "The Island of the Fay" (1841) the narrator argues that solitary contemplation of nature allows to understand infinity and mankind's place in the universe. It is during one of his solitary walks that the narrator finds a charming island, whose one end is basked in light and the other veiled by shadows. Soon enough, a Fay emerges from the shadows, circles the island in her boat, and disappears in the dark. This cycle continues until the Fay, growing more shadowy with every passing, is no longer visible. Though the essay—so different from Poe's usual stories filled with images of violence and atrocity—is clearly a philosophical piece in which the ephemeral Fay is a symbol of the inexplicability of life and death, it does evoke the feeling of enchantment inherent to fairy stories rather than to Gothic fiction. A similar atmosphere appears in some of Poe's poems, e.g. "Fairy-Land" (1829) and "Dream-Land" (1844), which conjure images of otherworldly spaces haunted by mystery and melancholy.

In comparison, the fantastic elements appearing in the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne are more tangible than the ethereal and estranging manifestations present in Poe's poetry and fiction, probably because their primary function is to enhance the allegorical nature of a given story and serve its moralizing purposes. For instance, in "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) the eponymous character ventures into the forest in order to accompany the devil to a blasphemous ceremony—the fantastic dimension of this tale is clearly embedded in the Puritan belief in witchcraft and the workings of the devil, and is intended as a critique of the hypocrisy of the Puritan community. In "The Great Carbuncle" (1837), a tale structured upon the well-known quest motif, a group of heroes is searching for the eponymous gem. Their semi-fantastic quest allows Hawthorne to comment on the futility and nonsense of various human desires. Set in Italy, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1846) is the story of Beatrice, a girl who became poisonous because her father had raised her in a poisonous garden. Beatrice's beloved, Giovanni, attempts to cure her, but his endeavor is doomed to fail. In this reversal of the biblical story of Eden and the original sin, Hawthorne exposes humankind's susceptibility to temptation. "Feathertop: A Moralized Legend" (1852) is perhaps the most fantastic among all of Hawthorne's tales. A witch, Mother Rigby, decides to animate and humanize her scarecrow (she gives him a pipe which he must puff in order to remain alive), and then allows him to explore the world. Unfortunately, Feathertop eventually discovers his true identity and is so devastated that he throws his pipe away. The moral message of this fantastic story is clear: Feathertop's integrity is destroyed by knowledge of his true self, while many people continue

to live happily in self-deception. Still, with its playful approach to the figure of a witch (so condemned by the Puritan tradition) and its moral message balanced by the appearance of magic typical for fairy tales, "Feathertop" might be the most amusing and fantastic among Hawthorne's short stories.

It needs to be added that apart from filling his short stories with fantastic elements, in his romances Hawthorne argues in favor of a writer's right to imbue his works with fantasy.<sup>6</sup> In the well-known preface to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), "The Custom-House," Hawthorne explains how moonlight can disclose the otherworldly qualities of everyday objects and transform them into something extraordinary. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) he adds that the writer of romance is, in fact, fully entitled to freely introduce "the Marvelous" into his works—Hawthorne's "the Marvelous" is a term which lacks a precise definition, but seems to denote fantastic elements and the atmosphere of some otherworldly mystery. Both texts reveal Hawthorne's awareness of the potential of the fantastic and his approval of its presence in American romance. As Scott Friesner argues, "The Custom-House," when read as a literary manifesto, "seeks to assert the role of the fantastic within Romance," whereas when read as fiction, it "illustrates that Hawthorne's celebrated ambiguity is grounded in his refusal to discredit or disavow the eruption of the fantastic" (34). Attebery does not hesitate to acknowledge the role of American romance in the development of American fantasy: "Romance, with its doubts and doubleness, its shifting levels of primary and secondary belief, differs in its aims from pure fantasy. Nevertheless, in solving their own literary problems, the romance writers helped clear the way for more fully developed fantasies, stories concerned not so much with shadows and ambiguity as with sheer wonder, told with a full measure of belief" (1980, 58).<sup>7</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fantastic elements appeared also in narratives depicting exaggerated adventures at the frontier, time travels, and ghostly encounters. Many so-called "dime novels" featuring the Wild West (written, e.g. by Edward S. Ellis) were "usually highly coloured if not outright fantastic adventures of genuine characters like Jesse James" (Kincaid 41–42). The motif of time travel appeared, for instance, in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), a utopian novel about an ideal communistic society in the year 2000, explored by a young man from 1887, and in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), which presents a clash between the modern protagonist and the superstitious medieval England of King Arthur's court. As far as ghostly encounters are concerned, several of Henry James' short stories (e.g. "The Ghostly Rental," "Altar of the Dead") and the novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) are haunted by apparitions.

tions or permeated with some otherworldly presence (sometimes perceived only by the protagonist), which the author uses to explore the mechanisms of human psychology (Lustig 2). Though none of these 19<sup>th</sup> century writers could be called a fantasist in the modern sense of that word (i.e. a writer of fantasy fiction *per se*), their works moved beyond the boundaries of objective reality. All in all, between the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these and other American writers created a rich legacy of works that imbued Americans minds and landscapes with the fantastic, which inarguably contributed to the development of the American fantasy genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### FAIRIES IN 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

A topic which deserves separate mention in the discussion of fantastic elements in American literature before 1900 is the conspicuous presence of fairies in a range of works created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> The ways in which writers such as John Milton Harney, Joseph Rodman Drake, James Kirke Paulding, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Charles M. Skinner incorporated fairies into their works reveal the impact of the legacy of the Old World on the sensibility of American writers. On the one hand, some of these writers wished to imbue America with a sense of wonder similar to the one permeating European fairy tales, so they transplanted particular motifs (and European fairies) into American literature. As a result, their works voice a nostalgic longing for the enchantment of the Old World and, indirectly, for the Old World itself. On the other hand, other writers used fairies as a means to extol the superiority of the New World, which dispelled the charm of the old continent. Finally, still others dealt with the notion of assimilation, and verified whether the European legacy of enchanting stories could be successfully combined with the American landscape and experience. This part will examine a selection of works by Harney, Drake, Paulding, Whittier, and Skinner in order to demonstrate how these works not only strengthen the presence of fantastic elements in American literature, but also express a vicarious yearning for the Old World, boastfully promote the New World, and attempt to recombine the old with the new to create something distinctly American.

John Milton Harney's *Crystalina: a Fairy Tale* (1816) and Joseph Rodman Drake's "The Culprit Fay" (published posthumously in 1835) are examples of texts which imitate the conventions of European romances in hope that American readers will be fascinated by their fairyland imagery. Harney's *Crystalina* is a chivalric romance which follows the adventures of Rinaldo,



a brave knight, whose betrothed, princess Crystalina, is kidnapped by the fairy king, Oberon. With the help of a hermit, Rinaldo ventures into the subterranean Fairy Land, finds Crystalina, reverses her metamorphosis, and rescues her from her oppressor. Harney's poem received mixed reviews: while some critics complimented the author's rich language and imagination, others—like Philadelphia's *Port Folio*—argued that “Modern taste requires something more substantial than these airy nothings” (“Crystalina...”). Drake's “The Culprit Fay” is even less successful in its depiction of fairies. The eponymous fay loses the favor of the fairy king due to his love for a human girl. To retrieve his status, the fay needs to perform certain tasks. His knightly apparel, errant adventures, and loyalty to the maiden are also a distant echo of a chivalric romance. Nonetheless, the awkward disproportion in size—the fay is a tiny creature and the maiden, presumably, a regular human girl—and childish imagery hardly appealed to adult readers. Attebery explicitly condemns the poem as saccharine and grotesque, because it “gets bogged down in cobweb hammocks, acorn helmets with thistle plumes, and boats made of ‘muscle’ shells” (1980, 29). Both *Crystalina* and “The Culprit Fay” seem hardly anything more than imitations of European chivalric conventions, which (perhaps inadvertently) voice a nostalgic longing for the enchantment of the Old World.

James Kirke Paulding's *A Gift from Fairyland* (1838; also known as *A Christmas Gift from Fairyland*) differs from the two previous works in that Paulding's stories about fairies are often a façade which allows the author to extol the virtues of the New World. Thus, instead of just emulating European fairy tales, *A Gift from Fairyland* reworks them until they fit, or even represent, life in America. The freedom offered by America is a theme recurring throughout the collection. Paulding's fairies are characterized by their want of liberty, so it is only natural that they emigrate to the New World (iii). In “Florella or The Fairy of the Rainbow,” a princess yearning for freedom is overjoyed when she is transported to the New World by her fairy godmother, and prefers to remain there instead of returning to the Old World of stilted etiquette and bonds of social hierarchy. When the princess announces: “I will stay where I am, and share with the rest of my fellow-creatures, what God has given equally to all” (57), her words are a fine reflection of American patriotism and democracy.

While “Florella” rejects the Old World for its restraints on freedom, “The Philosopher and Fairy Ring” derides a person's over-reliance on science. The eponymous character does not believe in fairies who, enraged by his disbelief, intend to teach him a lesson. Paulding's description of the fairy community is reminiscent of American society and its yearning for freedom from the dominance of the Old World: “a republic, situated somewhere in the great west-



ern continent, whither they [fairies] had been driven by the persecutions of science and philosophy. It was composed of emigrants from all parts of fairy land, in the known world, who had united together for defence against their great enemies, the philosophers" (66). Despite their efforts, the fairies never manage to convince the philosopher of their existence. However, that disbelief eventually costs the man his life, because he decides that the only way to prove to himself that he exists as a human being is to die—and he succeeds at doing that. The implied moral of the story is that such fanciful debates lead to nothing useful, and the Philosopher would have been happier in the Old World.

In another of Paulding's stories, "The Fairy Experiment," the narrator reveals a bit more about the fairy republic of the New World. After their migration, the fairies were initially ruled by a king and queen, whom they soon began to oppose, so eventually the royal pair had to flee to the Old World. Then, the independent-minded fairies abolished hereditary rights, and established a Republic and a government, which were ruled by equality and liberty (164). Apparently, the American land possesses some innate feature which induces the migrants to rebellion, since both the colonists and the fairies opposed royal reign.<sup>9</sup> It was perhaps because of these obvious allusions to politics that *A Gift from Fairyland* failed to impress readers. Though Paulding's explicit juxtaposition of Europe and America in favor of the latter dispels the nostalgic longing for the Old World, it also fails to offer in return the experience of uniquely American enchantment.

Aside from poetry and children's books, stories about fairies appeared in records of American folklore. John Greenleaf Whittier's *The Supernaturalism of New England* (1847) and Charles M. Skinner's *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* (1896) reflect two different approaches to fairies in the New World. Whittier's *The Supernaturalism of New England* consists of tales about specters, witches, and haunted houses that people apparently encountered in the region of New England. Though Whittier seems genuinely amused by the stories, he nonetheless remains skeptical about the existence of the supernatural. His skepticism is particularly clear when he writes that the belief in fairies "never had much hold upon the Yankee mind—our superstitions being mostly of a grimmer, and less poetical kind" (59–60). The story further related by Whittier is introduced as the last rumor about New England's fairies. One day, a group of migrant fairies settled at an inn, which then became very popular with customers who gathered to hear the fairies speak in a Yankee-Irish dialect. However, the customers soon began to doubt whether the fairies existed at all. While some sources claimed that it was because of the prevailing suspicion that the fairies eventually moved out of the inn, others suggested

that the fairies “disappeared” because they were revealed to be the landlord’s daughters hidden in the ceiling. The message of Whittier’s story is clear: Old World superstitions will not thrive in America.

Charles M. Skinner’s *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land* also supports the claim that it is a difficult task for American authors to successfully assimilate Old World fairies. Skinner’s work is a bizarre collection of stories which combine elements of European folk tales with Native American legends and accounts of tragic, but perfectly natural events that occurred in different regions of the US. Though Skinner clearly does not wish to treat America as inferior to Europe (8), he seems unable to avoid making comparisons with the Old World, and claims that “as time goes on the figures [...] of our history will rise to more commanding stature, and the mists of legend will invest them with a softness or glory [...] Washington hurling the stone across the Potomac may live as the Siegfried of some Western saga, and Franklin invoking the lightnings may be the Loki of our mythology” (8). For Skinner, the heritage of the Old World is clearly a point of reference, a standard to be met or perhaps even surpassed. The stories in his collection transpose elements of European folktales and fairy tales onto the American land in order to invest the New World with a similar sense of enchantment. Interestingly, most of the tales link supernatural events with a specific place or region in the New World (in fact, the entire collection is divided into sections devoted to specific areas—the Hudson, the Delaware, the Great Lakes, and so forth). By placing the supernatural within geographical boundaries, Skinner creates an impression that American lakes, rivers, mountains, and valleys are full of mysterious wonders and threats—in doing so he is, consciously or not, tapping into the rich “repertoire of European fantasies concerning the West” (Kroes 3), which presented it as a lost and forbidden territory, a paradise and a land of redemption, a place of extraordinary novelties and dangers (Kroes 1–13). Moreover, even when some of Skinner’s stories do not contain anything overtly supernatural, they still account for numerous tragic deaths and love affairs, perhaps to enhance the romantic character of a particular location. Richard Dorson ironically surmises that

Skinner appears happiest when one lover dies, through foul play or mischance, and the other goes witless and pines to an early death. Where he dug up all his enamored pairs will probably remain an unfathomed mystery. The net effect is to make the path of true love in America appear unbearably torturous and leading only to a memorial cliff, or cave, or pond where one or both of the tormented duo meet their untimely death. (73)

Dorson’s comment about the unfathomable sources of Skinner’s love tales is an implicit criticism of Skinner’s method of compiling *Myths and Legends*: several tales are abridged versions of popular stories by, for example,

Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne, yet Skinner seldom gives credit to their original authors. For instance, a reworked version of Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" opens the entire collection. The motifs of ghosts, magic sleep, and time travel invest the Catskill mountains with the quality of enchantment. Even so, to increase the story's similarity to a fairy tale, Skinner alters Irving's descriptions: the man whom Rip meets in the forest is called "a dwarf" with a "green and ghastly" face, whereas one of the men playing bowls is "cloaked and snowy-bearded," thus almost resembling a wizard (Skinner). Such artificial references to fairytale figures and objects reappear throughout the collection. The "Catskill Gnomes" brew a magic liquor which shrinks the body and inflates the head. In "Moodus Noises" two rival groups of witches regularly fight in a cave lit by a great carbuncle; if they fight for too long, the king of Machimoddi, sitting on a sapphire throne, raises his wand and extinguishes the light to stop the fight. "The White Mountains" describes the fate of stolen Indian children who are changed into fairies. In "Dunderberg" the narrator claims that the eponymous mountain is populated with imps whose leader speaks in Dutch. What is more, many of these tales freely combine native characters with remarks about elves, castles, and wizards (one Indian villain, Norsereddin, even claims that he is a descendant of Egyptian kings). This suggests that in his pursuit of a nostalgic pseudo-fairy tale effect Skinner frequently disregarded other conventions.

Yet as awkward as some of Skinner's stories often seem, they account for supernatural elements preserved by the tales of settlers and Native Americans, thus confirming their place within the body of New World folklore and partially dispelling the nostalgia for the enchantment of the Old World. Simultaneously, those of Skinner's tales which do not artificially impose fairytale conventions on the narrative prove that the fantastic is already present in America, though it is not embodied by European-like fairies and castles, but rather by the unfathomable menace of the wilderness and the ghosts of American natives and settlers. A fine example is the story "A Trapper's Ghastly Vengeance": a trapper avenges the death of his wife and child by having the Indian perpetrator tied to a horse together with their bodies; the condemned rider is said to be still haunting the woods. Richard Dorson, though rather critical of Skinner's collection, contends that Skinner gave Americans "pretty tales cloaking the American hills, coasts, rivers, and prairie with romantic associations culled from a past skimpy by European standards but approaching a respectable three centuries in his day" (69).

What is more, *Myths and Legends* include several tales pertaining to American history, featuring both common soldiers and national heroes, like George Washington. Such tales seem particularly designed to strengthen the readers'

patriotic feelings, which also dispels the nostalgic charm of the Old World. The longing for enchantment is then satisfied by the wonders of the New World. For instance, the narrator of "The Gray Champion" insists that a "tall, white-bearded man in antique garb"—the spirit of New England—will appear in order to encourage the citizens to fight for their rights "whenever any foreign foe or domestic oppressor shall dare the temper of the people" (Skinner 226). This New England champion is—like Davy Crockett, Johnny Appleseed, and other American folk figures—a peculiar synthesis of a traditional folktale hero and the embodiment of American independence, embedded in a uniquely American landscape.

The sense of wonder and enchantment produced by such a combination seems more genuine than that offered by stilted imitation of old conventions present in the works of Harney and Drake. Tales which tap into the stories of colonial struggle to tame the wild land, recognize the formation of America's national identity, and acknowledge the country's difficult path to self-government not only endow America with a sense of wonder, but also anchor the fantastic within the country's own history. Even if these stories still display some influences of Old World conventions, their movement beyond imitation of European folktales and literature towards a visibly American (literary) spirit deserves its due acknowledgment (provided, of course, that these stories do not become blatant metaphors of America's history like some of Paulding's "fairy tales"). All in all, the diverse presence of the fantastic within American literature between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both in the works of mainstream writers as well as in the evolving American folk tales, helped to open American literature for the development of modern fantasy.

## CHAPTER 3. CARTOGRAPHY IN (AMERICAN) FANTASY LITERATURE

Though maps of imaginary realms are one of the most characteristic (Tuttle 50)—and perhaps puzzling—features of fantasy literature, they have received decidedly less attention from scholars of the genre than other aspects of modern fantasy. In recognition of their ubiquity, the following chapter is going to investigate the origins and roles of imaginary maps within the structures of the genre in order to assess their significance for the readers and writers of fantasy fiction. This theoretical investigation will be then supplemented by a comparative analysis of a group of maps selected from a range of American fantasy novels, which will illustrate the diversity of fantastic cartography.<sup>1</sup>

### IMAGINARY MAPS AND THE ACT OF SUB-CREATION

In *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction* (2005), Lisa Tuttle argues, and rightfully so, that the presence of maps within the fantasy genre should be linked with J.R.R. Tolkien (50). The enormous success of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* dictated the unofficial rules of writing fantasy for decades: since Tolkien supplied his world of Middle-earth with maps, subsequent writers accepted imaginary cartography as an indispensable element of a fully-fledged fantasy novel (Stanton 171). Indeed, they were right to recognize the significance of maps since their presence in Tolkien's works was not accidental.<sup>2</sup> Maps accompanied Tolkien's literary work from the beginning: *The Hobbit* was equipped with two maps, *The Lord of the Rings* with three, and still other maps were prepared for *The Silmarillion* (Drout 405). Tolkien's maps can be praised both for their artistic and narrative value: "The long, flowing lines, rhythmic patterning, and graceful curves blur the line between the craft of cartography and the art of illustration. But the maps were not intended to be decorative only; they were integral parts of the written work and were intended to be accurate representations of the text" (Drout 405). Tolkien's cartographic endeavors correspond with his theoretical claims on crafting fantasy narratives, which are developed in the essay "On Fairy-Stories." This essay, as it was already said in Chapter 1, presents the concept of sub-creation, i.e. the literary act of establishing a fully believable Secondary

World that can convince readers to temporarily suspend their disbelief, so that they can immerse themselves in the fantastic reality (9–73). The creation of maps can be perceived as one of the elements of sub-creation, since a precise and well-structured map can enhance the believability of the secondary realm: the map becomes a tangible image of something that otherwise exists only in the imagination of the author, and it serves as a medium through which readers can gain access to the author's private vision. Many authors after Tolkien must have realized that cartography can allow readers to relate to their secondary worlds, hence the ubiquity of fantastic maps.

Tolkien, however, was not the only fantasist to include maps in his fantastic narratives at that time, so he should not be regarded as the sole founder of this tradition in the fantasy genre—though his lasting impact on American fantasy, particularly in the period of the 1960s–1980s, and on American popular culture in general cannot, of course, be underestimated (Stanton 10). L. Frank Baum's *Tik-Tok of Oz* (1914), the eight volume of his *Oz* series, introduced a sketchy map of the fictional realm. In 1932 Robert E. Howard provided a map for his fictional world referred to as the Hyborian Age, in which Conan the Barbarian battles evil sorcerers, slays malevolent beasts, and rescues beautiful damsels in distress.<sup>3</sup> Howard's map presents a fragment of a larger continent with its western shore and, interestingly, Tolkien's Middle-earth has a similar shape. The question of whether Howard's maps inspired Tolkien's or whether both men were inspired by similar sources (e.g. real geography) could be a topic of separate research. Still, even if, by any chance, Tolkien was inspired by Howard, it was Tolkien who voiced the idea of sub-creation which became such a significant concept for the theory of fantasy literature.

The significance of imaginary cartography is supported not only by Tolkien's sub-creation, but also by the theories of scholars after Tolkien. John H. Timmerman's *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* (1983)—a structuralist study which divides a typical fantasy narrative into six elements (Story, Common Character and Heroism, Another World, Magic and the Supernatural, Struggle between Good and Evil, and the Quest) and which was discussed in Chapter 1—also highlights the importance of a believable Another World (5–102). If maps can be related to Tolkien's sub-creation, they can also be recognized as a prominent component of Timmerman's believable Another World (since Timmerman also stresses the immersive potential of fantasy narratives) or, in general, of the genre's structure. Mark J.P. Wolf agrees: "They [maps] provide a concrete image of a world, and fill in many of the gaps not covered in the story; gaps between locations, at the world's edges, and places not otherwise mentioned or visited by the characters. As such, they are one of the most basic devices used to provide structure to an imaginary world" (157).

Farah Mendlesohn, whose *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) was also discussed in Chapter 1, similarly acknowledges maps in her attempt at classifying fantasy narratives. Mendlesohn divides fantasy into four distinct categories: portal-quest, immersive, intrusion, and liminal, and maps are quite significant for the first category. According to Mendlesohn, a portal-quest fantasy—exemplified by C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara*—offers a transition from the common everyday world into an unfamiliar fantastic reality, which the protagonist and reader explore together. Since the fantastic reality is a fascinating novelty for both the protagonist and reader, portal-quest fantasies can be greatly detailed and descriptive. Mendlesohn even calls portal-quest fantasies “a guided tour of landscapes” (xix), which highlights the importance of traveling for the development of the plot. If traveling is of such importance, then the presence of a map is a logical consequence. The map allows readers to develop their understanding of the secondary geography and of the journey which the characters have to undertake. What is more, thanks to the map readers may partially accompany the characters in their discoveries of new territories during their quest. Mendlesohn further explains the significance of maps when she recalls the words of Dianna Wynne Jones: “maps are a substitute for place, and an indication that we have to travel; they also, however, fix the interpretation of a landscape. Maps are no more geography than chronology and legend are history, but in portal-quest fantasies, they complete the denial of discourse” (qtd. in Mendlesohn 14). This idea of the “denial of discourse” voiced by Wynne Jones is inarguably related to Tolkien's sub-creation and Timmerman's *Another World*. Both Tolkien and Timmerman claimed that the secondary realm must be a believable entity, and Wynne Jones suggests that maps, a semi-tangible evidence of the quest, have the power to make readers forget about the text—about the discourse. What follows is an experience of immersion in the fantastic reality. This experience of immersion can be related to a popular (childhood) practice of tracing maps with one's finger and imagining foreign travels before actually setting on a journey. Of course, in the case of fantasy fiction, the journey can be then realized only through the perusal of the story, in the company of the characters.

However, while maps can be a useful tool allowing authors to establish believable secondary worlds and readers to form an understanding of those worlds, in some cases the popularity and ubiquity of fantasy maps might work against the genre. Because of the pattern established by Howard and Tolkien, other writers (especially those involved in high/epic fantasy with the quest motif) could have felt obliged to equip their books with a map which they saw as a prerequisite for the fantastic adventure. The problem is that not all



fantasists have been able to produce maps matching or surpassing the quality of Tolkien's works.

One of the recurring problems of fantastic cartography is the exaggeration visible in the choice of geographical names. Some writers strive so hard to ensure that their readers will recognize a location as a fantastic place that they produce extensive or barely pronounceable names. Examples appear in Tad Williams' *The Dragonbone Chair* (e.g. Elvritshalla, Drorshullvenn), Stephen R. Donaldson's *The One Tree* (e.g. Bhrathairain), and Jack L. Chalker's *Demons of the Dancing Gods* (e.g. Husaquahr and Zhafqua). Perhaps meant to sound mysterious, remote, and exotic, such exaggerated names can easily provoke the readers' ironic comments (as they might seem ridiculous and childish) and contribute to their overall distaste for the genre.

Another problem of fantasy maps is their low quality, since skilled fantasists are not necessarily skilled cartographers. The low quality is visible, for instance, in mistaken distances. Different activities related to traveling (packing, unpacking, resting) and different means of transport (walking on foot, riding a horse or in a carriage) need varying amounts of time, so the distances between locations should be appropriately calculated and the narrative should acknowledge them when explaining how long the characters traveled from one destination to another. Of course, checking whether the author did not miscalculate the distance would require a careful comparison of the narrative and the map—which, in many cases, will not be even possible, because many fantastic maps do not provide any information about the scale of the map. Out of the twenty four maps chosen for analysis in this chapter, only three clearly include the scale of distance (maps from *The Verdant Passage*, *The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time*, and *Tris's Book*). Surprisingly, many maps do not even point which direction is the North—which is a standard element of every real map. Of course, precise scale and directions are not that important for readers of a fantasy novels. Yet if the map is provided not only to allow readers to trace the quest, but also to enhance the believability of the world, the omission of such details becomes a significant mistake.

Another problematic point is the author's choice regarding the placement of particular geographical locations. While in real life pine forests do not grow in the middle of deserts, and deserts do not suddenly change into swamps, are such solutions acceptable in fantastic environments, and then in fantastic maps? This question again touches upon the notion of balance between realism and fantasy in the genre. If the cases described above are not the author's mistakes but deliberate solutions grounded, for instance, in the forces ruling the secondary world, then a map presenting such a landscape should not be treated as less real, since it corresponds to the internal laws of the imagined



reality (e.g. the forest in the middle of a desert can be sustained by magical powers). But if the author fails to provide any reasonable explanation, then such a map simply reveals the author's lack of knowledge in terms of biology and geography.

Finally, even if the map is carefully prepared and its elements correspond to the internal order of the secondary realm, one problem still remains. While the map might help readers understand the realm, it might also diminish the feeling of adventure and spontaneity since frequently "[it] lists *everywhere* we will be visiting" (Wynne Jones qtd. in Mendlesohn 14). As a result, the map becomes the pre-set scheme of the quest, revealing details of the up-coming adventure—in other words, it is a spoiler. Recognizing this problem, Mark J.P. Wolf argues: "This is one example of why world-building should go beyond the story's needs and suggest a world much broader and more detailed than what the story gives the audience, since areas appearing on a map that do not appear in the story encourage speculation and imagination" (158–159). Taking everything into consideration, though fantastic cartography occupies a significant position within the structures of the genre, its presence can influence the reception of the narrative in both positive and negative ways, depending on the quality of the map and the writer's knowledge of cartography.

### ANALYZING AND CLASSIFYING FANTASTIC MAPS

The second part of this chapter is devoted to the investigation of twenty four maps from a range of American fantasy novels (the list of titles is available in the section with chapter notes),<sup>4</sup> which will serve as a representative group for the intended comparative analysis. The choice to focus on American fantasy fiction alone stems from the fact that most fantastic maps appear in the subgenre of high/epic fantasy that relies on secondary worlds, and the market for this subgenre has been for decades visibly dominated by American writers (Łaszkiewicz 18–19). Moreover, since the historical development of American fantasy, though partly indebted to British writers, was conditioned by different historical and cultural factors, the study of fictional cartography in American fantasy can allow to comment on these maps' shared features (which could be later contrasted with the approach to fictional cartography in British or other fantasy fiction). The selected maps will be compared in terms of their extensiveness, aesthetics, and language, and the results (though based on a limited material) will signal the variety of approaches to fantastic cartography.

As far as their extensiveness is concerned, fantasy maps correspond to the author's vision of the imaginary lands: if the novel features a wide spectrum of

characters coming from different parts of the realm and if the characters travel a lot, the maps grow in size and number of locations. Thus, some maps might consist of only the most basic elements, e.g. the general contour of the continent and a few geographical locations. Such maps appear in *Magic Casement*, *The Black Gryphon*, *Wizard's First Rule*, *The Verdant Passage*, *The Black Unicorn*, and *The Witch World*. More elaborate maps, with a greater diversity of geographical elements (islands, rivers, mountains, forests, villages, cities, kingdoms, etc.) can be found in *Lord Foul's Bane*, *Brisingr*, *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, *The Masterharper of Pern*, and *Lyonesse*. Some, rather rare, works provide—apart from fragmentary maps of specific regions—also separate maps of the realm's cities or even maps of the entire imaginary world. Maps of cities appear in *The Dragonbone Chair* (the map of Hayholt Castle), *The One Tree* (the map of Bhrathairain), and *The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time* (e.g. the maps of Caemlyn and Tar Valon). In addition, Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series provides a map of the entire fantasy world, which closely resembles that of the real world. As a result, *The Wheel of Time's* achievement in fantastic cartography is one of the most extensive in the genre. Still, the places shown on fantasy maps, also on Jordan's, are often not given equal attention in the plot. In several fantasy novels some locations are mentioned as distant and exotic even for the inhabitants of the imaginary realm, e.g. Shara and Seanchan in Jordan's universe. Such locations are an instance of fantasy within fantasy, since the legendary or inaccessible lands function as imaginary in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the secondary world. This, as Mark J.P. Wolf explained (158–159), doubles the feeling of wonder for readers since they are faced with yet another dimension of fantasy.

In terms of extensiveness, four categories of maps can be distinguished, depending on the shape of the territory presented. The first category should be described as western-shore maps, since the maps created by Howard and Tolkien—depicting a fragment of a continent bordered by the sea/ocean from the West—has become one of the most recognizable variants. This pattern is visible in *The Witch World*, *Tris's Book*, *Brisingr*, *A Shadow of All Night Falling*, *Wise Man's Fear*, *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, *The Dragonbone Chair*, *Fionavar Tapestry*, and *The Wheel of Time*. While there are maps which present a continent's eastern, northern or southern coastline, as in *Dragons of Winter Night* and *Magic Casement*, they are noticeably less popular than the western-shore variant. The popularity of the western-shore map might be ascribed either to Howard's and Tolkien's still-present influence on fantasy fiction or, if we assume that the western-shore is somewhat reminiscent of European coastline, to the American writers' nostalgic perception of the Old World as the place of adventure, enchantment, and fantasy—and a natural choice of setting for fan-

tasy narratives whose imaginary worlds are inspired by the European Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> The narrative potential of the western-shore map should also be taken into consideration, since the sea is frequently incorporated into the plot. In novels with western-shore maps, the protagonist's journey often covers both land and water routes, which enriches the whole quest/adventure. In addition, the sea and its shores are always inhabited by people with distinct cultures based on their connection to fishing and sailing (e.g. the Atha'an Miere in *The Wheel of Time*), which is another level of sub-creation within the narrative. Finally, the act of crossing the sea might be linked with the discovery of new territories in the realm of fantasy or it might even become the route to the realm of immortality and gods (e.g. the Undying Lands of elves in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Fionavar Tapestry*).

The second category is formed by maps which present a world consisting entirely of islands. Even though several imaginary worlds include islands, worlds consisting of islands only are quite rare. Among the selected twenty four maps there are only two that belong to this category: one is found in *The Earthsea Quartet* in which the imaginary world consists of bigger and smaller islands, and the other in *Lyonesse* in which the setting is an imaginary island located near the shores of Western Europe. Similarly to novels with western-shore maps, novels with island maps frequently incorporate sea journeys. Arguably, island worlds are markedly less popular, because they do not offer the possibility of long epic journeys through different landscapes, which are a staple component of many high/epic fantasies. The island maps can be contrasted with the third category, i.e. maps which show inland territories only. Inland maps appear in *The Black Gryphon*, *The Verdant Passage*, *Lord Foul's Bane*, *Demons of the Dancing Gods*, and *The Black Unicorn*. Perhaps having no need for or interest in the motif of sea journeys, some writers prefer to limit their imaginary worlds and maps to inland territories useful in the course of the narrative.

The final category includes maps whose imaginary geography is constructed upon reference to real geography. Like island maps, these seem less popular: among the twenty four maps selected for analysis, only three belong to this category. One is the map of *Lyonesse*: the imaginary island is located near the coasts of France. Another one is the map of the entire globe included in Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*: its continents resemble Europe and Asia. The third one is found in *Golem in the Gears*: the shape and geographical features of Piers Anthony's world of Xanth resemble Florida, and the author has confirmed this resemblance in his interviews ("Xanthmaker").

The chosen maps can be compared also in terms of aesthetics, and this comparison allows to divide them into three distinct groups. The first group

are the draft maps, named after their rather economical approach to details. Draft maps typically present only the contour of the land and provide only the names of important geographical locations, such as main cities, countries, mountains, rivers, etc. They scarcely use graphic symbols or shades to mark the location of forests, deserts, mountains ranges, and other natural regions. The name of a particular region is usually the only evidence of its existence on the draft map. Maps from this category are present in *The Witch World*, *Lyonesse*, *The Masterharper of Pern*, and *Magic Casement*. The second group are the elaborate maps which contain all the elements of draft maps, but are further enriched with graphic symbols and shades. These include miniature drawings of mountains, trees, castles, and ruins, various shades of gray which mark higher parts of land, as well as dots and dashes which mark water, deserts, plains, and swamps. Such elaborate maps can be found in *The Dragonbone Chair*, *Lord Foul's Bane*, *The Black Unicorn*, *Brisingr*, *The Verdant Passage*, *Dragons of Winter Night*, *Demons of the Dancing Gods*, *A Shadow of All Night Falling*, and *Fionavar Tapestry*. The third category are the artistic maps whose additional elements serve only aesthetical purposes. Artistic maps are embellished with ornamental frames and miniature drawings (of people, animals, ships, and buildings), and often use special fonts for more significant geographical names. As a result, they become miniature works of cartographic art. Artistic maps can be found in *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, *Wizard's First Rule*, *The Black Gryphon*, *The Death of Chaos*, *The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time*, *Tris's Book*, *A Feast for Crows*, and *Wise Man's Fear*. Of course, the artistic value of these maps is irrelevant to their cartographic value, but it may enhance their validity as documents presumably produced in the imaginary world.

The analysis of the extensiveness and aesthetics of the chosen maps does not reveal any specific correlation between these maps and the time of their publication, i.e. a particular type of fantasy maps does not seem to dominate over a particular period of time in the genre's development. We could assume, for instance, that western-shore maps—resembling those produced by Howard and Tolkien—should have been the most popular just after the success of their works. However, even if subsequent writers recognized the general usefulness of fantastic cartography, they did not emulate the same patterns. *Lord Foul's Bane* from 1977, *Lyonesse* from 1983, and *Demons of the Dancing Gods* from 1984 do not possess western-shore maps, in contrast to *Brisingr* from 2008 and *Wise Man's Fear* from 2011. Similarly, there seem to be no tendencies regarding the aesthetics of fantasy maps. While *The Witch World* from 1963 and *The Masterharper of Pern* from 1998 both have draft maps, *Lord Foul's Bane* from 1977 and *A Shadow of All Night Falling* from 1979 feature elaborate

maps. Thus, the extensiveness and aesthetics of fantastic cartography seem to depend entirely on the writers' plans regarding their imaginary worlds rather than on any external factors.

Apart from extensiveness and aesthetics, the third point of comparison is the language used on fantasy maps. Long and exotic geographical names, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, are one of its characteristic features. Another distinctive trait of these names is their descriptive and metaphoric character: they often include references to nature, directions of the world, and feelings, as in Lonely Hills, Dreadfort, Ramsgate, and Blacktyde (*A Feast for Crows*), Westland, Midland (*Wizard's First Rule*), and Lake Country and Eastern Wastelands (*The Black Unicorn*). Moreover, writers frequently use diacritical marks, probably to make their invented names seem more fantastic and exotic—yet these marks often baffle readers and leave them wondering about the pronunciation of the name in question. A rich collection of such names appears in *Brisingr*, e.g. Alagaësia, Fläm, Cithrí, Petrøvyä, Tüdosten, Urû'baen, Ellesméra, Nädindel, Röna, and Sílthrim, though they can be found also in other works: Ma'ara and Ka'venusho appear in *The Black Gryphon*, and Tinuë in *Wise Man's Fear*. These linguistic creations (language-making) can be recognized as another layer of the process of sub-creation, yet only when they actually contribute to the integrity and believability of the secondary reality.

Finally, it is necessary to raise the questions of authorship. In some cases, it is clear that the author of the book is also the author of the map, e.g. the map in *A Shadow of All Night Falling* is marked with "g.cook" for Glen Cook, and the map in *Brisingr* has "C.P." for Christopher Paolini. In some cases, the author of the map is not directly mentioned, but it is probably safe to assume that the writer is the creator of the map, since otherwise some credentials to copyright would have been provided. Interestingly, a large number of maps were commissioned to other people, often professional artists.<sup>6</sup> Their signatures are visible on the maps and/or credentials are given to copyrighted material: such information can be found in *The Black Unicorn*, *Lord Foul's Bane*, *The Death of Chaos*, *A Feast for Crows*, *Wise Man's Fear*, *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, *Tris's Book*, and *The Wheel of Time* series. A successful cooperation between the writer and the illustrator is quite significant for the success of the entire process of sub-creation. The writer has to share his vision of the imaginary realm with the illustrator, so that the map can become an integral and useful component of the narrative. Consequently, the illustrator participates in the process of sub-creation and shares some of the writer's responsibility for the successful sub-creation of the fantastic world.

### FANTASY MAP AS THE CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

The diversity of components used in fantasy maps suggests that imaginary cartography has evolved together with the genre and now constitutes its integral part. Inarguably, fantasy maps not only participate in the creation of a believable secondary world, but also affect readers' perception of that world, since they translate imaginary territories into something tangible and help readers contextualize the characters' adventures. Thus, writers who recognize this potential can consciously decide to use fantasy maps as tools for building their secondary world and narration. In "Here Be Cartographers: Reading the Fantasy Map," Nicholas Tam raises some important questions pertaining to this matter:

So when we open up a novel to find a map, we can think of the map as an act of narration. But what kind of narration? Is it reliable narration or a deliberate misdirection? Is it omniscient knowledge, a complete (or strategically obscured) presentation of the world as the author knows it? Or is the map available to the characters in the text? If it is, then who drew up the map, and how did they have access to the information used to compose it? If it isn't, then through what resources do the characters orient themselves in their own world? (Tam)

Tam is clearly interested in such issues as the authority of the map and its position within the imaginary world. In his own analysis, he focuses on Thrór's map from *The Hobbit* and wonders whether the map can be treated as an integral part of the realm created by Tolkien. His study allows him to conclude that Tolkien managed to create a map which can convince the reader that it was actually prepared by the dwarf, Thrór, not the author. Tam argues: "the map is [...] Tolkien's way of reporting to his readers what Bilbo and Thorin were looking at—no different than if your copy of the book came bundled with a replica of Bilbo's sword, Sting" (Tam). For Tam, the elements of Thrór's map—landmarks, runes, and additional information—create an illusion that the map is something that a dwarf (not a human writer or a computer program) could have prepared for his own usage. Thus, the map becomes a valid document that both represents and functions in the secondary world.

The example of Thrór's map corresponds to another point advocated by Tam further in his article: "[m]aps could do a lot more to dive into the perspective of an imagined land's inhabitants, revealing how the people see their own world as well as their techniques and motivations for piecing that picture together" (Tam). In other words, fantasy maps may become an instance of interplay between the author, the reader, and the characters—with the characters treated as the original map-makers/users, and the author and readers as secondary figures. Still, even though the map becomes a channel of communication between these three parties, the act of communication is dominated



by the author (and the illustrator) since readers have no impact on the contents and quality of the map. Of course, in contrast to real maps, which are often the product of social and political changes and can be easily analyzed in terms of domination or exclusion of particular nations and ethnic groups (Huggan 3–21), fantasy maps seem neutral in such aspects since they do not reflect the political or social aspirations of particular groups. But they do support the prevailing authority of the author, and very few maps can convince readers to substitute that authority with a belief that the map was actually produced by the inhabitants of the imaginary world. Such maps are rare, but their contribution to sub-creation is perhaps the most significant.

While discussing the cartographic work of Karen Wynn Fonstad, who created entire atlases of imaginary maps based on the works of several fantasists, Mark J.P. Wolf pays particular attention to Fonstad's immensely popular atlas of Tolkien's Middle-earth and declares: "That enough of an audience exists for such an atlas to be published (as well as a revised second edition) is testament to the importance that maps have as guides to secondary worlds, even when they are unauthorized" (163). The study of the fantasy genre's imaginary cartography reveals quite a lot about the dynamics between the writers, readers, and protagonists of fantasy fiction, as well as about the process of world-building (sub-creation). Of course, the analysis conducted in this chapter could be further complemented by similar investigation of maps which accompany various games located in secondary worlds (card games, role-play games, and computer games). Inarguably, it would be interesting to examine the creation, components, and functions of such maps—some comments on this topic have already appeared in Jason Denzel's article "Beyond the Aryth Ocean". Moreover, since the analysis provided in this chapter focused mostly on American works (with only occasional references to British fantasy), this topic could be further developed by a cross-sectional study of maps created by authors from other parts of the world. Such a study could determine if the cultural background of the authors has any influence over the structure of their imaginary worlds and, consequently, over their fantastic cartography, e.g. if western-shore maps appear primarily in American fantasy, Anglophone fantasy in general or also in fantasy narratives produced by writers of different nationalities. While this chapter uncovered certain shared traits in the maps produced by American writers, e.g. their tendency to create western-shore maps, which might be grounded in the country's colonial past and nostalgic perception of the Old World, these traits are only a starting point for further research. All in all, the study of fantastic cartography can deepen our understanding of the mechanisms governing the difficult and demanding process of sub-creation.





## CHAPTER 4. RELIGION IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Questions pertaining to the presence of religious themes in fantasy literature gained wider attention due to the immense popularity of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* with its claim that the Holy Grail is a symbol referring to Jesus' descendants also significantly added to the growing controversy, but since Brown's novel is not fantasy fiction *per se*—perhaps only the writer's fantastic revision of certain religious dogmas—it will not be included in this chapter). Suddenly, when the entire world was watching the cinematic versions of Tolkien's trilogy and children around the globe became Potter-fans overnight, the society realized how greatly a work of fantasy can capture a person's imagination, and this recognition was followed by numerous questions about the religious and moral aspects of the fantasy genre. Readers and viewers of different backgrounds—scholars and critics, parents and religious authorities, representatives of various denominations and atheists—expressed their thoughts and concerns about the metaphysical aspects of fantasy literature. Are novels containing magic, witches, demons, and generally elements of the supernatural suitable for religious (Christian) readers who fear that such works might lead them and their children to the dangerous sphere of the occult? Can these novels really weaken the readers' faith and eventually, but inevitably, lure them to the occult? Where is God present in the worlds of fantasy fiction—if there is any God present at all? What are the values promoted by fantasy fiction? The fact that so many people raised these and other questions, and then became so involved in their discussion, is evidence of the genre's ability to transgress the borders of imagination and touch upon issues which contemporary readers consider important.

Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the presence of religious themes in modern fantasy and to investigate a selection of fantasy novels with very different approaches to religion.<sup>1</sup> In some narratives, fictional religions are used mostly to enrich the structures of the imaginary world (as in the works of Dave Duncan and George R.R. Martin). Other writers use fictional religions to entangle their protagonists in violent conflicts of religious nature (Guy Gavriel Kay, Brandon Sanderson, Celia S. Friedman) or to question some fundamental elements of the imaginary world, e.g. its reliance on ancient myths (Jack Vance and Poul Anderson). Finally, some works

contain more or less conspicuous allegorical references to existing religions (the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis) or are intended as the author's critique of a particular religion (the works of Philip Pullman). Even a brief examination of these approaches will demonstrate the complexity of the fantasy genre's religious dimension, and can serve as a starting point for further discussion of how the author's religious background and beliefs influence their fiction (though some authors, e.g. Guy Gavriel Kay, seldom speak about their religious views).

### ***THE LORD OF THE RINGS VERSUS HARRY POTTER***

Though Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Rowling's *Harry Potter* became the center of the ensuing debate, the treatment and critical appraisal of these two works has been remarkably different. In the case of Tolkien's trilogy, most people generally agree that despite the lack of God's direct presence in the narrative (since Tolkien introduces a creator figure, Eru Ilúvatar, in *The Silmarillion*), the trilogy is an unquestionable repository of Christian morality and references to biblical tradition. This conclusion is based on the recognition of Tolkien's devotion to the Catholic faith, which permeates his personal letters to publishers, colleagues, family, and friends (Carpenter 113–114, 167–168, 183–185, 550–552). Moreover, critical analyses of *The Lord of the Rings* and other works depicting the fictional Middle-earth revealed numerous parallels between Tolkien's world and Christian (Catholic) faith: these parallels are visible in the genesis of Middle-earth, in the recurring motifs of temptation, sin, and self-sacrifice, in the presence of providence, and in the angelic-like existence of elves to name just a few.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the *Harry Potter* series has been frequently and heavily criticized. Of course, Rowling's creation has also been praised by some critics who argue, for instance, that the series teaches children about the importance of courage, friendship, and responsibility (Dalton 60–73, 82–97; Dickerson and O'Hara 227–260). Nonetheless, two arguments against Rowling's series are particularly serious and cannot be easily dismissed.

The first concern voiced by some critics is that despite their courage and loyalty, the protagonists of Rowling's series are not the best role models for young readers. Even though Harry and his friends manage to save their world, during their adventures they lie, cheat, and notoriously break the rules. Secondly, it is pointed out that the series contains some occult symbolism that might increase children's unhealthy interest in witches and magic, which might then lead them to real-world occultism (Abanes 132–140, 150–164). Some might object to this last claim by arguing that novels such as *The Lord of*

*the Rings* also feature magic, yet they are not criticized for its presence in the same manner as *Harry Potter*. However, this line of defense seems inaccurate for two reasons. The magic present in *The Lord of the Rings* is a gifted power accessible only to a few figures: the protectors of the land and angelic-like elves. Tolkien's magic bears no resemblance to occult practices. It generally remains inaccessible to humans (and hobbits), and appears only as an additional help, not the driving theme of the story. Moreover, the destructive power used by the enemies is clearly different from the power of elves and wizards, because it is corrupted by the hunger for domination. (Dalton 158–161; Wicher 15–60).

In contrast, Rowling based *Harry Potter*'s magic on "real" magical practices associated with Wicca and the occult (e.g. the protagonists learn spells, prepare potions, use divination, etc.), and in her imaginary world this type of magic is widely accessible to humans who possess magical abilities. The only difference between the protagonists and their malevolent enemies in terms of power is their personal choice of spells: while Tolkien's good and evil powers are clearly separated by their very natures, Rowling's magic is an indifferent entity that can be freely used by both good and evil characters. Secondly, Tolkien's and Rowling's depiction of magic cannot be compared because even though both series belong to the fantasy genre, they represent different sub-categories of fantasy (for different attempts at classifying fantasy literature see Chapter 1). Tolkien's trilogy is a prototypical example of high/epic fantasy set in a completely imaginary quasi-medieval realm, whereas in Rowling's young adult fantasy series wizards are neighbors of ordinary British citizens. The real-life setting of Rowling's narrative is another reason why children's interest in witches and magic, developed through her books, might be later transformed into a real interest in the occult (while perhaps only a few readers will be tempted to go out and search for hobbits after they finish reading Tolkien's trilogy). In time, the discussion revolving around Tolkien and Rowling encompassed other works (while Rowling may support or refute some claims about her series, Tolkien, who died in 1973, may be consulted only through his non-fictional writing). Before we focus on the religious aspects of some other fantasy novels, it is first necessary to investigate the reasons for the ubiquitous presence of religious elements in contemporary fantasy fiction.

### RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS IN FANTASY FICTION

The worlds of fantasy literature are ephemeral: they come to existence through language and are sustained by human imagination. Outside the pages of a book, they do not exist. Yet this does not mean that everything depicted in

fantasy literature is fleeting and devoid of significance for the real world. The fantasy genre uses its fantastic devices (imaginary creatures, magical artifacts, supernatural quests, etc.) to examine and comment on the universal experiences of love and loss, joy and despair, freedom and oppression, and many more. As Richard Mathews states, writers of fantasy literature can use the genre to join debates on many real-life issues such as contemporary politics, economics, psychology, and religion (2002, xii). In other words, though the genre's repertoire of settings, characters, and narrative solutions differs significantly from those employed by more mainstream ("realistic") literature, the fantasy genre is still an efficient means of exploring a range of topics, including post-modern people's concerns pertaining to religion.

One reason why religious themes and motifs so frequently appear in fantasy literature is the fact that the genre greatly relies on our mythological and religious heritage. Myths and sacred narratives from around the world have long served as a source of inspiration and a repository of ideas for subsequent writers of fantasy, who indiscriminately use their various components. Certain elements have even become standard components within the structures of the genre, e.g. the cosmic struggle between good and evil, the figure of a savior, the rites of passage, and the pattern of a hero's quest recognized by Joseph Campbell as the monomyth (in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*). Writers of fantasy often do not (or perhaps even cannot) purge these borrowed themes and images of their original spiritual connotations, and that is one of the ways in which modern fantasy becomes saturated with religious ideas. For instance, the cosmic struggle between good and evil—one of the genre's most popular motifs—usually requires the presence of gods and other divine figures which form a valid background for such a conflict, as well as an array of characters who become entangled in a web of difficult moral choices. The divine conflict frequently requires a savior figure, i.e. someone to suffer and sacrifice himself (or herself, though that is a less common option in fantasy fiction) for the benefit of the community. A savior figure can be easily related to various myths and religions of the world, including Christianity and the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The rites of passage are also spiritually significant since they prepare the protagonists for a particular challenge, establish them as members of a given community, and grant them extraordinary powers and wisdom, which bring the protagonists closer to the sphere of the otherworldly (divine). A quest fraught with several dangers and challenges is also one of the driving motifs of fantasy narratives. The stages of this quest are often those identified by Campbell within various world myths (as elements of the grand monomyth), and they, too, are related to otherworldly matters: the protagonists frequently encounter gods and goddesses, enter a land of the dead, and even

undergo the process of divinization before they are able to achieve their final goal—the monomyth is essentially a journey of one's spiritual development and transformation.

Whether writers of fantasy incorporate the monomyth<sup>3</sup> and other mythological elements into their narratives consciously or not, these patterns have become so popular that works based on them are now formulaic and predictable. But this is only one of the possible dangers of the genre's excessive reliance on mythological traditions. Scholars of fantasy literature argue that the genre has granted itself the right to transform and adapt the mythological material according to its own needs—a process which might be beneficial for the genre, but not entirely for our mythological heritage (Attebery 2007; Trocha 2009). Nonetheless, the growing popularity and recognition of fantasy fiction can be treated as a sign that postmodern people, immersed in a material high-tech culture, still seek experiences of the marvelous and the otherworldly, as well as spiritual and moral sustenance. Mircea Eliade, in his extensive study of the presence of the sacred and the profane in different cultures, argues that though the form of a myth can be transformed or even corrupted when the myth becomes part of a new medium of expression, the core message of the myth might still be preserved and transmitted (15–17). Arguably, the fantasy genre can be recognized as one of these new channels for the preservation and transmission of our ancient knowledge.

Other reasons for the presence of religion in fantasy fiction are related to the figure of the writer. The writer's private commitment to a particular faith is often, deliberately or not, reflected in his artistic work. Moreover, the writer might purposely choose the fantasy genre as a means of discussing and criticizing a particular denomination or religious institution, which are then creatively embedded in the secondary world. Depending on the writer's goal, fantasy novels can address or present religion in a few ways. Firstly, writers can invent their own religions, frequently derived from religions existing in the real world, to enrich their imaginary reality and place their protagonists in a web of meaningful moral choices and obligations. This invention of secondary religions can be taken a step further when religious and spiritual themes become indispensable elements of the entire quest (adventure) and are situated in the center of the plot. Finally, the secondary religion may become the writer's personal comment on or criticism of an existing religious system. This chapter is going to discuss examples of works from all three categories. However, as their boundaries are rather fluid than clear-cut, the proposed categories cannot be treated as entirely separate groups; the difference between them frequently depends on the degree to which the author emphasizes the religious themes of his works, and that degree may change even in a single work

which consist of several volumes. To successfully illustrate the different ways in which writers of fantasy approach the topic of religion and to prove that the presence of religious themes within fantasy is not simply a recent phenomenon, the selection of novels discussed in this chapter consists of works that are popular at the moment and works that are now a couple of decades old. Each category will be exemplified by two or three independent titles.

### SECONDARY WORLDS AND SECONDARY RELIGIONS

First and foremost, fantasists frequently invent secondary religions simply in order to enrich their imaginary lands. These fictional religions often come fully equipped with an array of gods and holy figures, doctrines and dogmas, sacred places and ceremonies, myths and prophecies explaining the existence of the world and its inhabitants, and many more elements; as such, they may be well-established and believable systems, properly functioning within the boundaries of their imaginary worlds. For instance, in the series *A Man of His Word* (*Magic Casement, Faery Lands Forlorn, Perilous Seas, Emperor and Clown*; 1990–1992) Dave Duncan presents an original way to link religion with magic. The inhabitants of Duncan's world can gain power by learning rare magical words. Throughout the series, the characters confirm that knowing four words is the upper limit and that anyone who has tried to obtain the fifth one was destroyed by the power. However, at the end of the series it is revealed that when two people—who share, in total, five magic words—are in love, a new god can be created from their union: the lovers become one immortal entity.

Thus, in Duncan's fictional universe words are powerful not because they offer magic, but because they lead people closer to the state of divinity in which nothing is beyond their reach. Though such a divine union does not occur often, Duncan's world already possesses several gods who display both male and female features. Yet the protagonists of the series, Rap and Inosolan, do not wish for immortality since they do not want to judge human lives or punish people who do not worship them. In the end, the protagonists find a way to reduce their powers so that they can live together without the threat of unwanted divinity. Though Duncan's series does pose some questions about the nature of divinity and humankind's relationship to it, fictional religions are generally kept in the background of the plot and the series is generally focused on the protagonists' path to emotional maturity and achievement of high social status.

A greater diversity of competing denominations and approaches to religious worship exists in the world created by George R.R. Martin in the multi-volume series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (started in 1996). Martin's characters are far

from the innocent and somewhat naive protagonists of many fantasy novels which carefully separate good from evil. Torn between their duties and desires, the characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* often make mistakes, but they also do not blindly accept everything they are told to do and think. On the contrary, they constantly question and challenge their surroundings, including faith and religious institutions. To embed the moral struggles of his characters in a believable context, Martin invents a number of fictional religions with very distinct claims and traditions. In the quasi-medieval world of Westeros,<sup>4</sup> the majority of people believe in the Seven, i.e. seven divine aspects of one god (Father, Mother, Maiden, Crone, Smith, Warrior, and Stranger). Certain aspects of this fictional religion point to its affinity with Christianity: the concept of the Seven seems to be an extended version of the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the congregation is supervised by the papal figure of the High Septon, the needs of the congregation are addressed by priests and orders devoted to serving the Seven, and the symbols used by the faithful reflect some of those used by Christianity. Still, though the religion of the Seven is powerful in the southern territories of Westeros, it is openly challenged by the inhabitants of other regions, who worship different gods.

For instance, people of the northern lands pray to the Old Gods who had been worshipped long before the faith of the Seven first appeared in Westeros. The belief in the Old Gods, revolving around forces permeating the natural world, was established by an ancient race known as the Children of the Forest. Contemporary people of the North, who inherited the traditions of the Children, do not need scriptures or spiritual leaders. Following ancient practices, they pray in front of weirwood trees. The trees have faces carved in their bark and the red sap coming from these “wounds” creates an illusion of bleeding (or bloody tears). The trees are surrounded by an atmosphere of holiness, which inspires people to approach them with reverence and religious piety so that they can properly address the divine forces hidden in the natural world. The worship of weirwood trees seems to be a curious combination of animism and Christianity, since the bleeding trees might be interpreted as a reconstructed symbol of Christ’s crucifixion.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another religious tradition is preserved by the inhabitants of the Iron Islands. The Iron people believe in the merciless Drowned God who rules the seas. Following the demands of their faith, they are ruthless seamen and warriors, who never fear the open waters. So far, Martin has paid markedly less attention to this religion: one of the few rituals described is the event during which a person is symbolically drowned in sea water and then brought back to life by a priest of the Drowned God in an act of consecration to the fictional deity (a ritual which might reflect Christian baptism). Though they



do acknowledge the spiritual leadership of priests, worshipper of the Drowned God apparently have no need of scriptures or temples. Since Martin has, so far, revealed little about the practices of the Iron people, their religion seems a combination of Christianity with mythological images of gods residing in the sea.

Martin also presents the cult of R'hllor, the so-called Red God, whose attributes are fire and light. R'hllor's divine opponent, the Great Other, is the god of ice and death. The cult of R'hllor claims that the cosmic battle between these two deities will be resolved by the reincarnation of Azor Ahai, a messianic hero destined to save humankind. The motif of a messianic savior figure is still not fully developed in Martin's series, though its TV-adaptation clearly demonstrates that the soteriological motif is gaining more and more prominence. Still, despite its messianic character, the worship of R'hllor is quite disturbing since priests of the Red God perform violent and sinister rituals such as bringing dead people back to life (which does not resemble resurrection, but rather the creation of zombies), sacrificing people to obtain the god's favor, and producing shadows that follow their every command. Martin's fictional world is on the brink of destruction, and it will be interesting to see if, paradoxically, the dark cult of R'hllor becomes its path to salvation.

Interestingly, none of the religions and cults mentioned throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* is granted a position of dominance or depicted as the one most accurately reflecting the sphere of the divine. Representatives of all denominations argue that theirs is the true faith, and priests of the Red God seem particularly adamant in their claims that the worship of R'hllor is the only true religion that can bring salvation. And perhaps they are right since Westeros is threatened by the invasion of ice-cold, blood-thirsty creatures which seem related to the god of ice and death. Readers of Martin's series find it interesting to analyze the power relations between these conflicting religions and the moral ambiguity ensuing from the clash of so many different traditions (Vaught 89–106). It is partially because of this religious variety and ambiguity that Martin's imaginary world seems more realistic and, consequently, more believable. If the motif of the savior, possibly accompanied by the escalation of religious conflicts, becomes a central element of the main plot, the religious dimensions of *A Song of Ice and Fire* will need to be reassessed.

Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Fionavar Tapestry* (*The Summer Tree*, *The Wandering Fire*, and *The Darkest Road*; 1984–1986) is a fantasy trilogy in which religion and spirituality play a prominent role from the very beginning. In the course of the trilogy, Kay develops a complex secondary world permeated with references to various existing religious (e.g. Christianity and Taoism) and mythological traditions (e.g. Celtic and Norse), which form a religious



backdrop for the adventures of his protagonists. These protagonists—five people transported from modern-day Toronto to the fantastic Fionavar—become immersed in a cosmic conflict between gods and, consequently, participate in sacred rituals, acquire divine-like powers, and even encounter some deities; all of these events contribute to the development of the narrative. These events are also significant for the psychological and emotional development of the protagonists. The trilogy repeatedly highlights, for instance, the power and significance of self-sacrifice. Paul, one of the five visitors, volunteers to hang for three days and nights on the sacred Summer Tree, in a scene which strongly resembles the crucifixion. The results of his decision are the redemption of the land (the dying kingdom is saved by the long-awaited rain) and of Paul himself, because the man—spiritually reborn after the event—is able to reconcile with the death of his girlfriend.

Another theme recurring throughout the trilogy is the significance of humankind's free will. Kay's protagonists (e.g. Diarmuid, Kim, Darien) struggle against fate, make their own choices, and deal with the consequences of their decisions. Kay demonstrates that acting according to one's own conscience will, in the end, lead to success: Diarmuid's sacrifice for a fellow warrior, Kim's refusal to use her power in a morally ambiguous way, and Darien's choice of light instead of darkness ultimately contribute to the final victory over the evil Rakoth. Kay clearly elevates the freedom of will above other divine gifts and praises people's ability to choose good over evil. These moral dilemmas and challenges are just as significant for the plot of Kay's trilogy as the fantastic adventures typical for high/epic fantasy.

In Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* series (*The Final Empire*, *The Well of Ascension*, *The Hero of Ages*, and *The Alloy of Law*; 2006–2011) religion is also one of the central concerns of the narrative. Sanderson's Final Empire is a world of red skies and constant ashfalls, dominated by the apparently immortal Lord Ruler and the nobility, while thousands of people are slaves called the skaa. A half-skaa, Kelsier, attempts to end the Lord Ruler's reign and free the skaa with the help of his companions, including a young girl, Vin. Kelsier devises a clever plan how to make the apparently immortal and indestructible enemy more vulnerable. But his companions do not know about the central element of the plan: Kelsier's sacrifice. At the end of the first volume, the man attempts to rescue one of his companions from a public execution. However, when the Lord Ruler comes to the scene, Kelsier is unable to harm him. Instead of running away, he allows the tyrant to kill him, because the investigation of various religions led him to the conclusion that only unyielding courage and self-sacrifice can give the enslaved people hope and determination required for a rebellion. Indeed, Kelsier's martyr-like death (and subsequent

appearances of a man physically resembling him) push the slaves into revolution (*Mistborn*'s themes of oppression and revolution resonate with both the American struggle for independence and biblical imagery<sup>6</sup> which is quite often reconstructed in the series). Vin eventually manages to kill the Lord Ruler, but learns that in fact he was not the one destined to rule at all: he was an usurper who unrightfully gained divine power, but also somehow kept the destruction of humanity at bay. With Lord Ruler's death, the people are again threatened by destruction. As the story unravels, the cosmic battle between two gods (Preservation and Ruin) and Vin's struggle to save the world become the central elements of the plot. Sanderson's formula is simple: to dethrone the old god, a new one is needed, and the revolution in his secondary world is of both social and religious nature. And while the protagonists struggle to save their world, they must answer some difficult questions about their own perception of divinity and religiosity.

Another series which revolves around religious concerns and reinterprets Christianity is Celia S. Friedman's *The Coldfire Trilogy* (*The Black Sun Rising*, *When True Night Falls*, and *Crown of Shadows*; 1991–1995). Friedman introduces two protagonists, Damien Vryce and Gerald Tarrant, whose world is a planet called Erna, colonized by humans centuries ago. Damien is a Warrior Priest of the Church of Human Unification (which promotes faith in one God), and Gerald had once been the Prophet of that Church before he committed a sin and was banished from the institution. The main adventure revolving around the battle to save Erna forces these two men to cooperate despite their mutual hatred. This cooperation has a great impact on Damien's and Gerald's existence, and through their dilemmas Friedman addresses several questions regarding morality and faith.

Damien, for instance, has to decide whether good goals justify bad means. In his quest to save the world, he neglects his duty to kill Gerald (who is no longer a human, but an immortal creature feeding on people), believing that Gerald might help him rescue Erna's inhabitants. This neglect is one of the reasons why the priest eventually leaves his beloved Church. Nonetheless, Damien's friendship and sacrifice are the reasons why the selfish and power-obsessed Gerald slowly begins to care about other people and, in the end, decides to sacrifice his immortal existence to save the planet. Through Gerald, Friedman demonstrates that even the worst sin is not stronger than the power of self-sacrifice in the name of good. Apart from reworking the themes of sin, sacrifice, and redemption, Friedman addresses several issues connected with religious institutions, since her Church of Human Unification is a descendant of the Catholic church (similarities to the Catholic Church appear in the structure, hierarchy, and rituals of the fictional institution). The leader

of the Church, the Patriarch, is a complex character who is troubled by the same question as Damien, but his answers are different from Damien's, so ultimately he decides to protect Erna according to his own beliefs (without resorting to fae—the magic-like power of the planet). In the end, the Patriarch sacrifices his own life to show his followers that violence is never a justifiable solution to problems, and to cleanse his followers of the sin of violence with his own death. The scene is skillfully constructed as a distant echo of Christ's baptism and crucifixion—one of the many references to Christianity scattered throughout the trilogy.<sup>7</sup>

### RELIGION IN FANTASY: ALLEGORY OR CRITICISM?

While writers such as Kay, Sanderson, and Friedman invent alternative religions (inspired, to a varying degree, by existing traditions) in order to further challenge their protagonists, others use the genre to provide comments on the religions and religious institutions of the real world—in some cases, these comments are the most explicit message of the entire work. A case in point is, for instance, C.S. Lewis' series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956) which is often categorized as religious fantasy because of the distinctly Christian message running throughout the story (the author was himself an Anglican), visible e.g. in the motifs of treason, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, redemption, and the ultimate glory of the Narnian savior figure—the lion Aslan (Wicher 15–60; Bruner and Ware 2005). Lewis' Narnia has even been called an allegory of Christianity, which emphasizes the impact of the spiritual message interwoven into the adventures of the protagonists (Dickerson and O'Hara 58–59). Yet the reconciliation of fantasy fiction with the notion of (religious) allegory might be a troublesome—and redundant—endeavor since, as Mathew Dickerson and David O'Hara explain, “in fantastic literature, the allegories, if they are there, always serve the story, and not the other way around. Their presence in the story is only part of the story's richness” (59). Dickerson and O'Hara argue that interpreting a fantasy narrative only for its allegorical message might even be counterproductive, because

once we find the allegorical, we feel that we have done our jobs as readers and needn't think any more. 'Aslan is Christ,' we say, much as we'd say  $1 + 1 = 2$ , and we cease to wrestle with what Lewis might be showing through Aslan's complex character. Thus, when a reader focuses on the allegory, [...] the reader ceases to learn. (Dickerson and O'Hara 58–59)

After all, the power of fantasy fiction lies in its ability to reconstruct well-known figures and themes. Focusing only on the most obvious allegorical interpretation does not allow readers to fully acknowledge other interpretative perspectives and to consider the work's other merits—and its possible flaws.

A completely different approach to religion in fantasy fiction appears in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (*The Golden Compass*—originally published in England as *Northern Lights*—*The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*; 1995–2000). The trilogy, which revolves around a great battle between the evil Authority (God) and the Republic which attempts to overthrow him, is Pullman's means of criticizing Christianity and its institutions. The central characters, Lyra and Will, are children entangled in the cosmic struggle, who gradually expose the true nature of the fictional god and his church. This truth is Pullman's attempt to criticize and discredit Christianity (particularly the Catholic Church).

Yet this attempt is not very successful. Dickerson and O'Hara point out that the trilogy lacks in several departments: the concept of the transcendent Dust is not well-developed as if the author himself was not sure how to define it, the final battle proves to be mildly significant and provides no real solution to the divine conflict despite the Authority's death, and Lyra's positions as the new Eve and her supposed temptation to love Will are unreasonably significant for the battle (194–199). In addition, the questions about human freedom and submission to objective morality seem to serve one purpose: to portray the Authority as a usurper and liar who unrightfully claimed the position of the Creator. As a result, Dickerson and O'Hara accuse the trilogy of being overly didactic, and for them it is obvious that the author has

an unrelenting animosity toward God, church, religion in general, and especially Christianity. Every dialogue, every moment of revelation, every speech from a wise character, and every portrayal of an evil character becomes yet another chance for Pullman to rail and preach against the evils of the church. Everything that has ever gone wrong in any of the universes, it seems, is the fault of the Church or of those who believe in God. (199–200)

However, in contrast to Dickerson and O'Hara, Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware claim that despite the author's obvious attempts to discredit Christianity, the trilogy corresponds to certain truths of the Christian tradition. One of their most interesting arguments focuses on the descriptions of the Authority: Bruner and Ware state that the figure hidden behind that name does not resemble the Christian God, but the rebellious Lucifer who desired power for himself (2007, 78–80). Moreover, though Pullman continuously criticizes the Authority and the fictional church, he never aims any criticism at the figure of Jesus Christ who is not even present in his world of religious tyranny (Bruner and Ware 2007, 86). And in the end, Pullman's protagonists choose good over evil:

Lyra, the consummate liar, eventually has to face the fact that truth is her only viable option. That's why Will, the strong, self-reliant hero, is forced to admit his need for companionship, assistance, and grace. That's why Mary, the atheistic rationalist, feels such a desperate need for purposeful "connection" with the rest of the universe. (Bruner and Ware 2007, 155)

Bruner and Ware argue that the protagonists' desperate search for truth, support, and love does not point to an evil God (Pullman's Authority), but to a the Heavenly Father who is absent from the narrative—and for whom Pullman is also searching (2007, 153–164). All in all, though *His Dark Materials* generally presents the quest for spiritual enlightenment in a rather disturbing way, the trilogy demonstrates that the fantasy genre can be deeply involved in addressing a range of religious dilemmas (Freitas and King ix–xxiv).

While *His Dark Materials* is a very explicit critique of Christianity, in some fantasy novels Christianity is indirectly criticized when it is presented as something antagonistic to the fictional world and unnecessary for the well-being of its communities.<sup>8</sup> For instance, one of the most despicable characters of Jack Vance's *Lyonesse* trilogy (*Suldrun's Garden*, *The Green Pearl*, and *Madouc*; 1983–1989) is Father Umphred, a missionary who comes to the island of Lyonesse in order to build a church and convert the island's pagan inhabitants. Father Umphred finds an avid supporter in Queen Sollace who, encouraged by the priest, pesters King Casmir for money which will allow Umphred not only to build his church, but also to buy some holy relics (perhaps even the Holy Grail). Yet Queen Sollace does not realize that, contrary to his magnificent proclamations about a holy mission, the priest is a cowardly and egoistic man interested only in his own glory. When the evil King Casmir is finally overthrown and Queen Sollace sent into banishment, Father Umphred tries to sneak away from Lyonesse with some gold. In the end, he is captured and punished for his lies and hypocrisy with death. Of course, Umphred's presence in the narrative should not be treated as Vance's critique of Christianity in general. Yet intentionally or not, the characters that support the Christian faith are either unappealing or morally disputable, while the good and kind protagonists seem not to really care about the new religion (as long as they do not have to deal with Umphred). As a result, Vance's *Lyonesse* is portrayed as a legendary and mythic land where Christianity is not yet fully established—and apparently not really needed.

A similar idea appears in Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword* (1954), a dark fantasy novel set in medieval Europe and immersed in Norse mythology. The novel begins with Orm's wish to marry an Englishwoman and his ensuing conversion to Christianity (which is still not widespread among the Danes). However, even after his conversion Orm continues to worship Norse gods, and quite soon he gets rid of the Christian priest. That is why his first-born son cannot be instantly baptized and, consequently, is stolen by a capricious elf. This episode is only the first of many events demonstrating the clash between the old realm of pagan worship and the new era of Christianity (interestingly, though elves, trolls, and other creatures of legends generally speak about "the

White Christ” with fear and contempt, the novel’s greatest embodiments of evil are the figure of Sathanas and his witch-servant).

In the course of the novel, the stolen child, Skafloc, becomes a great elfish warrior entangled in battles between trolls, giants, and the evil Valgard (the child left to Orm in his place). His upbringing and position transform him into a member of the legendary realm which is so clearly separated from Christianity. Skafloc’s tragic fate begins when he enters into an incestuous relationship with his mortal sister, Freda (not knowing that they are related by blood). When the truth is revealed, Freda and Skafloc’s conversation about the future of their relationship reflects the difference in their perception of the world, which is based on their diverging morality and (lack of) religious faith:

‘Come – Freda, come, forget the damned law—’

‘It is God’s law,’ she said tonelessly. ‘I cannot disobey it, my sins are too heavy already.’

‘I say that a god who would come between two that love is an evil creature, a demon – I would smite such a god with my sword if he should come near. Surely I would not follow him.’

‘Aye – a heathen you are!’ she flared. (Anderson 154)

Their parting—the result of Freda’s adamant faith—is also the beginning of their downfall. Skafloc becomes blood-thirsty and obsessed with war, while Freda is tormented by sorrow and remorse. The woman also loses her new born child to Odin, because she has to pay her debt for his past help. As a result, grief-stricken and extremely lonely, Freda decides to forsake her faith: “She took the crucifix from about her neck and kissed it. ‘Forgive me,’ she breathed. ‘Forgive me if You can, that I love him more than You or Your laws. Evil am I, but the sin is mine, not his’” (Anderson 219). Her love proves greater than her faith, and Freda is able to reunite with Skafloc before his death. Yet in spite of the final victory, the ending is grim: Skafloc is dead, Freda has no prospects for the future, and the elf lords fear that old gods and creatures of folktales will eventually disappear because of the advent of human civilization and its “white god.” Like Vance, Anderson creates a world in which the spheres of pagan myths and Christianity cannot coexist. Yet while in Vance’s trilogy religious strife is just one element of the story, in Anderson’s novel this conflict—emphasized by the tragic end of Skafloc and Freda’s relationship—is one of the main axes of the narrative.

Summing up, this chapter illustrates the different ways in which writers of fantasy fiction introduce religions into their secondary worlds. Depending on the complexity and roles of these religions, they can enhance the believability of the fictional reality (Duncan, Martin), contribute to the development of the plot and the protagonists (Kay, Sanderson, Friedman), and challenge the fictional realm of ancient myths and wonders (Vance, Anderson). They can also

imbue the narrative with allegorical references to an existing religion (Lewis) or use the narrative as a means for criticizing an existing religion (Pullman). Each of these approaches might be studied separately, and there are numerous novels whose religious dimensions have not yet been critically investigated. All in all, the continuing and diversified presence of religion (particularly of various Christian denominations) in fantasy literature proves that the genre successfully functions as a platform for addressing and discussing the religious concerns of (post)modern people.





## CHAPTER 5. ANTI-CHRISTIAN DIMENSIONS OF FANTASY LITERATURE

Fantasy literature is a genre that can both promote and challenge established religions. While J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* have generally been praised for their worlds steeped in Christian ethics and theology, and read by many almost as allegories of Christianity,<sup>1</sup> J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy have been heavily criticized—the former for its portrayals of magic and seemingly favorable approach to occultism, and the latter for its alternative world which serves as a medium for the author's criticism of institutional religion (Catholicism in particular).<sup>2</sup> It is quite clear why Rowling's and Pullman's works, in contrast to the worlds of Middle-earth and Narnia, might be treated as a challenge to Christianity.

By and large, modern fantasy fiction may serve as a fine tool of religious criticism, since it allows its authors to create alternative worlds that challenge established beliefs and customs. Yet these subversive, imaginary worlds with their overt criticism and fascination with witchcraft are not the only means through which the genre can oppose, or even rebel against, Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, fantasy fiction—including narratives set in the primary (real) world and secondary (fantastic) worlds—challenges Christianity by displaying a strong preference for the realm of faerie and for mankind's mythic past with its pagan religions revolving around ancient deities and nature worship. Moreover, some narratives present Christianity as an alien element which, in the name of progress and salvation, is forcefully introduced into a secondary world that has no need of it and whose inhabitants would be much happier if they were left to their own ancient rituals of worship. Finally, some fantasy narratives feature good protagonists who reject Christianity (or are indifferent to it) and malevolent antagonists who either are the representatives of the church or justify their malicious actions with Christian ideals. In order to prove that these motifs are recurring elements within the genre's structure, rather than an occasional inclusion, the following chapter is going to analyze a selection of works by Lord Dunsany, Poul Anderson, Charles de Lint, Robert Holdstock, Peter S. Beagle, Jack Vance, and Clive Barker. While discussing the works of William Morris (who greatly contributed to the development of contemporary

fantasy) and their reconstruction of certain archetypes, Richard Mathews argues: “Morris implies that Christianity has done a disservice to mankind by limiting humanity’s mythic and mystical options, narrowing its imaginative vision, and distracting its attention from the here to the hereafter” (2002, 48). Arguably, fantasists analyzed in this chapter follow in Morris’ footsteps and continue to re-introduce readers to their mythic heritage and models of spirituality other than that offered by Christianity—and some of them even categorically reject Christianity through the actions and beliefs of their protagonists. This anti-Christian aspect of modern fantasy has, so far, received less critical attention than the occult undertones of Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and the corrupted Catholic Church of Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*.<sup>4</sup>

### CHRISTIANITY VERSUS THE WORLD OF FAERIE

A conflict between the worlds of faerie and Christianity appears as early as in Lord Dunsany’s beautifully written *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* (1924)—a work recognized by many scholars and readers as one of the pillars of the modern fantasy genre. Complying with the request of the Parliament of Erl, the lord of the valley sends his son, Alveric, to marry Lirazel, the elven princess, and to return with her to his castle. Though Lirazel gladly weds the mortal champion, soon their union is challenged by the differences in their experience and heritage. Lirazel, who is accustomed to the timelessness, wonder, and liberty offered by life in the magical Elfland, struggles to understand the customs of her husband’s people, including their religious beliefs. These beliefs are vaguely reminiscent of Christianity: Lirazel and Alveric get married in the holy place of the Freer according to “Christom rites,” and the Freer is a priest who deems Lirazel beyond salvation because of her lineage, and so he orders her to renounce all connections to her former land (29). Though Lirazel eventually complies with his requests, she is quick to add that her father’s runes could easily destroy the priest’s holy book and its spells (30). Afterwards, the elven princess tries to follow the customs of her new world and participate in its religious ceremonies. Yet for one accustomed to celebrating the beauty and majesty of the natural world, stern religious doctrines which allow the worship of one god alone and which insist on self-denial make very little sense. Lirazel cannot comprehend the new faith, which is one of the reasons behind her growing frustration with life in the mortal world, which will lead to a forced separation between the spouses (Joshi 98–99). Eventually, the princess discards the faith of mortals and boldly announces: “For between Elfland and Heaven is no path, no flight, no way; and neither sends ambassadors to the other” (220). Thus, contrary to what Tolkien would later advocate

in his essay “On Fairy-Stories” (1939)—that “God is the Lord, of angels, and of men – and of elves” (in *Tree and Leaf* 66)—Dunsany presents a world in which the faerie and Christian elements cannot meld, but only coexist in strict separation. When Lirazel is reunited with her husband and son, and the magic of Elfland floods the valley of Earl, the holy place of the Freer is protected by the sound of the bell. While the rest of Erl merges with Elfland, the priest is happy to live in his little “Christom” enclave which remains free of magical intrusions.<sup>5</sup>

A similar conflict between the worlds of faerie (myth) and Christianity underlies Poul Anderson’s *The Broken Sword* (1954)—a novel inspired by Norse mythology.<sup>6</sup> While in Dunsany’s narrative the religious conflict is eventually resolved so that the protagonists can be reunited in spite of their different attitudes to religion, in Anderson’s novel it leads to tragedy and death. The protagonist, Skafloc, is a human child raised by elves. The theft was possible because his father, Orm, neglected his Christian duties and did not have the new-born child baptized. Orm’s negligence results from his failing commitment to the new religion: though he, like many others, officially converts to Christianity, he continues to worship the old Norse gods. Christian piety would have saved him and his family from tragedy. As it is, Skafloc becomes an elven warrior who, similarly to his foster family, has little respect for Christianity. Due to a tragic turn of events, the hero develops an incestuous relationship with his sister, Freda. With the truth revealed, Freda—a devout Christian woman—abandons her beloved (154). Though Freda eventually forsakes her faith and reunites with Skafloc, the man dies shortly after their reunion. In the world of *The Broken Sword*, Christianity and the realm of faerie cannot be reconciled. Elves and other creatures of Norse myths will eventually have to yield to the new religion, and Skafloc and Freda—the representatives of both traditions—are torn apart by their contradictory beliefs.

### REJECTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION

In the urban fantasy novels of Charles de Lint (a prolific modern Canadian writer) the good and admirable protagonists also struggle with the dictates of Christianity and repeatedly reject faith embodied by institutional religion. However, they do so not because of tragic love or other similar circumstances, but because they find spiritual fulfillment in their connection to the Spiritworld (the Otherworld) with its magical forces and ancient creatures commanded by Grandmother Toad of Native American legends. Moreover, more than in divine providence, the protagonists believe in humankind’s own strength and perseverance, and when they actually do seek a relationship with the divine,

they often prefer to partake of the otherworldly mystery permeating the natural world, and to seek help with the ancient deities that embody the powers of nature. Thus, their attitudes to divinity embrace various forms of animism, deism, and pagan nature worship.

A key concept reappearing in de Lint's novels is the concept of the Great Mystery—a mystical force or entity associated with the natural world, which inspires people with a sense of wonder, but also evokes humble respect and fear.<sup>7</sup> The protagonists' recurring experiences of divinity hidden in the wilderness (which becomes a sacred space) is then frequently contrasted with the dictates of Christianity and regulations of institutional religion. And it is the former, not the latter, that de Lint presents as the source of true religious enlightenment.

A case in point is the novel *Greenmantle* (1988). Set in a small village on the backdrop of Canadian wilderness, the story revolves around Ali, a young girl who discovers that the embodiment of ancient myths—the Horned Lord of the Forests (in the form of a stag)—is hunted by demonic hounds. Ali finds herself in the middle of the conflict, trying to comprehend the villagers' worship of the deity and to reconcile it with Christian doctrines, her belief in God, and the fact that the hounds in pursuit of the stag occasionally become monks dressed in habits. The final resolution of the conflict might be quite disturbing for Christian readers. While Ali condemns the malevolent monks, but not Christianity altogether, she comes to the conclusion that Christian teachings are but a distortion of the divinity hidden in the natural world. Her decision is foreshadowed by statements made by other characters. Lewis, a man very critical of Christianity, tells the girl:

"The Christians weren't stupid. They borrowed what they could, from wherever it would be useful. They frowned on merriment and dancing, so they made Lucifer over in the shape of the Pagan Pan who embodied—at least for them—all that they stood against. But what can you expect from a religion that is based on so much suffering? It's little wonder that faerie couldn't abide the sight of their crucifix with the son of their god nailed to it. Did you know that the cross originally stood for the Tree of Life—for nourishment and life-giving? They turned it into a symbol of death." (152)

Lily, another of the villagers, later adds:

"I can remember the first time you told me about what the church did to the mystery. The one they called Jesus—the Green Man they hung from a tree in the desert. How St. Paul took the mystery and twisted it to make a religion of intolerance and self-torment. That's how I still see the pack. As St. Paul's dogs, still trying to trap the mystery with their lies." (196)

Both villagers continue to claim that even if the figure of Jesus Christ had once been an aspect of "the Great Mystery," the church horribly distorted his image by veiling it with its demands of pointless suffering and abase-

ment. When a minor forest spirit, Mally, joins the religious debate by declaring: "Those gospels of theirs—if you look hard enough through them, you can find a passage to forbid anything you want, and another to condone the same thing" (216), it becomes clear that all of these characters are voicing de Lint's private opinions.

Nonetheless, de Lint is critical not of the figure of Jesus Christ, but of the faults he ascribes to the institution of the church. Thus, his protagonists satiate their yearning for a spiritual bond with the Holy by their commitment to the god hidden in the wilderness (of whom, according to the logic of the novel, the figure of Christ is an aspect or reflection). Ali decides to trust her intuition rather than church instructions, and she valiantly protects the stag from the monks. During her struggle, the girl experiences a moment of enlightenment: "She pictured Jesus in her mind, not the hateful image of Him on His cross, but others she had seen, of a gentle man, a kind man... [...]. She saw Christ's face and smiled when she saw that He had the mystery's eyes" (313). This religious epiphany endows Ali with inner strength which allows her to triumph over her adversaries.<sup>8</sup>

Similar motifs reappear throughout de Lint's subsequent works. In *Spiritwalk* (1992), the Virgin Mary is grouped alongside Brigit, Galata, Metra, and other mythic female figures as the embodiment of the same "mystery" (150), and one of the protagonists wonders why the church stresses the significance of self-denial and the reward of afterlife, but does not pay enough attention to the beauty of the world, since "the world itself was a great mystery worthy of devotion" (224). In *The Wild Wood* (1994), when the protagonist, Eithnie, is confronted with the existence of otherworldly creatures, she tries to rationalize her experience and soon arrives at some striking conclusions: "UFOs, tabloid headings, appearance of the Virgin Mary... perhaps they could all be explained this way. Perhaps they were all part of faerie in their own way, they were all real. Or as real as they had to be" (98). In *Someplace to Be Flying* (1998), one of de Lint's several novels which feature the Animal People and the Spiritworld (both strongly inspired by Native American mythology), the protagonists encounter a female deity who represents the unity of all life and the sacredness of nature, and whose majesty and puissance leave them breathless (538). Bettina from *Forests of the Heart* (2000) is one of the few positive characters who actually declares herself a Christian. Still, even Bettina (who is Mexican) is more devoted to the Virgin Mary rather than to God and the church, because that brings her closer to the sacred mystery permeating the natural world. When Bettina's mother, a practicing Christian, objects that the girl should attend the mass more often, her own mother scolds her: "The desert is our church, its roof the sky. Do you think the Virgin and *los santos* ignore us

because it has no walls? Remember, *hija*, the Holy mother was a bride of the desert before she was a bride of the church” (15–16). Having received such teaching since her childhood, the adult Bettina freely combines her magic (occult-like) practices with a firm belief in the help of the Saints, and perceives the Virgin Mary as “a wise woman” figure and incarnation of female power. Another of the novel’s protagonists, Donal, later creates a disturbing painting in which Jesus is combined with the mythic figure of the Green Man:

A naked man wearing a mask of leaves hung Christ-like from an enormous oak. His body was clothed in a nimbus of gold light that was picked up again in the leaves of his mask and the trunk of the tree behind him. Green blood poured from his mouth, the palms of his hands where they were nailed to the tree, and a gaping wound in his abdomen. [...] Not blood. What poured out of the wounds was a liquid spill of finely detailed leaves and spiraling vines. (121–122)

Finally, one of the secondary characters argues the following: “We must realize that we do not live in a world of dead matter, but in a universe of living spirit. Let us open our eyes to the sacredness of Mother Earth, or our eyes will be opened for us” (124). All in all, de Lint’s novels convey a very clear message: Christianity is but one of the modes through which people have tried to conceptualize the divine “mystery” that permeates the world. To attain spiritual enlightenment and to re-introduce themselves into a life in the sacred, modern people do not need the mediation of the church and its doctrines which only distort the truth about the nature of the divine. Rather than their relationship with institutional religion, people should deepen their intimate bond with the natural world and open themselves to the Spiritworld. In this respect, de Lint’s works support Chris Brawley’s argument about the functions of mythopoeic fantasy (developed in *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*, 2014). Brawley argues that mythopoeic fantasy—with its sacramental visions of nature—can restore people’s relationship with the natural world, which has been undermined by Christianity. Brawley points out that Christianity’s anthropocentric perspective and elevation of mankind over other forms of creation result in a relationship of dominance and subordination, which indirectly legitimizes people’s exploitation of the natural environment; he quotes Joseph Campbell’s belief that Christianity “has lost its sense of participation in the mystery of the universe” (Brawley, “Introduction,” n.p.). De Lint’s nature-loving protagonists apparently share this belief and, consequently, abandon Christianity in favor of other forms of spirituality, which allow them to reconnect with the natural world.

“Thorn” (1986) and “Scarrowfell” (1987), two short stories by Robert Holdstock, are even more explicit in their rejection of the hegemony of Christianity in favor of nature worship and pagan deities. Thomas Wyatt, the protagonist of

the first story, is a village mason whom the nature-deity Thorn asks to sculpt his face in a newly built church so that he can gain control over the temple. While initially Wyatt complies with the request, soon he is plagued by doubts and fears, and eventually refuses to continue his work after he discovers his wife having sex with Thorn's priest. However, his refusal is meaningless since the deity's faces are already present in other churches.<sup>9</sup>

Holdstock's story is clearly indebted to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835). Both texts revolve around the theme of human susceptibility to evil and present the wilderness as the abode of supernatural forces which oppose Christian dominance. Both texts feature a young man who is tempted by evil (Wyatt to carve the deity's face and Brown to follow the devil into the forest) and whose faith is challenged by a demonic adversary (the nature-god Thorn is not presented as a benevolent deity, but rather as an amoral entity associated with the fecundity and brutality of the natural world). Both protagonists have wives whose purity—or the lack of it—conditions their faith, and both end up disillusioned with themselves and their communities as a result of their choices. Even the title could suggest some affinity between the stories, since Holdstock chose to name his Green Man figure "Thorn"—the same word appears in the surname of the American writer.

Yet though Wyatt—like Goodman Brown who desperately seeks God's help during the ceremony in the forest—eventually refuses to yield to the pagan deity, the story makes it perfectly clear that his refusal is futile. The pious priest of the newly built church turns out to be a servant of Thorn. The village members, though they obediently participate in Christian ceremonies, secretly believe the Christian God to be a stranger to their land, and they are excited by the possibility of Thorn's return. Thorn himself mocks Christianity when he spreads his arms and tells Wyatt: "I am the Cross of God" (108). And while Wyatt is dying at the end of his short rebellion, he learns that even at that very moment he is being replaced by other servants. Apparently, nothing can stop the ancient god from reclaiming what belonged to him before the arrival of Christianity.

The triumph of nature deities and ancient rites over Christianity is even more evident in the short story "Scarrowfell" (1987). The protagonist, young Ginny, awaits the coming of Lord's Eve. Though the prospects of feast and dancing suggest that it will be a merry festival, Ginny's recurring nightmares and the news about the arrival of a mysterious man named Cyric make the reader more and more suspicious of the true nature of the event. And rightfully so, because on the day of Lord's Eve Ginny's mother vanishes and the distressed girl is ignored by everyone. Eventually, she learns that she was chosen to complete an ancient pledge which will allow Cyric, a man who died cen-



turies ago, to return to the village. Though initially the girl is shocked by the ghastly visitors from the underworld and by the sacrifice of her friend, soon she feels empowered by her new role of a mediator between life and death (between the material world and the otherworldly sphere inhabited by ancient forces). In the story's finale, she enthusiastically recites the Lord's prayer with the rest of the village. Yet the prayer is not what is typically associated with the name:

Our Father, who art in the Forest  
Horned One is Thy name.  
Thy Kingdom is the Wood, Thy Will is the Blood  
In the Glade, as it is in the Village.  
Give us this day our Kiss of Earth  
And forgive us our Malefactions.  
Destroy those who Malefact against us  
And lead us to the Otherworld.  
For Thine is the Kingdom of the Shadow, Thine is the Power and the Glory. Thou art the  
Stag which ruts with us, and We are the Earth beneath thy feet.  
Drocha Nemeton (235)

Like "Thorn," "Scarrowfell" presents a rural community whose dedication to Christianity proves to be a public façade of lies. Though the entire village and the church are prepared for festivity, the Lord whose Eve the people and their priest intend to celebrate is not the Christian God. Him they perceive as the invader that has to be secretly opposed. The Lord adored by them is a nightmarish otherworldly entity whom Ginny beholds with fear and disgust, which do not stop her, however, from joining the circle of his worshippers and reciting the distorted version of the Christian prayer.<sup>10</sup> The girl never condemns the veneer of Christian piety which, it seems, has always surrounded her and which she also easily discards in favor of a pagan deity. Consequently, though at no point does Holdstock openly attack Christianity or have his characters engage in serious religious debates, both of his short stories are quite explicit in their preference for a spirituality derived from myths and pagan nature worship rather than from Christianity.

### CHRISTIANITY IN THE ROLE OF THE ANTAGONIST

Some fantasy novels discredit Christianity by linking it to the figure of the narrative's antagonist who threatens the positive and likeable characters. Such a narrative solution appears, for instance, in Peter S. Beagle's *Tamsin* (1999). The novel's protagonist, Jenny, attempts to save the ghosts of Tamsin and her beloved from the evil Judge Jeffreys<sup>11</sup> whose own ghost has been hunting the couple for centuries. The Judge does not hesitate to command and

condemn others in the name of the Christian God, apparently finding in his flawed understanding of divine law enough justification for his cruel actions. While initially it seems that no one can oppose the judge, the man is suddenly challenged and even overpowered by an old lady who reveals herself to be an ancient deity. Manifesting her powers, the deity declares: “We was here when your Almighty woon’t but a heap of rocks and a pool of water. We was here when woon’t nothing but rocks and water. We was here when we was all there was. [...] And you’ll tell me who’s to bide with me and who’s to hand back? *You’ll tell me?*” (264). While this single scene cannot, of course, be treated as Beagle’s overall critique of Christianity, it repeats the ideas present in the previous works: ancient forces and entities are still present in the world, and they can challenge both the domination of Christianity and the people who invoke God and Christian doctrines to legitimize their violence and hatred.

Apart from Beagle’s *Tamsin* there are other fantasy novels whose malevolent antagonists are associated with or represent Christianity, whereas the protagonists either reject the Christian faith or remain entirely indifferent to it. Jack Vance’s *Lyonesse* trilogy (*Suldrun’s Garden*, *The Green Pearl*, and *Madouc*; 1983–89) and Clive Barker’s *Weaveworld* (1987) are cases in point. The former features Father Umphred, a missionary who visits Lyonesse (a land still full of magic and faerie) in order to convert its pagan inhabitants to Christianity. In spite of his lofty declarations, Umphred is truly interested only in acquiring wealth and recognition, and his dubious morality and piety are but a veneer for his conceit and egoism. It is not surprising then that with Father Umphred as its main representative (and the vain and self-important Queen Sollace as its supporter), Christianity becomes associated in Lyonesse with corruption and deceit, and the virtuous protagonists do not seek religious enlightenment in the new faith. With the death of Umphred and the banishment of Queen Sollace, the future of Christianity in Lyonesse becomes uncertain.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, in Barker’s *Weaveworld*, which follows the protagonists’ struggle to save the magical world of the Fugue and its inhabitants from eradication, only the adversaries are connected to Christianity, whereas the protagonists, Suzanna and Cal (two modern people), explicitly state that they are not Christians and reject official doctrines (612, 639). The main antagonists of the story—Immacolata, her sister called the Magdalene, and a mysterious being which identifies itself as Uriel—are distorted versions of biblical figures. Immacolata, who bears the name given to Virgin Mary, is a revenge-obsessed madwoman that resorts to violence and cruelty to achieve her goals. As the Black Madonna, she is worshipped by a congregation of corrupted priests. The Magdalene, whose name alludes to the figure of Mary Magdalene from the New Testament, is a gruesome monster that rapes men and gives birth to

foul offspring. Uriel, believing itself to be the Archangel that guards the gates to Eden, is a deluded alien entity that kills everyone according to its flawed sense of biblical justice. Their two mortal helpers, Shadwell and Hobart, are respectively a corrupted salesman and a fanatic policeman, whose obsessions are fueled by religious imagery and desire for retribution (Shadwell reminiscences on his Catholic upbringing, and Hobart sees himself as the Dragon that will mete out divine punishment). Since all of these antagonists eventually fail, one could argue that their flawed nature and misunderstanding of religion were the reason for their failure. This, however, is only partially true since the protagonists triumph not because they are true Christians that believe in divine providence, but because they love the world of the Fugue and desperately strive to protect it. Their triumph, similarly to the events described in the works of de Lint and Vance, results in the restoration of a magical world of myth and magic, in which there is apparently no place for the Christian God.<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, the discord between Christianity and the world of magic and faerie, the tragic dissent between the protagonists who accept Christianity and those who do not, and the conflict between the antagonists who are associated with Christianity and the protagonists who do not care much for faith are significant elements of many fantasy narratives. These motifs are frequently combined with the protagonists' worshipful admiration of the numinous power hidden in the natural world and with their return to ancient rituals of nature worship. It should be noted that the analyzed works are set both in fantastic secondary worlds and in the world as we know it: in the former, Christianity is often presented as redundant as far as the well-being of these imaginary worlds is concerned, and in the latter, modern protagonists typically rediscover their ancient mythic heritage in the course of their adventure. If all of these motifs are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that fantasy fiction can challenge Christianity in ways more subtle—and perhaps more dangerous, as some might argue—than by featuring wizards and magic, which are, by and large, staple elements of all fantastic stories. Without a doubt, the complex relationship between fantasy fiction and religion deserves more critical attention. After all, while this chapter provides several examples which illustrate the genre's anti-Christian dimensions, there are issues which still require closer examination, e.g. the extent to which the novels discussed in this chapter (as well as others) were influenced either by the authors' religious (cultural) background and personal beliefs or by the setting chosen for the novel. The answers to this and other questions will ultimately contribute to our better understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the modern fantasy genre.

## CHAPTER 6. LYCANTHROPY IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Without the rich heritage of myths, legends, and folk tales which serve as sources of inspiration and repositories of valuable cultural material, the modern fantasy genre would not be what it is today. It was already argued in Chapter 1 that the presence of reconstructed mythological borrowings is one of the key features of the genre. It was also signalled that the relationship between myth and fantasy has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the genre preserves within its own body certain mythological figures and patterns, thus saving them from oblivion in the (post)modern world. On the other hand, by treating myths as just a repository of ideas which they might use according to their own needs, writers of fantasy may distort the original meaning of mythological tales and separate them from their original cultures and societies. These dangers are highlighted by Brian Attebery in “Exploding the Monomyth: Myth and Fantasy in a Postmodern World” (2007), and reaffirmed by Bogdan Trocha in *Degradacja mitu w literaturze fantasy* (*Degradation of Myth in Fantasy Literature*, 2009). Since Trocha’s investigation of the genre’s approach to mythological traditions was explored in detail in Chapter 1, here I will only repeat some of the main claims, because they will support the analysis of lycanthropy conducted in this chapter. Having examined a range of fantasy novels, Trocha argues that mythological borrowings present in the fantasy genre are typically fragmentary and isolated from the original narrative, because writers may deem certain components of the borrowing unnecessary for their story. Consequently, these unnecessary components can be completely eliminated or reduced to a few characteristic features. Other components of the borrowing can be condensed into a larger image or transposed, i.e. moved from one entity onto another. The end result is a new entity which combines elements of the original mythological item (figure, event, artefact, etc.) with the author’s own artistic vision (Trocha 197–213).

In recognition of the processes discussed by Trocha, the aim of this chapter is to analyze the treatment of a single motif—lycanthropy—in a selection of fantasy novels, which will provide evidence for the extensive reconstruction of myths and folk tales within the genre. The proposed analysis will be developed in two stages. The first part—an attempt to summarize the principal interpretations of the man-to-beast transformation—will discuss lycanthropy as a component of our mythological heritage, as a psychological condition, as

a social construct, and as mode of conceptualizing the relations between the human and the animal world. The second part will investigate a selection of fantasy novels and demonstrate how fantasists reconstruct traditional images of lycanthropy for their own purposes. One of the most common scenarios involving lycanthropy is that interwoven with horror, in which a werewolf—the blood-thirsty killer appearing with every full moon—has to be hunted down and killed for the sake of the protagonist and the entire community. However, this scenario based on the duel between the monster and the hunter has already been exploited to the utmost (particularly by horror movies), which has significantly decreased its impact. Fortunately, writers of fantasy fiction continue to conduct literary experiments in which they prove that this centuries-old motif can still be presented in fresh and surprising ways.<sup>1</sup>

### LYCANTHROPY FROM THE MYTHOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The image of lycanthropy present in world mythological heritage is one revolving around wildness, wilderness, and violence, which is not surprising since, as Gary R. Varner explains, werewolves “have been a fear of humankind since the Neolithic age and may have originated in the shamanic rituals that seemingly transformed men into wolf-like creatures” (97). In *Wojownicy i wilkołaki (Warriors and Werewolves)*,<sup>2</sup> Leszek Paweł Supłecki argues that in antiquity lycanthropy was typically an element of the ideology upheld by (young) warriors, and as such it revolved around life outside the society and was dominated by violence, rape, and killing (5, 202–241). Varner’s claims are similar since he states that scholars “associate the original werewolves with martial brotherhoods, which were extent [sic] in the early Greek, Persian, German, Scythian, Dacian and Celt societies” (97). Słupecki and Varner both emphasize the fact that lycanthropy is not restricted to any particular culture since throughout the centuries werewolves have appeared in different parts of the world: in Greek and Roman mythologies, Celtic tales, Arthurian legends, Scandinavian myths, and Slavic folktales. The study of these texts reveals a myriad of variable details in the werewolf mythos, present in the methods of becoming a werewolf (rituals, curses, violent deaths, magic rings, wolf skins, use of powers), the duration of the metamorphosis (one night, a few days, several years), the rules of returning to human form, the participation of other figures (kings, gods, sacrifices, unfaithful spouses), and many more, which all contribute to the incredible richness of the mythos.

An extensive study of werewolf and vampire legends was conducted by Erberto Petoia in *Vampiri e lupi mannari*,<sup>3</sup> which is complemented by an in-

formative introduction by Alfonso M. Di Nola. This study provides numerous tales and historical accounts of (supposed) manifestations of lycanthropy and vampirism—two instances of man’s transformation into the threatening “Other.” In the introduction, Di Nola claims (as does Słupecki in his work) that lycanthropy is a world-wide phenomenon related also to transformations into other animals, depending on the culture in question. Di Nola further claims that it is characteristic of Western mentality to elevate its own example to the role of a universal model (in Petoia 5). Thus, the Western representation and reception of the man-into-wolf transformation frequently influences the general representation and perception of man’s change into an animal. However, while the Western transformation into a wolf is deemed a curse (such a reception was largely shaped by the Christian perspective), in other cultures man’s change into an animal (the ability of shape-shifting)<sup>4</sup> does not necessarily have such negative connotations (Di Nola in Petoia 6).

Apart from being recognized as a significant element of the mythological (cultural) heritage, lycanthropy can be also interpreted as a psychological condition because it is “symbolic of the irrationality latent in the baser part of man and the possibility of his awakening” (Cirlot 195). In this understanding, the shift into a wolf is not a matter of a physical transformation, but of a psychological one: it is an expression of the most primitive (often unconscious) desires and urges hidden in the human mind. Taking the psychological aspect into consideration, in her study on lycanthropy Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray links werewolves with the concepts of externalized and internalized grotesque (53). Bourgault Du Coudray indicates that in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic fiction images of monstrosity heavily relied on the grotesque mode which emphasized the unnatural and offensive qualities of the Other’s body by contrasting it with the “normative” human body (51–52). Bourgault Du Coudray states that “Few representations of such a grotesque body can rival the werewolf’s moment of metamorphosis from human into wolf, when one form melts and twists into the other” (51). However, “the romantic grotesque” then shifted the emphasis on monstrosity from the outside to the inside, which in the case of werewolves signalled the contrast between their monstrous nature and seemingly normal human body (Bourgault Du Coudray 53). Consequently, the scholar draws a distinction between externalized and internalized grotesque: externalized grotesque embraces a physical transformation into a werewolf, and internalized grotesque a psychological one in which the “psychologized werewolf [...] would not necessarily undergo a literal transformation, but it would certainly exhibit lupine behaviour, indicative of an interior disturbance” (55). Such lycanthropy is connected not with the corrupted human body, but with the afflicted human mind.

Lycanthropy as a phenomenon of the mind can also be related to Varnier's distinction between a voluntary and an involuntary transformation into a werewolf:

The voluntary werewolf became one because of his or her unnatural obsession with human flesh. This person also had sufficient magical powers to affect a physical transformation. [...] The involuntary werewolf was transformed by an evil magician or was sentenced to become such a beast for a certain number of years to atone for the commission of a sin. (98)

The first category, the voluntary werewolf, again points to the human mind and its particular inclinations as possible triggers and amplifiers of the werewolf curse. Thus, lycanthropic metamorphosis can be interpreted as a problem in a person's psyche. In fact, in the past lycanthropy was frequently perceived as an illness of the mind,

a form of madness or melancholy, but it was not until the late seventeenth century that this view regained widespread credence. The Enlightenment rejection of superstitious or occult beliefs in favour of Reason lent further weight to this interpretation, which remained the dominant explanation for lycanthropy into the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century scholars' commitment to the principles of scientific inquiry led to other 'rational' explanations of the phenomenon; it was argued that belief in the werewolf is a superstition originating in such sources as the crimes of sociopaths, an atavistic craving for blood or human flesh [...]. (Bourgault Du Coudray 1–2)

This comment introduces the third understanding of lycanthropy: as a social construct which serves to differentiate between members of a community. Similarly to ancient times when the ethos of lycanthropy separated groups of warriors and rebels from the rest of the society, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lycanthropy also served as a tool of social exclusion. Lycanthropy could be linked, for instance, to the lives of the lower classes, to the decay of the aristocrats or even to foreigners—depending on which group was treated as the Other and which group was the prevailing majority (Bourgault Du Coudray 45–46). Such lycanthropy was a social construct that unmasked the dangerous Other who was a threat to the healthy part of the society. At some point, emancipated women were also considered to be such a threat. Women's emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to many images of "pathologized or demonic femininity," and tales about female werewolves, e.g. Gilbert Campbell's "The White Wolf of Kostopchin" (1889), Clemence Housman's "The Were-Wolf" (1896), and S.R. Crockett's *The Black Douglas* (1899), "contributed to a discourse that envisioned women as a threat to the lives and aspirations of men" (Bourgault Du Coudray 47–48).

Lycanthropy can operate as a tool of exclusion not only among particular groups within one community, but also on a greater scale: as a symbol of exclusion from the society in general, since the werewolf is a person violent-



ly ripped away from society (and culture) and thrown into bestiality and the wilderness—a state often not regarded as particularly desirable. For instance, discussing various werewolf tales of Early Modern Europe, Isabelle Pollentzke indicates that for centuries the werewolf, “by crossing the border between human and animal, posed a threat that the devil and his followers would undermine Christian society” (Pollentzke). Of course, if the animal world was associated with the lack of morality and piety, it was only natural for the werewolf figure—the epitome of corruption and a creature related to the feral wolf—to be regarded as violating the biblical order of things and belonging to the domain of the devil. Postmodern studies of human-animal relations map numerous ways in which animals have functioned as constructs representing the fears and desires of particular social and cultural groups (DeMello 9–11). However, in contrast to the previous centuries, postmodernism recognizes the Western perspective (and its Christian foundation) as only one of the available modes of conceptualizing human-animals relations. These other modes, rather than emphasize humanity’s dominion over the world, frequently point to the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all life (Hamel 1–4). From this perspective, the werewolf—though still a frightening creature—can be regarded as a hybrid entity mediating between the human and the animal world.

### REINVENTION OF LYCANTHROPY IN FANTASY LITERATURE

These three perspectives on the motif of lycanthropy—mythological, psychological, and sociological—are, to a varying degree, reinvented by contemporary fantasists. The works chosen for analysis are Stephen King’s *Cycle of the Werewolf* (1983), Torill Thorstad Hauger’s *Varulven og Iselin* (1992),<sup>5</sup> Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga (2005–2008), and two works featuring female werewolves: Peter S. Beagle’s *Lila the Werewolf* (1978) and Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* series, particularly the volume *Men at Arms* (1993) in which the werewolf Angua appears for the first time. The selected works were published between the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is quite significant since the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced several novelties into the original werewolf mythos. Bourgault Du Coudray points out that the novelties introduced in the texts of the 1930s and 1940s include being bitten by a werewolf as a way of becoming one, using a silver bullet as the most efficient method of killing the beast, and undergoing lycanthropic transformation due to the full moon; she also points to the emphasis put on the link between lycanthropy and masculinity (77–79). Today, all of these novelties are well-established elements within the modern werewolf mythos (which appear also in the novels chosen for analysis).

Probably less known than his other horror novels, Stephen King's *Cycle of the Werewolf* (1983) is a short work in which a vicious and blood-thirsty werewolf appears with every full moon and kills the innocent citizens of Tarker's Mills. There are no particular reasons given for the werewolf's appearance in the village; it is only suggested that, before his first transformation, the lycanthropic man picked up some strange flowers near a cemetery. Thus, lycanthropy is presented as a cataclysm that strikes the innocent, and an inexplicable evil force that has to be subdued and defeated. In this respect, King's werewolf is a typical beast appearing in numerous myths and legends: one to be hunted down by a brave hero for the sake of the community.

However, King introduces certain twists into the typical quest-to-kill-the-werewolf narrative pattern. First of all, the person transforming into the werewolf is Reverend Lester Lowe of the Grace Baptist Church in Tarker's Mills. It is Lester Lowe, both a member of the community and its spiritual guardian, that is the gruesome, evil beast revelling in death. Paradoxically, instead of being horrified by his metamorphosis, the Reverend is thrilled by the power engulfing him every month and eventually begins to perceive the transformations as a gift that somehow also serves God's purposes—an approach which entirely distorts the faith he is supposed to preserve. Arguably, the Reverend exemplifies the figure of “the Gothic double,” i.e. “the paradoxical existence of both good and evil in a single person, [which] remains an important issue in the fiction of Stephen King” (Strengell 68). Comparing Lester Lowe to the figure of Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde from Robert Louis Stevenson's narrative, Heidi Strengell argues that his gruesome transformations are, together with his socially respectable vocation, a manifestation of his dual nature (70–71). Thus, the Reverend is both a beast and a tragic conflicted individual; “in the Gothic manner the Beast can be anywhere or, even worse, anybody” (Strengell 76).

Another twist which King introduces in the well-known pattern is the choice of the hero who will challenge the werewolf: it is Marty Coslaw, a ten-year-old handicapped boy. A child on a wheelchair is not the type usually assigned the role of the fearless and strong beast hunter. Yet, though Marty's body is not that of the typical beast-slaying hero, the boy is endowed with the right qualities of character. When Marty identifies the Reverend as the werewolf, he sends him anonymous letters which insist that the man-beast should stop the killing. In the last letter, Marty reveals his own identity, and then courageously waits for the werewolf to appear with the next full moon. The boy kills the lycanthrope with silver bullets and, by doing so, rescues both the community and the Reverend. Thus, on the one hand, King's novel heavily relies on the standard elements of the modern werewolf mythos (full moon, violence, and silver bullets) and the traditional narrative pattern in which the main aim is to

kill the evil creature, with the rest of the novel's plot being merely a decoration. On the other hand, the author managed to refresh his werewolf narrative by assigning the roles of the werewolf and the hunter to unusual characters, consequently producing a child beast-slayer and a lycanthropic (fallen) priest.

Another original variation on lycanthropy appears in Torill Thorstad Hauger's<sup>6</sup> *Varulven og Iselin* (1992). The novel's protagonist is again a young boy, thirteen-year-old Robin, yet this time the boy is not the hero, but the werewolf. Robin begins to transform into a beast (with every full moon) after his encounter with a strange old man. The man tells Robin stories about werewolves, and when the boy falls asleep, he covers him with a wolf-skin. But this is only a symbolic gesture imitating the folkloric means of shifting into the beast. What really initiates Robin's metamorphosis is his craving for power. Robin wants to be strong and fearless in order to defend himself against school bullies. Unfortunately, his desire for strength soon develops into a fascination with violence and domination. His role models are juvenile delinquents, and Robin struggles to become accepted into their gang. However, as the events unfold, the boy gradually becomes disgusted with the gang's brutality and indifference to human suffering. Unfortunately, his own descent into violence triggers off the transformation into a werewolf (Hauger even uses a different font to relate the thoughts of Robin in his werewolf form), and despite his growing fear of the metamorphosis, Robin is unable to stop it.

The hero who actually defeats the werewolf is Iselin, a strong-hearted and kind young girl. Robin develops romantic feelings towards Iselin, which strengthen his hatred of the lycanthropic transformation. When Iselin overhears a plan in which Robin is supposed to attack a wealthy old woman, she courageously substitutes herself for the woman, because she wants to punish the delinquents and save Robin. In this story no silver bullets are required to defeat the werewolf. What is required is courage and love. The moment when Robin is ready to hit the old lady (not knowing it is actually Iselin in disguise), he stops in his tracks, because the hunched figure reminds him of his dear grandmother who passed away some time ago. The memory of his grandmother and of the love she bestowed on him, as well as the feelings he has developed for Iselin, grant Robin the strength to finally refuse the temptation of violence and to get rid of the wolf-skin. Thanks to the two women, the boy is able to defeat the beast within him. As a result, in Hauger's novel it is the female and her love that may repel the curse of lycanthropy and its symbolic temptation into masculine violence and domination—a solution which makes Hauger's Iselin somewhat reminiscent of Mina Harker from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* who, at one point, takes pity on the wretched vampire (Strengell 77). This unquestionable significance of the female in Hauger's version of the bat-

tle with a lycanthrope is a welcome change from the narrative pattern in which the female is merely the werewolf's prey, waiting to be rescued by the male hero.

What is more, Hauger's werewolf is not so much a physical beast (though Robin does claim to see certain changes in his face during the transformation, such as growing fangs and gleaming eyes), but a psychological weakness: a temptation into violence and the corruption of one's soul. People are spiritually transformed into a werewolf when they are unable to be true to themselves, to speak their own mind, and to firmly support what they believe in. Moral weakness exposes the soul and mind to the hideous transformation, while courage fulfils the role of the silver bullet that can kill the monster. But since it is one's own weakness that leads a person to becoming a werewolf, anyone is prone to lycanthropy and no evil curse or magical ritual is required. Lycanthropy is a psychological threat coming from within, a threat constantly present. Hauger's Robin, a boy-werewolf and another example of the internally conflicted "Gothic double," has to learn the painful lesson of how to choose good over evil before he is able to mature into an adult. Hauger skilfully interweaves the traditional elements of the werewolf mythos with Robin's journey to maturity, and addresses some of the ever-present dilemmas of human existence.

A striking change in the depiction and reception of lycanthropy has recently appeared together with the immensely popular fantasy romance series *Twilight* (2005–2008, consisting of *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*) written by Stephenie Meyer. Meyer's tale of a love triangle between Bella Swan (a human girl), Edward Cullen (a vampire), and Jacob Black (a werewolf) has become a worldwide success. *Twilight* and other books from the category of romantic fantasy have introduced a new perspective on both vampires and werewolves. Although much of the old mythos is still preserved—in the case of vampires, their beauty and craving for blood, and in the case of werewolves, their ferocity and transformation—in general, vampires and werewolves have definitely become more humane than ever, because the primary subject of the series is (teenage) love. As a result, the two male protagonists are no longer monsters but romantic lovers, and their monstrosity and primal instincts are subdued. The vampire is no longer a sinister creature roaming the night in search of blood, but a sophisticated and loving boyfriend who resists the temptation of attacking his beloved (the more old-fashioned vampires appearing in *Twilight* are restricted to the roles of villains, while Edward Cullen and his family are the heroes). Similarly, the werewolf is not a beast of the full moon, but a caring protector harbouring feelings of unrequited love. Meyer liberally transformed the stock characters of Gothic and horror fiction to the

point when they were fit to become the protagonists of a standard romance novel (with a paranormal twist), in which the romantic plotline is of primary importance and the narrative usually rewards the heroine and the readers with a happy ending (Crawford "Introduction"; Melton 578).

However, Meyer's portrayal of lycanthropy is one of the series' many problems: Jacob is, in fact, not a werewolf, but a shape-shifter. His transformation is not subjected to the full moon; it is a talent inherited in his Native tribe. Yet Jacob is constantly being called a werewolf, not a shape-shifter, which adds confusion to the werewolf mythos present in the story. Perhaps this is simply an example of mythopoetic speculation (to use Bogdan Trocha's terminology) performed by Meyer on a greater scale, but the result of this are confusion and degradation of the original pattern. Still, the *Twilight* series and numerous other works which emulate the pattern of supernatural love display a surprising (post)modern variant of lycanthropy: a romanticized, humanized werewolf whose rival in love is the vampire. While King's werewolf was definitely an antagonist and Hauger's a potential antagonist, Meyer's werewolf is a potential lover, which is a complete reversal of the traditional depiction and reception of lycanthropes.

Other interesting variants of lycanthropy appear in the works of Peter S. Beagle and Terry Pratchett, who both portray female werewolves. Links between femininity and lycanthropy have appeared in human thought since antiquity (but because of lycanthropy's initial connection to warrior ideology they were not as frequent as male metamorphoses), e.g. in the image of the she-wolf feeding Romulus and Remus, and in the folktales about evil women and witches who were punished or cursed with lycanthropy for their sins (Petoia 152, 167, 214). Bourgault Du Coudray claims that there are significant differences between the portrayals of male and female lycanthropes. She argues, for instance, that women's femininity and sensuality link them to nature, to the pleasures of the flesh and, as a result, to lycanthropy more directly than men's masculinity; that male lycanthropy expresses itself in violence, while female in sexual insatiability; and finally, that while male lycanthropy has to be subdued or defeated, women's acceptance of lycanthropy often leads to self-development and the understanding of female nature (112–129). Bourgault Du Coudray's distinction between male and female lycanthropy is clearly present in Peter S. Beagle's and Terry Pratchett's portrayal of female werewolves.

The plot of Beagle's novella, *Lila the Werewolf* (1978), revolves around Joe Farrell and his new girlfriend, Lila Braun. On the night of a full moon, Farrell is suddenly visited by a blood-stained wolf that, with the break of dawn, transforms into his girlfriend coming home after a busy werewolfish

night. Lila does not confess to being a lycanthrope, but Farrell is convinced that she is one. With the next full moon, Lila's mother is introduced into the story as an overprotective person who constantly worries about her daughter's transformations. It is then that Lila finally tells Farrell about her lycanthropy, explaining that it had started with puberty, as if—together with menstruation—lycanthropy was part of her process of becoming a woman. On the one hand, even though Lila tries to brush off her condition as something that just happens to people (like allergy), the truth is that the metamorphoses make her suffer: when asked if she had ever killed a person, Lila begins to cry hysterically. The young woman even pays regular visits to a psychiatrist, who tries to help her cope with her state as if lycanthropy were another mental problem. On the other hand, Farrell notices that seconds before the actual transformation, his girlfriend looks thrilled.

Lila and Farrell slowly grow apart over the next few months, not because she is a werewolf, but because they are both aware that they do not love each other. The climax comes when Lila transforms and—sexually aroused—flees from Farrell in search of a mate. The man begins to chase her, but is unable to stop her and, in the end, becomes a witness of her intercourses with several dogs. The sexual frenzy ends in the morning, when Lila can finally turn into a human after drinking some blood. Seconds before her transformation, a man tries to kill her with silver bullets. Farrell, shocked and disgusted by the events of the night, does nothing to stop him, and Lila is saved by her mother. After the incident, Lila moves out because, as Farrell explains, they have learned too much about each other. The final lines of the story reveal that two years after the incident Lila is getting married to a psychologist who thinks her transformations are something wonderful.

Beagle's novella offers a completely different reading of lycanthropy than the previous works, because the author clearly combines lycanthropy with femininity. It is emphasized that Lila's transformations began in puberty—and the dependency of modern werewolves on the cycle of a full moon generally resembles the female menstrual cycle. Farrell learns to accept his girlfriend's lycanthropy just as any man might accept the changes in his partner's mood before her menstruation. In addition, it is Lila's mother—another female—that comes to her rescue, as if she were the only one able to understand her daughter's monthly experiences. Moreover, Beagle links lycanthropy with sexual desire, or even rampant lust. As a woman, Lila seems insatiable; as a werewolf, she yields to her primal instincts. The craving for sex is mixed with the desire for blood: before becoming human in the final scene, Lila drinks the blood of her dog lovers. The connection between Lila's transformation, sexuality, and craving for blood is reminiscent of a similar motif which has been



functioning in vampire lore since the publication of Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The three vampire sisters inhabiting Dracula's castle have become, over decades, the template for the figure of a seductive female vampire whose yearning for blood stands for or is combined with her sexuality (Melton 76–77; Senf 201–204). Thus, it seems that the portrayals of female vampires and lycanthropes are indebted to the same fantasies and fears of uncontrollable female lust.

Beagle's final modification of the werewolf mythos is the creation of an urban werewolf who has to deal with city life and all its nuisances. Instead of roaming the forests, Lila roams the city. Unfortunately, in the story Lila is seldom given a voice of her own and readers are acquainted with her mainly through Farrell's perspective, whose understanding of Lila's situation is for sure distorted, since he is neither female nor lycanthropic. Thus, Lila's true thoughts about her transformations and femininity remain unknown.

Beagle's tone in *Lila the Werewolf* is frequently light and humorous; however, the real humour connected with lycanthropy comes with Terry Pratchett's Angua who appeared for the first time in the volume *Men at Arms* (1993) and since then has become a prominent character of Pratchett's *Discworld* series. Delphine Angua von Überwald belongs to an aristocratic werewolf family; in Überwald lycanthropy is more of a privilege and mark of social status than a curse. Angua, being an independent-minded and strong-willed young woman, rebels against family traditions which include preying on innocent citizens and killing weaker members of the family. Instead, she decides to join the City Watch in Ankh-Morpork. Thus, Pratchett presents two types of werewolves: one that revels in blood and dominance, and the other that wants to turn lycanthropy into a tool serving good purposes. Being one type or the other is a matter of individual choice, because Pratchett's werewolves retain human intellect in their wolf form. That is why, even though Angua is often driven by her instincts and is subjected to the conditions ruling her race (full moon, silver, etc.), her own choice is to protect others rather than harm them: she even leaves money for the chickens she kills in her wolf form in order to emphasize her humanity since animals do not pay for their meals.

Pratchett is able to derive lots of humour from the figure of a female lycanthrope and her down-to-earth problems. For one thing, the humour centres around Angua's work as a guard. The woman is always concerned about her transformation, because it involves lots of nudity, and returning to human shape next to criminals and fellow-guards is not something a woman would really like to do. In addition, because her clothes constantly come and go, Angua wears her guard badge on a dog collar, so that she will not lose it and people will recognize her as a guard even in her animal form. The evolving



crime world of Ankh-Morpork also quickly adapts to a lycanthropic officer, and scent bombs become a useful tool. Secondly, there is Angua's romantic relationship with another guard, Carrot. Though Carrot (like Farrell) does not mind her being a werewolf, Angua is often troubled by her abilities and their influence on her life (for instance, the fact that she has to sleep in a dog's basket a few nights each month and that she is physically able to shred people into bits). However, Carrot accepts her just the way she is, and it becomes Angua's task to accept herself in a similar manner, which she finds rather difficult because of her family's traditions and habits (Beagle's Lila would fit into von Überwald family far better than Angua, since she also becomes a blood-thirsty beast after transformation). As a result, despite the comic elements, Angua is a very troubled character: she has to learn to accept her lycanthropic nature, but to do so, she has to work out her own way of being a werewolf, since she does not wish to follow the standards set by her family. In contrast to Lila's condition, Angua's lycanthropy is not equated with femininity or sexual desire; there are only some comic situations resulting from her being both a woman and a werewolf. But just like Lila, Angua becomes an urban werewolf that has to adapt her lycanthropy to the conditions of city life.

The five examples of fantastic lycanthropy provided in this chapter evidently repeat certain well-known elements of the werewolf mythos: painful transformation under the full moon, thirst for blood, craving for flesh, struggle with everyday life, and death by a silver bullet. At the same time, these works are fine examples of how fantasists manipulate and, to use Bogdan Trocha's terminology, eliminate, reduce, condense, and transpose well-known mythological and folktale elements of lycanthropy in order to incorporate them into their secondary worlds. The results of those endeavours are lycanthropes from all walks of life (a priest, modern teenagers, aristocratic and ordinary women), new types of lycanthropes (a romanticized werewolf, an urban werewolf), various perspectives on lycanthropy (lycanthropy seen not only as a curse, but also as a desired ability, a psychological threat, part of womanhood, a channel for feminine sexuality, and a comic element), and original narrative solutions (lycanthropy being repelled, subdued or defeated by children and women, werewolves becoming potential boyfriends, and lycanthropy seen as part of everyday life that has to be somehow dealt with). These lycanthropes can be studied through the lens of Gothic fiction, Romance fiction, gender studies, human-animal relations, and other critical perspectives which, by focusing on particular aspects and conditions of the lycanthropic metamorphosis, may indicate how the figures of werewolves embody a society's changing approach to the broadly defined Other. In the context of the fantasy genre, these individual reconstructions of lycanthropy are indicative of a larger and more signifi-

cant process: the constant fluidity of the entire genre and the extent of mythopoetic speculation (reconstruction of myths) conducted within its boundaries. Similar studies on other mythic motifs and patterns reappearing in fantasy fiction (e.g. other malevolent creatures, figures of saviours, quest-journeys, etc.) would prove that they also have undergone the process of reconstruction and reinterpretation. In their search of fresh readings and surprising solutions, contemporary fantasists reconstruct chosen myths, transform them, adapt them, maybe even distort them. Nevertheless, myths and folk tales—so often forgotten in the high-tech, modern world—can continue to exist as a prominent category within the structures of fantasy literature.



## CHAPTER 7. UNICORNS IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Though unicorns do not appear in fantasy literature as often as elves, trolls, and dragons, they too are a prominent component of the genre's repertoire of magical creatures. Among a wide range of fantasy novels and short stories featuring unicorns, Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968) is one of the most acclaimed and loved tales. The novel became so recognizable that it has dominated Beagle's literary career for years. In fact, Beagle even claimed that, despite the immense success of *The Last Unicorn* (1968), he is unwilling to write about unicorns ever again ("Paradoxa Interview..."). Paradoxically, these mythic beasts have somehow continued to reappear in Beagle's fiction for half a century—for instance, in "Julie's Unicorn" (1995), *The Unicorn Sonata* (1996), and "Two Hearts" (2005). Yet in every subsequent work, Beagle's unicorn is somewhat different from its predecessor, and in some cases strikingly different from its traditional counterpart.<sup>1</sup>

To analyze how and why Beagle has transformed the traditional unicorn mythos, it is useful to refer to Bogdan Trocha's extensive work on the presence of myths in modern fantasy literature, *Degradacja mitu w literaturze fantasy* (*Degradation of Myth in Fantasy Literature*, 2009). Though Trocha's work was analyzed in Chapter 1, it is worth repeating some of his main claims, since they will support the investigation of Beagle's portrayal of unicorns. Trocha examines a selection of fantasy novels, which allows him to discuss the diversified presence of mythological borrowings within the genre. Trocha states (197–213) that these borrowings are usually fragmentary and disconnected from their original narratives, because fantasists reconstruct the borrowings according to their own needs. Thus, those components of the borrowing which are considered redundant are either completely eliminated or reduced to a few distinctive features. Other components of the borrowing can be condensed or transposed (combined into a larger entity or moved from one entity to another). These fragmentary mythological borrowings are then introduced into the secondary world and further changed according to the requirements of the narrative (mythopoeic speculation).

Trocha argues that all of these processes lead to the degradation of myth. Though he acknowledges the fact these various reconstructions imbue fantasy literature with remnants of mythological knowledge which readers might rediscover, he also points out that myths recycled by the fantasy genre can be dis-

torted, desacralized (separated from the sphere of sacred beliefs to which they originally belonged), and misunderstood. These claims are supported by Brian Attebery's article "Exploding the Monomyth: Myth and Fantasy in a Post-modern World" (2007), in which he contends that mythological borrowings within fantasy literature are often separated from their primary cultural background and, as a result, exploited. In turn, fantasy narratives which only recycle well-established mythological patterns become formulaic and predictable.

This threat, however, does not seem to pertain to Beagle's unicorns. As George M. Eberhart explains in his study of fabled animals, "Unicorn legends have a long and cosmopolitan history ranging throughout most of Europe, Africa, and Asia," and details of the unicorn mythos vary considerably across cultures (567–568). Thus, even if we assume that the unicorn transformed by Beagle is exclusively the European unicorn, it is still impossible to claim that these transformations exploit the culture of a particular community, because the single-horned beast has never been the property of a single society. In addition, though Beagle's unicorns display some features consistent with the traditional European mythos, their subsequent transformations (part of Beagle's mythopoeic speculation) reduce the degree of predictability. Nevertheless, Trocha's and Attebery's warnings that a mythological borrowing may become distorted due to its various transformations cannot be easily dismissed. Therefore, the analysis conducted in this chapter will assess the degree to which Beagle's works—to use Trocha's terminology—eliminate, reduce, condense, and transpose elements of the traditional unicorn mythos. It will also investigate the new elements introduced by Beagle into the mythos, and evaluate the results of these transformations. Yet before we can discuss Beagle's unicorns, it is necessary summarize the themes and images traditionally associated with these mythic beasts.

### TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE UNICORN MYTHOS

The unicorn has always been perceived as one of the most noble and ethereal creatures haunting human imagination. In the European folklore, the unicorn is traditionally recognized as the symbol of purity and chastity. Any pursuit after this swift beast is doomed to fail. Only when approached by a virgin does the unicorn become peaceful and submissive. Linda S. Godfrey claims that the unicorn appeared in human imagination as early as in Chaldean artwork from around 3500 BC (26); in other words, unicorns have accompanied people for thousands of years. In antiquity, they were mentioned mostly in texts on natural history, in which they were described as creatures supposedly encountered in some exotic lands.<sup>2</sup> Cassandra Eason states that the unicorn was

first described in 398 BCE by the Ancient Greek naturalist Cresias. He travelled throughout Persia and the Far East and told of a creature he encountered that seems remarkably similar to the fabled unicorn, with a white horse body, a dark red head and dark blue eyes, and a threecolored, pointed horn about one-and-a-half feet long. (xiii)

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, unicorns frequently appeared in bestiaries and love poetry—for example, in one of the poems by Thibaut de Champagne (1201–1253), the unicorn is a metaphor describing a lover approaching his beloved (in Ruud 628). In addition to literature, unicorns were present in medieval heraldry and in tapestries which illustrated the many attempts to capture the beast. The most famous tapestries are *Dame à la licorne* (today exhibited in the Musée de Cluny, Paris) and *The Hunt of the Unicorn* (exhibited in the Cloisters division of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City). What is more, the fascination with unicorns inspired not only several works of art, but also real life pursuits after the beast. Newly discovered animals, e.g. narwhals, antelopes, and rhinoceroses, were often mistakenly identified as the mythic unicorn. People chased after the beast so persistently not only because of its beauty, but also because of its horn which, according to some legends, could be turned into a poison (Steffler 126) or an aphrodisiac (Eason 86). Also Christianity, by adopting the unicorn as one of its prominent symbols, has contributed to the preservation of the unicorn mythos. The Christian tradition focuses on the beast's purity and strength, as well as on the rich imagery surrounding its captivity: "According to legend, the unicorn could be caught only with the aid of a virgin, in whose lap the trusting animal sought refuge – a posture that enabled hunters to trap and kill the beast. This was seen as a symbol of the Virgin's Mary conception of Christ and of his subsequent arrest and crucifixion" (Steffler 126). In the Christian tradition, the untainted unicorn, exposed to harm because of a virgin, became a representation of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Discussing the cultural significance of monsters, Jeffery Jerome Cohen argues that monsters embody the fears and desires of the society which creates and sustains them (4). The monster is the Other *par excellence* as it transgresses bodily norms, violates moral codes, exhibits qualities inaccessible to people, and indulges in behavior restricted or condemned by the society (Cohen x). Yet its existence is crucial because by conceptualizing the Other, the society conceptualizes the Self (in whatever form that Self may be desirable). It is evident that the unicorn has fulfilled similar functions by becoming, over the centuries, the embodiment of fascination with things distant and exotic, expression of sexual restrictions, emblem of courtly culture, and Christian symbol of unattainable grace and virtue. Nowadays, this mythic beast is still a powerful symbol frequently adopted by artists from various fields, including

fantasy literature. Given the unicorn's strong presence in medieval culture and the fantasy genre's equally strong fascination with the Middle Ages, visible particularly in the genre's perpetual creation of quasi-medieval worlds and reconstruction of medieval symbols and figures (Selling 211–218), it is not surprising that the unicorn has become a stock character in the repertoire of fantasy writers. The eponymous character of Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*—a novel also set in a fantastic reality reminiscent of the High Middle Ages and their courtly culture—is probably the most popular fantasy unicorn in the world. Even so, it is quite distant from its traditional counterpart.

### THE UNICORN—REIMAGINED

The element which is entirely eliminated from Beagle's story, apparently unnecessary even though the plot is set in a quasi-medieval world, is the fascination with the unicorn's horn: none of the characters ever suggests that Unicorn should be captured so that her attribute might be turned into poison or aphrodisiac. Instead, they are all fascinated with her immortal beauty. In fact, Geoffrey Reiter (2009) argues that exploration of immortality and mortality is one of the main themes of the novel; consequently, Reiter offers a reading of *The Last Unicorn* which highlights the protagonists' experiences of both states. For Mommy Fortuna, King Haggard, and Captain Cully mortality is equal to doom, which explains their struggle to reach immortality: both Mommy Fortuna and Haggard imprison mythic creatures for their own delight, whereas Cully surrounds himself with a façade of lies because of his paradoxical desire to become more real than the mythic Robin Hood.<sup>4</sup> While Cully's illusion is brutally shattered by Schmendrick's magic, Mommy Fortuna's and Haggard's punishment for the crime of usurping reign over immortality is death. Yet despite their errors, both Mommy Fortuna and Cully with their fake lives, and Haggard "with his dreadful hunger for a beauty that can never escape him, and his crippling knowledge that nothing is worth loving because everything dies in his hands" (Beagle 1978, 12) deserve pity rather than condemnation. In contrast, Schmendrick's and Molly's experiences of immortality contribute to their spiritual growth: having been cursed with immortality, the magician wants to become mortal again, whereas Molly's belated meeting with a unicorn, though painful, frees her from a meaningless existence with Cully. Reiter argues that Beagle's stories "advocate a dialectic, a synthesis between the poles of mortality and immortality, suggesting that life ought to be lived in a balanced perspective that privileges neither the real not the ideal but exults in both" (104). Unicorn's fate, i.e. her experience of mortality and her altered perception of immortality, strongly supports Reiter's claim.



In order to develop the themes of immortality and mortality in Unicorn's adventures, Beagle significantly reduces and then alters the traditional image of the unicorn. The process of reduction begins in the opening scene of the novel: though the hunters call Unicorn the last of her kind, the younger man does not seem particularly disturbed by the world's loss of unicorns, since for him they are hardly anything else than fairytale creatures. Unicorn then decides to leave her fairytale (her Edenic forest) and step into the world of mortal people, who—blind to supernatural dimensions of their world—further reduce her to a pretty horse. Finally, for Mommy Fortuna and Haggard, Unicorn becomes nothing more than a way to fulfill their selfish desires. All of these reductions diminish Unicorn's mythological status and expose her to desires and dilemmas characteristic for mortality. The final step in the process of reduction is Unicorn's complete alteration: Schmendrick commits one of the most horrible deeds in the entire book—he traps an immortal soul in a mortal body.

The metamorphosis, though surprising, can be anticipated from the first chapter. When Unicorn learns that she is the last of her kind, her idle life is disrupted by unexpected emotional uncertainties, which is something characteristic for humans, not for mythic beasts. Anxiety finally compels the protagonist to abandon the forest in search of her kin, even though unicorns spend their entire lives in one place. Thus, Unicorn's subsequent bodily transformation seems a natural continuation of her psychological change and a result of her being exposed to the mortal world.

In his analysis of *The Last Unicorn*, John Pennington (1989) applies William Blake's theory of contraries to argue that Beagle's novel explores the tensions between innocence and experience, and mortality and immortality, without privileging one state over the other. Pennington recalls Blake's "fearful symmetry" of opposites in order to investigate the novel's metafictional aspects, i.e. the ways in which Beagle uses the convention of fantasy literature to insert comments on fairytales and myths. Inspired by Pennington, Geoffrey Reiter explores the tensions between mortality and immortality. Yet he pays almost no attention to the theme of innocence and experience. Even Pennington does not attempt to narrow down these two categories and instead uses them in a very broad sense. Thus, adopting Pennington's idea to analyze Beagle's works through the theory of contraries, I want to argue that innocence and experience—understood as referring to human sexuality—are one of the main themes of *The Last Unicorn* and the cause of Beagle's alteration of the traditional unicorn mythos.

Unicorn, living in her Edenic forest, is the embodiment of innocence that knows nothing of desires which rule human existence. This state of innocence is gradually threatened by Unicorn's experience of the mortal world and,

eventually, the mythic beast becomes mortal. Unicorn's transformation disrupts the traditional pattern. No longer is the unicorn approached by a maiden: the unicorn becomes the maiden, so two images—of beast and virgin—are condensed into one. A male protagonist would be, perhaps, a less surprising choice. After all, the traditional unicorn was attracted to virgins, in medieval times it was associated with knights (who were fierce in battle, but gentle towards women), and even served as a symbol of Christ. Nevertheless, Beagle opted for a female beast.

Even though Beagle's description suggests that Unicorn has lived for centuries, her human body is that of a beautiful, young girl. This apparent inconsistency highlights the fact that though Unicorn might be old and wise for a mythological creature, her understanding of love and sexuality is that of an inexperienced woman. It is her relationship with Prince Lír that gradually teaches the Lady Amalthea (Unicorn) about passion and yearning. Exposed to the conditions of mortality and Lír's affection, Amalthea slowly forgets about her mythological origins, and her innocence becomes experience. In contrast to Mommy Fortuna's and Haggard's desire to possess immortality, Lír's yearning for the Lady is perhaps the purest in the entire novel: after the initial stage of infatuation, the Prince is satisfied by Amalthea's existence alone and does not care about her physical shape. The body ceases to be important, because Lír—an idealistic hero and an errant knight—admires the truth and beauty contained by the soul. Thus, even though Unicorn's departure leaves Lír grief-stricken, as a true hero he understands that certain (narrative) patterns cannot be disobeyed.

Despite their mutual feelings and the many tasks which the prince performs to impress his beloved, Amalthea and Lír neither consummate their love nor even touch. This striking lack of physical contact can be explained either as the requirement of the convention chosen by Beagle or the prerequisite for fulfilling the novel's quest. On the one hand, the relationship between Amalthea and Lír resembles that between a lady and her chivalric knight: the lady is the object of distant worship and admiration, but not of sexual desires. In this respect, the novel's imagery reflects medieval courtly culture in which the concept of refined love (*fin amors*) was grounded in the elevation of the female, the experience of the spiritual dimension of the relationship rather than its physical consummation, and the tasks performed by the lover in the name of his beloved so that he could prove himself worthy of her affection (in Ruud 160–161). On the other hand, according to the unicorn mythos present in the story, a man is forbidden from touching a unicorn regardless of its physical shape. Had the pair touched at least once, it would have been impossible for Amalthea to return to her mythic shape—the symbol of chastity and purity.

And since Unicorn has to fulfill the task of finding her kin, she cannot be allowed (or doomed) to remain a human woman.

Apart from the requirements of the convention and narrative, the lack of physical contact can be explained by the position of masculine desire within the story. A hint of physical lust is present at the beginning of Lír and Amalthea's relationship: Amalthea says that the Prince does not desire her thoughts, but wants her just like the Bull. However, during the months that follow her metamorphosis, the Lady begins to understand that Lír's admiration is nothing like Haggard's (and the Bull's) greedy desire to possess. In the end, Lír is satisfied with loving Amalthea regardless of her physical shape. In other words, his masculine desire is exchanged for platonic love.

This theme of substitution is further developed in the relationship between Unicorn/Amalthea and the Red Bull/King Haggard. The novel never explains the relationship between the King and the Bull or how the Bull was created. Nonetheless, the beast fulfills Haggard's every wish, and so he chases the unicorns into the sea where they can be imprisoned to the King's delight. J.E. Cirlot points out that as a symbol, "the bull may be linked with the active, masculine principle" and, referring to Jung, he suggests that the bull might also be "a symbol for the father" (34). The color red is traditionally associated with love and passion. If we combine these explanations, it is easy to perceive the Red Bull as the symbol of male virility and mature masculinity. The Bull might be the external projection of the King's unfulfilled desires. Why they remain unfulfilled can be explained in two ways. Some elements of the novel imply that the King is impotent: his kingdom is withered (similarly to that of the Fisher King), and Lír is his adopted child. Thus, Haggard's desires might have been externalized in the form of the Red Bull. Or the Bull might have come into existence because of the King's general dissatisfaction with earthly pleasures, including sexual intercourses. Since Haggard yearns for ideal beauty and purity, he can obtain them only by having the Bull—the incarnation of his desires—imprison unicorns. In this respect Haggard and Lír are similar: the King wants to possess the symbolic chastity represented by unicorns, whereas the Prince chooses platonic love over his (physical) desire for Amalthea.

Readers might be surprised by the unicorns' passive acceptance of their fate—though in the past they have supposedly killed dragons and other beasts, they allow the Bull to imprison them in the sea. Their inability to defeat the Bull is grounded not in physical weakness, but in their innocence, because the Red Bull is "pure corrupted experience" (Pennington 15). Thus, in symbolic terms, the confrontation between unicorns and the Bull is one between chastity and masculine desire—features which are associated with a rather stereotypical construction of femininity and masculinity (Tierney 564–566). Amal-

thea's own struggle to defeat the Bull exemplifies this symbolic dimension of the conflict.

During her first encounter with the Bull, Unicorn (still in her mythic shape) is unable to face the beast. She flees, backs down, runs in circles, but does not actually attack the enemy. In fact, she cannot even endure his presence. That is because she is the embodiment of chaste innocence, whereas the Bull—the incarnation of masculine desire—represents the force she has never experienced before. Unicorn is saved only thanks to the human body she is given by Schmendrick. Since the Bull represents the desire for immortal (ideal) purity and beauty, he is not interested in Amalthea's human body—a mortal body which can be tainted and corrupted. He remains indifferent until the novel highlights the unimportance of the physical shape in relation to spiritual qualities (Lír's affection for Amalthea). Afterwards, the Bull chases after Unicorn even when she is still human.

Yet before her second confrontation with the Bull, Unicorn-Amalthea undergoes the transition from innocence to experience. Prince Lír's chivalric love is the catalyst of her psychological transformation: Amalthea learns about passion and matures as a human woman, even though her love cannot be consummated. Consequently, her victory over the Bull is inspired both by Lír's sacrifice and her regained innocence now "informed by experience" (Pennington 15). It is crucial that Unicorn challenges the Bull in her animal form, because the conflict between masculine desire and chastity is once again moved into the symbolic dimension: not a woman facing a man, but Unicorn facing the Bull. In the end, Unicorn becomes a paradox: a mythic beast that has experienced human mortality and passion. Though she returns to her Edenic forest, she is no longer the same creature. Arguably, the experience of mortality has not diminished her, but elevated to a new level of awareness: "she is now universal – immortal, mortal; innocent, experienced" (Pennington 16). King Haggard is substituted by Lír, whose physical desire is replaced by platonic love. Thus, he becomes the symbol of untainted masculinity, experienced yet innocent. The victory of idealistic love over physical desire is further reaffirmed by the Bull's descent into the sea where he is pushed by the chaste Unicorn. The barren lands of the kingdom are revived. Thus, despite Lír and Unicorn's separation, the ending vibrates with power. However, if Beagle had not written the sequel to *The Last Unicorn*, readers could have rightly feared that, despite his knightly character and love for Unicorn, the idealistic Lír might one day become another Haggard whose yearning produced the Red Bull.

Though Beagle's reconstruction of the traditional mythos produced a very unique Unicorn, connections to Christianity can nonetheless be found. Firstly,

the female Unicorn is still linked to Christ: her metamorphosis is a distant echo of divinity incarnated in human flesh, and her greatest miracle is the resurrection of Lir. Secondly, her fate resembles that of Adam and Eve, who lived in the Garden of Eden until they received the knowledge of good and evil, and of their own sexuality. After their innocence was transformed into experience, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. Similarly, Unicorn leaves her forest because her Eden-like existence is disrupted by knowledge (of her being the last) and previously unknown emotions. The journey into the world of men then puts an end to her former innocence, substituting it with innocence based on experience. Yet in contrast to Adam and Eve, Unicorn is eventually allowed to return to her Garden. Finally, some biblical imagery is linked to unicorns' imprisonment in the sea:

One Bible-related legend contends that the unicorn was too high-spirited to ride on Noah's ark with the other animals and that is how it became extinct. 'The Unicorn,' a popular 1967 song by the Irish Rovers with lyrics by Shel Silverstein, insisted the unicorns were too busy playing to make it onto the ark. (Godfrey 28)

Perhaps it was this Bible-related tale or its music version that inspired Beagle, himself a musician, to hide the unicorns in the sea. All in all, though *The Last Unicorn* preserves a few elements of the traditional mythos, the book is such an amusing and multi-faceted story because of its reconstruction of a well-known motif. Still, despite the novel's popularity, Beagle did not intend to write a sequel. Another unicorn appeared in his fiction many years later, in the short story entitled "Julie's Unicorn" (1995). Though a fair degree of mythopoeic speculation is again present, this unicorn retains more features of its medieval prototype than Unicorn-Amalthea.

The short story revolves around a medieval tapestry in which a knight is forcefully leading a unicorn to his lady. With the use of old Japanese magic, Julie Tanikawa frees the frightened beast from the tapestry (it comes out in the size of a kitten) and takes it home. In a way, this is a repetition of the theme from *The Last Unicorn*: an immortal creature should not be enslaved to someone's delight regardless if the person is a king, a lady of the court, or a skillful artist. Though the title of the story is ambiguous, because it suggests possession, Julie eventually helps the unicorn return to its rightful place.

The unicorn's appearance and behavior are strongly inspired by traditional mythos. Described as having cloven hooves and the quarters of a deer, Julie's unicorn (similarly to Unicorn) remains true to medieval imagery, not to modern-day images in which the unicorn is a horned horse. After it is freed, the miniature beast cannot grasp its own identity (again similarly to Unicorn after her metamorphosis). It spends several days looking at itself in the mirror (while Joe Farrell, Julie's boyfriend, is playing medieval melodies), apparent-

ly trying to recognize itself after centuries of entrapment. The mirror is a reference to every unicorn's vanity—according to traditional lore, they are creatures aware of their own unrivaled beauty—and to one of the tapestries included in the series “The Lady with the Unicorn” (*Dame à la licorne*), “Sight.” In this particular piece a lady holds a mirror which reflects the unicorn's image (Hathaway 90–91). Given the prominent role of a medieval tapestry in this story, Beagle's decision to have the unicorn stare into the mirror while its searching for its identity could have been inspired by medieval artwork.

In contrast to *The Last Unicorn*, this time the beast is not given its own voice or a human body. It is fierce, self-willed, and mistrustful of humans. Despite their efforts, Julie and Joe cannot comprehend the creature's nature or desires—Julie's unicorn is a truly mythic beast only temporarily thrust into the human world. Yet the protagonists never doubt that they are dealing with an intelligent and sensitive creature. Though the short story seems to highlight the animal nature of the unicorn (which emphasizes the creature's status of the Other) as opposed to the human side of Unicorn from the previous text, Julie and Joe do not objectify their non-human guest. Though they try to conceptualize its emotional state through their own feelings, this practice of anthropomorphism is not something necessarily objectionable. As Margo DeMello explains, since people still cannot access or understand animal emotions, “careful anthropomorphism” can serve, at least, as a starting point for identifying and interpreting them (357–359).

Though Julie's unicorn is closer to the figure of the mythic Other than the protagonist of *The Last Unicorn*, Beagle does not leave the creature completely unaltered. For one thing, he reduces its mythic nature by making the miniature beast an object of humor: Farrell is worried that people will step on it or that it will be hunted down by Julie's cat, whereas the cat decides to adopt the unicorn as one of its kittens. These elements contribute to a significant reduction of the atmosphere of dignity and mysticism that usually surround unicorns. In addition, Beagle modifies the rules which regulate who can touch the creature. In contrast to *The Last Unicorn* and traditional tales, Joe may touch the beast and it does not seem particularly affected by male touch. It also does not seem to particularly care for virgins, or for women in general, since it is in search of a man, a hermit. While the unicorn's—a traditionally solitary creature's—desperate struggle to find its companion might be a surprising twist, its bond with a hermit is easier to explain. A hermit fits the story's medieval convention, since it is a figure that often appears in chivalric romances. Moreover, seclusion from society and chastity which characterize a hermit's life are features which define also the existence of unicorns. Thus, both experience life in the same way. Julie and Joe help the unicorn return to its proper place

in the tapestry: not in the knight's captivity, but in the forest where the hermit is awaiting its return. Overall, though Julie's unicorn is closer to traditional mythos than Unicorn-Amalthea, in both cases Beagle forces the mythic beasts to establish, at least for a while, some relationships with humans.

### DEGRADATION OF THE UNICORN MYTHOS?

These relationships are further explored in *The Unicorn Sonata* (1996). Beagle describes *The Sonata* as the book that was written to pay the bills ("Paradoxa Interview..."), which partially explains why the ideas that worked so well in *The Last Unicorn* are less effective in this story. *The Sonata*, like *The Last Unicorn*, explores the dilemmas typical for mortal existence, tensions between innocence and experience, and transitions from one state to the other. Unfortunately, it also exaggerates the ideas that were used sparingly in *The Last Unicorn*: the unicorns of *The Sonata* are still beautiful creatures and their horns play a significant part in the story, but little more than that is left from the original mythos.

First of all, Beagle places the unicorns in their very own world, a parallel dimension called Shei'rah, accessible only to a few people. In Shei'rah the beasts are distinguished not only according to their position in a hierarchical community (leaders, elders, defenders, etc.), but also according to their descent (lanau, ki'lin, and karkadann)<sup>5</sup> and appearance (they have various colors of the coat). On top of that, the unicorns even have their own names. In contrast to the traditional unicorn which was an ethereal creature living in solitude, the unicorns of *The Sonata* are both members of a hierarchical community and recognizable individuals. It is then revealed that they are not even immortal: they may die of old age. Yet since they are long-lived creatures, they have partially forgotten about their own mortality.

Secondly, Beagle recycles the idea from *The Last Unicorn* and this time the unicorns are able to transform into humans whenever they wish to do so. Given this ability, they frequently leave Shai'rah for short periods of time, because human life is an object of their prevailing fascination. By giving the unicorns the ability to change, Beagle not only alters their mythological status (they have become shape-shifters), but also reduces their status as a symbol of purity (unicorns that can freely experience human mortality may have already lost something of their untainted innocence). While in *The Last Unicorn* putting an immortal soul in a mortal body was a horrible sin, in *The Sonata* it has become the norm.

Thirdly, though Beagle finally includes a unicorn's horn as a motif of the narrative, he does not leave it unmodified. The horn becomes separated from



a unicorn's body whenever the beast turns into a human, and the beast cannot return to its original shape without the horn. In addition, the horns are the source of the otherworldly music which surrounds the creatures; when separated from the creature's body, the horn becomes a musical instrument. Thus, the atrocity of Indigo's wish to sell his horn is comparable to having Unicorn transformed into Amalthea. But while Unicorn's transformation was involuntary, Indigo's wish is an act of self-denial and betrayal. John Papas, the owner of a shop with musical instruments, initially behaves like the greedy King Haggard: he is overwhelmed by the desire to possess the horn and its extraordinary music, so he frantically collects gold to buy it. His yearning lessens only after he learns about the consequences of the trade, but he nonetheless buys the horn because such is the requirement of the narrative. The unicorns of *The Sonata* cannot be healed from their blindness unless somebody buys the horn and supplies gold that will be then used to prepare a medicinal ointment.

The unicorns' blindness can be interpreted as the result of Indigo's struggle to move from innocence to experience: he wishes to forsake his mythic form in favor of human life, because he is fed up with his current existence. It can be argued that the unicorns of *The Sonata* all represent what Unicorn-Amalthea has become at the end of her tale: innocence informed by (the frequent) experience of the mortal world. Yet Indigo wants to further forsake innocence altogether and delve into the world of human experience; in Shei'rah unicorns do not do much aside from existing, whereas Indigo wants to explore the world. Just like Unicorn's human body of a young woman symbolized her lack of experience, Indigo's body of a teenage boy indicates his immaturity. Because of this immaturity, he is initially unable to recognize the corruptive effect of his actions. Indigo (like many young people) is blinded by his desires and uncertainties, and in order to achieve what he wants, he is ready to sell his horn—the key to his true identity—for money. As a result of his symbolic blindness, other unicorns become physically blind. To redeem Indigo from corruption and to save the unicorns, Beagle turns the act of selling into a sacrifice: giving oneself for the benefit of others (which is a very distant echo of Christ's sacrifice). Thus, when Indigo finally sells his horn, it is both to start a new life as a human and to rescue his original community.

Indigo's struggles are witnessed by Joey Riviera, a musically gifted teenage girl who finds her way to Shei'rah. Joey initially functions in the role of the maiden approaching the unicorn, but the deepening bond between her and Indigo allows readers to wonder whether the two will have romantic feelings for each other in the future. In a way, Joey and Indigo become both a revision and a continuation of the relationship between Amalthea and Lír. Indigo's decision to be a human is a postponed fulfillment of Amalthea's wish to remain

with Lír. Indigo's desire to fully experience the possibilities of human life will most probably include the experience of sexuality and mark the return of masculine desire which was significantly diminished in *The Last Unicorn*. As for Joey, despite her mortality, her soul (like Lír's) resonates in contact with the otherworldly existence of the unicorns (and their music which she is able to recreate). But in contrast to Amalthea, Joey's femininity will not be limited by a mythological origin (since she is only human) or narrative requirements (it is because she is human that she can help the unicorns). For these reasons, Joey and Indigo, united by their experience, might be able to establish a successful relationship. In this respect, *The Sonata* is an alternative for *The Last Unicorn*, because the sexual potency that was restrained in *The Last Unicorn* might be reasserted by the pair of *The Sonata* (might, because Joey and Indigo are still on the verge of adolescence and there are hardly any hints of romantic feelings in the novel). Thus, though *The Unicorn Sonata* strongly exaggerates the ideas from *The Last Unicorn*, it indirectly provides an alternative to the novel's ending.

In 2005, several years after the release of *The Last Unicorn*, Beagle published its short-story sequel entitled "Two Hearts." Having her best friend taken by a griffin that terrorizes her village, Sooz, the nine-year-old protagonist, decides to ask King Lír for help. On her journey to the castle she teams up with Schmendrick and Molly Grue. Lír is already an old man, but not another Haggard, because his longing for Amalthea has never become a corrupted desire. Since he is still a true hero, he embarks on his last quest against the griffin. Unicorn makes a brief appearance only at the end of the story. She kills the beast, but does not heal the mortally wounded Lír. Instead, she revives Sooz's dog. Schmendrick is disappointed by the outcome, but Molly knows better: being able to let the loved one go is an evidence of true love and wisdom (especially since Lír is already a very old man). However, another explanation, confirmed by the way Beagle describes Unicorn in this tale, is also possible. The memories of the human love from several years ago might have been dulled by time, and that is why Unicorn does not feel the need to revive Lír. In contrast to the novel, in "Two Hearts" Unicorn is not given a voice of her own. This is a major change in Beagle's fiction (the unicorns of *The Sonata* were quite talkative), because it highlights Unicorn's status as a mythic beast not involved in the affairs of the mortal world. She is the true Other that is summoned by a magician—a person of power—and has little to do with humankind. Why is Unicorn so different in this tale? Perhaps after having exaggerated unicorns' humanity in *The Sonata*, Beagle felt that his mythopoeic speculation has gone too far and he decided to return to the traditional mythos. As a result, Unicorn of "Two Hearts" is distant and otherworldly just like the unicorns of

traditional legends, and there are hardly any bonds left between her and the mortal world. Perhaps her experience of mortality has been suppressed by innocence inborn to every unicorn.

It is worth noting that the idea of a bond between humans and unicorns is not completely absent from the traditional unicorn mythos. Nancy Hathaway retells a Bible-related story of creation, in which the unicorn—the first animal named by Adam—was elevated by God among all other creatures (29–30). When Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, the unicorn was given a choice to stay. However, “The unicorn looked to the angels hovering above the gate with their burning swords, and looked to Adam and Eve—and followed them. Forever after the unicorn was blessed for its compassion, for it could have stayed in that place of ideal beauty and delight, but instead, out of love, it chose the hard way—the human way” (Hathaway 30). Though in some cases Beagle’s unicorns, which are in constant transition between innocence—experience—innocence (based on experience), might seem a distortion of the traditional mythos, they also, in one way or another, experience the human way of life and participate in the affairs of the mortal world.

Moreover, the hybrid human-animal nature of Beagle’s shape-shifting unicorns can be read through the prism of J.J. Cohen’s “monster theory.” Cohen understands monsters to be a reflection of the society which created them, and the monsters’ hybridity, which lies in their very nature, helps to further accentuate the community’s fears and desires (6). The shape-shifting (hybrid) bodies of Beagle’s unicorns also serve as a mirror for the fears, desires, and dilemmas of his human protagonists: Unicorn-Amalthea’s (sexual) inexperience, Julie’s unicorn’s search for its identity, and Indigo’s blinding greed are not the existential problems of mythical beasts, but of humankind.

All in all, Peter S. Beagle is not the only fantasist that has written about unicorns. These elusive creatures have appeared in, e.g. Bruce Coville’s *The Unicorn Chronicles* (1994–2010); Tanith Lee’s trilogy *Black Unicorn* (1991), *Gold Unicorn* (1994), and *Red Unicorn* (1997); Meredith Ann Pierce’s *Firebringer* trilogy: *Birth of the Firebringer* (1985), *Dark Moon* (1992), and *The Son of Summer Stars* (1996); as well as in such anthologies as Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois’s *Unicorns!* (1982) and *Unicorns II* (1992), *The Unicorn Treasury* (1988) edited by Bruce Coville, and *Peter S. Beagle’s Immortal Unicorn* (1995) edited by Peter S. Beagle and Janet Berliner. Nevertheless, though cross-sectional research on unicorns appearing in all of these works would most likely be very thought-provoking, the focus of this chapter was exclusively on Beagle in order to show the extent of the mythopoeic transformation which the multi-faceted image of the single-horned beast has undergone within the imagination of one author.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this work was to explore different aspects of contemporary fantasy literature. Subsequent chapters dealt with several topics, including the development of fantasy fiction in British and American literature, scholarly attempts at analyzing the genre's internal structure and providing classification of its subgenres, nuances of fantastic world-building (sub-creation), as well as the genre's complex relationship with mythology, its fantastic cartography, dialogue with existing religious traditions through the creation of imaginary religions, and reconstruction of selected mythological figures and patterns.

Of course, many equally significant topics were either only briefly mentioned or entirely omitted from the discussion, simply because there was not enough space to properly address all aspects of contemporary fantasy. This inevitable shortcoming of this book is, paradoxically, indicative of something very positive: the complexity of the fantasy genre creates a potent and attractive field for scholarly research, which will not be easily or quickly drained. We need only look at the amount of articles and books devoted to fantasy fiction, which are published every year both in Poland and abroad, to confirm the genre's academic potential (for instance, though the works of J.R.R. Tolkien have now been examined for decades, new critical studies of his fiction appear almost every year).

Among the topics which have recently gained more attention there is the relationship between fantasy fiction and the Anthropocene (defined as the epoch in our planet's history, which is characterized by mankind's impact on the planet's ecosystems). Discussing the possible futures of our world, many scholars of literature have turned to the speculative visions provided by fantasy fiction, which demonstrate what may (or will) happen to our world if we do not reflect on our actions and acknowledge the fact that a sustained natural environment should be just as important to our civilization as rapid technological development. Such works of fantasy fiction not only warn readers of the consequences of their actions, but also suggest possible solutions to contemporary problems (the change of their perception of the world being one of them).

Another prominent topic recently addressed by scholars is the presence of people of color in fantasy fiction. Inarguably, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the genre was dominated by white writers, and many of their works appropriated ethnic

cultures and operated with stereotypical images which diminished, misrepresented or openly discriminated people of color. Today, writers of color are reclaiming fantasy fiction as their own means of expression and white writers approach the topic of ethnicity in a more sensitive manner. Consequently, their works teach readers about the harmfulness of racial stereotypes and discrimination as well as about the need for cooperation between people of various cultures—and cooperation will be indispensable to save our shared home.

Of course, writers of fantasy fiction have produced more than their fair share of highly predictable, stylistically poor, and intellectually shallow novels and short stories, which discourage many readers from enjoying this type of fiction. However, the flaws of individual works should not be the reason for rejecting the entire genre. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Mark Twain has his protagonist think: “you can’t depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus” (Twain, ch. XLIII). Together with science fiction, modern fantasy (which operates with formulas and figures inaccessible to more “realistic” literature) can not only teach us invaluable lessons about our past, but also open our eyes to the present—and the future.

## CHAPTER NOTES

### CHAPTER 1.

1. In his discussion of the development of the fantasy genre, Richard Mathews points to fantastic elements present in such ancient works as, e.g. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2002, xv, 5–11).
2. This chapter contains a revised version of my article “The Antique and Modern Dimensions of Fantasy Literature” which was published in the journal *Annales Neophilologiarum* (7/2013, pp. 103–117). I would like to thank the journal for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
3. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* states that “romance” is a vast literary category which has been used by scholars to embrace a range of works, starting with ancient texts such as Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, moving through the Middle Ages (the works of Chrétien de Troyes, Geoffrey Chaucer, Sir Thomas Malory), the Renaissance (Sir Philip Sidney, Robert Greene), the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century historical romances (Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper) and Gothic fiction (Horace Walpole, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe), and ending with postmodern writers of romance such as, e.g. Umberto Eco (Clute and Grant 820–821). All of these instances of “romance” display their own features and interests; what they all have in common is possibly their focus on an alienated hero/heroine on a quest, who challenges or is challenged by social and spiritual norms, and represents certain archetypal ideals (Saunders 2). Apart from offering readers temporary escape from their world, romances “can also allow for incisive social reflection and comment, for the exploration of gender and relationships, for engagement too with the deep structures of human existence, on a level that we might call psychological, sometimes through a dream-like interweaving of fantasy and reality” (Saunders 2). The works of William Morris are indebted to the medieval tradition of “chivalric romance” in that they recreate its narrative patterns (the sprawling adventures of a knight errant, often enriched with fantastic elements), goals (self-development of the alienated hero), and motifs (faith, love, and death) (Thompson 212–220).

Overall, modern fantasy and science fiction are inextricably linked with the category of romance (Mathews 2004, 474–476). Mathews explains that inspired by the conventions of romance, “Morris and MacDonald established a cluster of defining characteristics: a break with conventional reality; a clear struggle of good against evil; a hero called to high purpose; episodic plot structures in which apparently unrelated events coalesce into clusters of significance; and a revolutionary fluidity of form, time, causality, language, and reality” (2004, 476). These characteristics were then adopted and developed by writers such as Lord Dunsany (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter*) and J.R.R. Tolkien, and further altered by subsequent writers of modern fantasy (Mathews 2004, 477–481).

4. The fantastic may appear in various forms of magical artifacts, supernatural creatures, and otherworldly events. Their presence in a given work may serve different goals, e.g. to introduce ambiguity and uncertainty as to the true nature of events, to emphasize the hero’s struggle, to enhance the spiritual or didactic message of the story, and to produce the notion of fairytale enchantment
5. To read about the influence of Tolkien’s medieval studies on his literary work, see, for instance, Jane Chance’s *Tolkien the Medievalist* (2008), Stuart Lee and Elizabeth Solopova’s *The Keys of Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature Through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2015), and Dimitra Fimi and Thomas M. Honneger’s *Sub-Creating Arda: World-Building in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Work, Its Precursors and Its Legacies* (2019).
6. In *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), Mark J.P. Wolf indicates that the term “secondary world” is only one of the names used by contemporary scholars of fantasy; others variants include “imaginary worlds,” “diegetic worlds”, and “constructed worlds”—all of them might emphasize different aspects of the world created by the writer (13–14). For the purpose of this book, the terms “secondary world” and “imaginary world” will be used interchangeably.
7. For a detailed discussion of Tolkien’s “Eucatastrophe” see, for instance, Andrzej Wicher’s *Selected Medieval and Religious Themes in the Works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* (2013).
8. For more information about Tolkien’s work on fictional languages see Carl F. Hostetter’s “Inventing Elvish” in Catherine McIlwaine’s collection *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-Earth* (2018).
9. In the past, myths were the sacred stories of a given community and served many roles, e.g. they developed people’s understanding of their religion, shaped their perception of the world, and conditioned their daily



lives. Today, myths are popularly defined as false or fantastic stories with little relevance for the technologically advanced world. Their social and psychological significance has been greatly diminished, and they are no longer recognized as something that a (post)modern consciousness can profit from. Thus, the Roman, Greek, and Norse traditions are, at best, acknowledged as remnants of past cultures, whereas the mythological dimension of Christianity is the topic of heated debates—if myth is defined as a false story about pagan gods, it is understandable that some scholars will refuse to apply it to Christianity. In this work, myth is broadly defined as a sacred narrative which preserves the religious knowledge of a certain community.

10. Translation of the title mine.
11. Originally: *spekulacja mitopoetycka* (translation mine).
12. The series consists of *Mythago Wood* (1984), *Lavondyss* (1988), *The Bone Forest* (1991), *The Hollowing* (1993), *Merlin's Wood* (1994), *Gate of Ivory*, *Gate of Horn* (1997), and *Avilion* (2009).
13. The series consists of *Daughter of the Blood* (1998), *Heir to the Shadows* (1999), *Queen of the Darkness* (2000), *The Invisible Ring* (2000), *Dreams Made Flesh* (2005), *Tangled Webs* (2008), *The Shadow Queen* (2009), *Shalador's Lady* (2010), and *Twilight's Dawn* (2011).
14. Campbell defines the monomyth as “[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure,” which consists of three major stages—separation, initiation, and return—that might be further subdivided into minor phases (28). During each stage, the hero is required to deal with various challenges that need to be fulfilled before he may access the next stage of his journey. The challenges endured by the hero are compulsorily of a fantastic and spiritual nature (e.g. self-sacrifice, false death), because it is crucial for the hero to gain experiences reaching beyond the average experience, so that he may successfully undergo spiritual development and achieve the object of the quest. Campbell argues that the monomyth is present in various myths and ancient tales.
15. See *Fantasy Literature and Christianity* (McFarland, 2018), pp. 24–31.

## CHAPTER 2.

1. See *Fantasy Literature and Christianity* (McFarland, 2018), pp. 15–19.
2. This chapter contains revised fragments of my PhD dissertation entitled “In Search of Christian Values, Motifs and Symbols in North American Fantasy Literature,” which was defended at the University of Białystok in 2016.

3. In his later work, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), Mather recounts the events at Salem in a more objective manner, probably in response to the criticism expressed by public opinion.
4. Interestingly, following Marion Starkey's work on the Salem witch trials, Bernard Rosenthal argues that given their occurrence "at the intersection between a receding medieval past and an emerging enlightenment," the trials can be regarded as "a kind of redemptive moment, an occasion when the wise people of Massachusetts saw their mistake and buried this medieval superstition not just for America but for the world" (61). Thus, the rejection of the trials and its medieval discourse indicates a shift towards the American Enlightenment.
5. In "Marginalia," an essay on poetry writing, Poe seems to be indirectly touching upon the notion of human (collective) unconsciousness when he wonders about "fancies" of the mind which cannot be easily grasped with language and which he experiences "at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams. I am aware of those 'fancies' only when I am upon the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so" (Poe 117). He later adds that he does not think that these "psychal impressions" are available only to him (Poe 117).
6. According to *Gothic Literature*, Hawthorne's most renowned stories and romances (e.g. "Young Goodman Brown," *The Scarlet Letter*) "are highly symbolic, challenging moral fantasies that are chilling in their dark assessment of the human character" (vol. 2, 363). Though the word "fantasies" does not, of course, denote fantasy in its modern generic sense, its usage in this context does point to the fact that Hawthorne freely introduced fantastic elements into his works to enhance their mood and message.
7. For a discussion of the relationship between romance and modern fantasy see Richard Mathews' essay "Romance in Fantasy Through the Twentieth Century" (*A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. by Corinne Saunders, 2004).
8. This chapter contains a revised version of my article "Longing for the Enchantment of the Old World: Fairies in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Literature," which was published in *Dwelling in Days Foregone: Nostalgia in American Literature and Culture*, edited by Weronika Łaszkiwicz, Zbigniew Maszewski, and Jacek Partyka (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 103–112). Published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing. I would like to thank the publisher for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
9. Paulding's fairy republic might seem somewhat reminiscent of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey's idea of creating in America a pant-

isocracy, i.e. a community in which all would be entitled to rule and which would, therefore, offer an alternative to the less egalitarian politics of the contemporary world. Unfortunately, the project soon collapsed. There is no evidence suggesting that while writing his fairy stories Paulding was influenced by this particular concept (Aderman and Kime 2003).

### CHAPTER 3.

1. This chapter contains a revised version of my article “Finding the Way through Fantasyland: Maps and Cartography in Modern Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *Visuality and Vision in American Literature*, edited by Zbigniew Maszewski, Weronika Łaszkiewicz, and Tomasz Sawczuk (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2014, pp. 143–155). I would like to thank the publisher for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
2. For more information regarding J.R.R. Tolkien’s cartography see Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull’s essay “Tolkien’s Visual Art” (in *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-Earth*, ed. by Catherine McIlwaine, 2018).
3. Several maps of the Hyborian Age are available at the website *Hyboria.xoth.net*.
4. Below is a complete bibliographical list of works whose maps are used in the analysis:
  - Piers Anthony’s *Golem in the Gears* (Del Rey, 1986),
  - Terry Brooks’ *The Black Unicorn* (Orbit Book, 1987),
  - Jack L. Chalker’s *Demons of the Dancing Gods* (Del Rey, 1984),
  - Glen Cook’s *A Shadow of All Night Falling* (Berkley Publishing Group, 1983),
  - Troy Denning’s *The Verdant Passage* (Wizards of the Coast, 2008),
  - Stephen R. Donaldson’s *Lord Foul’s Bane* (Del Rey, 1977),
  - Stephen R. Donaldson’s *The One Tree* (Del Rey, 1982),
  - Dave Duncan’s *Magic Casement* (De; Rey, 1993),
  - David and Leigh Eddings’ *Belgarath the Sorcerer* (Del Rey, 1995),
  - Terry Goodkind’s *Wizard’s First Rule* (Tor Books, 2008),
  - Robert Jordan and Teresa Patterson’s *The World of Robert Jordan’s The Wheel of Time* (Tor Books, 2001),
  - Guy Gavriel Kay’s *The Summer Tree* (Roc Trade, 2001),
  - Mercedes Lackey and Larry Dixon’s *The Black Gryphon* (DAW Books, 1995),
  - Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Earthsea Quartet* (Penguin Books, 1993),

- George R.R. Martin’s *A Feast for Crows* (Bantam, 2006),
  - Anne McCaffrey’s *The Masterharper of Pern* (Del Rey, 1999),
  - L.E. Modesitt’s *The Death of Chaos* (Tor Books, 1996),
  - Andre Norton’s *The Witch World* (Ace Books, 1985),
  - Christopher Paolini’s *Brisingr* (Knopf Books, 2010),
  - Tamora Pierce’s *Tris’s Book. Circle of Magic* (Scholastic, 1999),
  - Patrick Rothfuss’ *Wise Man’s Fear* (DAW Books, 2011),
  - Jack Vance’s *Lyonesse* (Gollancz, 2000),
  - Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman’s *Dragons of Winter Night* (Wizards of the Coast, 2000),
  - Tad Williams’ *The Dragonbone Chair* (DAW Books, 2005).
5. For a discussion of why the Middle Ages are such a popular component of imaginary worlds see Kim Selling’s essay “‘Fantastic Neomedievalism’: The Image of the Middle Ages in Popular Fantasy” (*Flashes of the Fantastic*, ed. David Ketterer, 2004).
  6. One of the most renowned illustrators is Ellisa Mitchell, an American artist whose illustrations and maps have appeared in many fantasy novels, including Robert Jordan’s *The Wheel of Time* series.

#### CHAPTER 4.

1. This chapter contains a revised version of my article “Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* (1/2013, University of Białystok, pp. 24–36). I would like to thank the journal for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
2. See Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware’s *Finding God in The Lord of the Rings* (2001).
3. Campbell’s concept of the monomyth is described in more detail in Chapter 1.
4. The medieval aspects of Martin’s world have been studied in *George R.R. Martin’s “A Song of Ice and Fire” and the Medieval Literary Tradition* edited by Bartłomiej Łaszkiewicz (2014), and Carolyne Larrington’s *Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (2016).
5. I have analyzed the prevalence of magical and symbolic trees and forests in fantasy fiction in my article “Into the Wild Woods: On the Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction,” which was published in *Mythlore* (36.1/2017, pp. 39–58).

6. It is worth noting that Sanderson is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as the Mormon Church) and the *Mistborn* series contains several references to Mormon beliefs. See *Fantasy Literature and Christianity*, pp. 188–193 (McFarland 2018).
7. A detailed study of the religious and Christian dimensions of Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry*, Sanderson's *Mistborn* series, and Friedman's *Cold-fire Trilogy* is conducted in my book *Fantasy Literature and Christianity* (McFarland 2018).
8. The anti-Christian dimension of fantasy literature are investigated in detail in a separate chapter of this book.

## CHAPTER 5.

1. See Andrzej Wicher's *Selected Medieval and Religious Themes in the Works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* (2013), Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware's *Finding God in The Lord of the Rings* (2001) and *Finding God in the Land of Narnia* (2005).
2. See Richard Abanes' *Fantasy and Your Family* (2002).
3. It needs to be noted that this chapter will discuss the category of Christianity in general rather than its particular denominations. While in the case of Tolkien, Lewis, Rowling, and Pullman it is easy to tie their work with their own religious beliefs (be it Catholicism or Anglicanism) since they openly spoke about them, many contemporary writers avoid such public comments. Moreover, most novels chosen for discussion in this chapter seldom refer to any particular branch of Christianity, instead relying on the most recognizable and universal features of Christianity. Thus, while this chapter will provide, whenever it is possible, information about the religious views of the writers whose works are chosen for analysis, it will not attempt to connect these individual works with a specific Christian denomination.
4. This chapter contains a revised version of my article "The Anti-Christian Dimensions of Fantasy Literature," which was published in *The Light of Life: Essays in Honour of Professor Barbara Kowalik*, eds. Maria Błaszkievicz and Łukasz Neubauer (Kraków: Libron, 2017, pp. 203–216). The article is reprinted and revised with permission.
5. According to Lord Dunsany's biographies, though the writer received a Christian upbringing (Joshi 17), he was an atheist (Amory 33) and was prone to criticize "the hypocrisy and intolerance of religion, specifically the Christian religion" (Joshi 143). The conflict between paganism and Christianity (with the victory of the former) returns as the main theme of

- another of Dunsany's work, *The Blessing of Pan* (1927) which, however, provides a more sympathetic portrayal of Christianity (Joshi 98–104).
6. Anderson's novel was already discussed in the previous chapter, yet it is necessary to repeat some of the key arguments in this part in order to support its claims.
  7. De Lint's "Great Mystery" seems to correspond to Rudolf Otto's (2–54) concept of the numinous, i.e. an inexplicable and incomprehensible divine entity that escapes human cognition and is, therefore, the object of people's fear and fascination alike.
  8. Stags and antlered deities appear in several traditions. One of the most prominent figures, which might have been a direct inspiration for de Lint, is the god Crenunnos from Celtic myths. The novel's image of an antlered god inhabiting Canadian forests might stem from the combination of two specific elements. For one thing, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century many people of Irish and Scottish descent migrated to Canada, bringing with them their Celtic traditions. Moreover, as Douglas Ivison explains, Canadian speculative fiction, given the country's geography, "is often concerned with isolation and survival" and "is often set against a northern, wilderness backdrop" (xxv). De Lint's *Greenmantle* (which is set in Canada) seems to consciously combine these elements. Still, the novel's rejection of the church and shift towards the natural world are also grounded in de Lint's private beliefs and his interest in mythologies. On his official website the author writes: "I suppose one could say I have a strong affinity for the earth. I'm not a practicing Wiccan, but I've been reading and researching the subject for more than twenty-five years and I like the commonsense approach that many of the pagans I know have towards environmental concerns. My own beliefs probably run more closely to an idiosyncratic form of animism, which isn't to say that I actually believe that trees, stones, wells, what-have-you actually have souls, but at the same time everything certainly seems to have a spirit of some sort, something that goes beyond what we see when we simply look at it." (de Lint, "Religion")
  9. This is an unmistakable reference to the numerous faces of the Green Man which decorate many European churches. The presence of the Green Man in Holdstock's story is not surprising given the author's fascination with European mythology and British folklore (the author was British). The complex mystery surrounding the origins and functions of the figure of the Green Man easily lends itself to creative reconstruction. For a detailed discussion of the appearance of the Green Man in British folklore see Carolynne Larrington's *The Land of the Green Man: A Journey Through the Supernatural Landscapes of the British Isles* (2015).

10. The characters of Cyric and the “Horned One” might have been inspired by the figure of Herne the Hunter appearing in British folklore (Larrington 2015, 104–106), which Holdstock—given his interests—might have been familiar with.
11. Beagle based his character on an authentic historical figure: George Jeffreys (1645–1689), 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Jeffreys of Wem, who conducted the trials after the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth against King James II.
12. Readers of Jack Vance’s fiction have argued that though his works provide evidence for the author’s anti-clericalism (particularly in the case of Christianity), they also affirm the overall cultural and social significance of religion. Vance generally avoided making any public comments about religion. (Rhoads 15–29)
13. In numerous interviews Clive Barker has strongly criticized institutional religion, particularly the Catholic Church. At the same time, he has declared himself a person deeply interested in matters of religion and spirituality. (Barker, “Spirituality”)

## CHAPTER 6.

1. This chapter contains a revised version of my article “The Reinvention of Lycanthropy in Modern Fantasy Literature,” which was published in *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited*, edited by Andrzej Wicher, Piotr Spyra, and Joanna Matyjaszczyk (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 91–103). Published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing. I would like to thank the publisher for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
2. English: *Warriors and Werewolves* (translation of the title mine).
3. English: *Vampires and Werewolves* (translation of the title mine). The full title of the original publication reads: *Vampiri e lupi mannari. Le origini, la storia, le leggende di due tra le più inquietanti figure demoniache, dall’antichità classica ai nostri giorni* (1991). In my work I use the Polish edition entitled *Wampiry i wilkołaki. Źródła, historia, legendy od antyku do współczesności* (2004).
4. Shape-shifting is a general term used to describe any change into an animal, including a wolf. In several myths it is depicted as a desirable and useful ability, the attribute of gods, shamans, and powerful heroes. The change into an animal was frequently initiated when a person put on a given animal’s skin (Eason ix–xii). Other means of transformation involved



- witchcraft, magical instruments, and ointments (Guiley 258). In legends and folktales, shape-shifting can be used for both good and evil purposes.
5. English: *The Werewolf and Iselin* (1992; translation of the title mine). In my work I use the Polish edition entitled *Iselin i wilkołak* (published in 1995).
  6. Torill Thorstad Hauger (1943–2014) was an acclaimed Norwegian writer of children's books and illustrator.

## CHAPTER 7.

1. This chapter contains a revised version of my article “Peter S. Beagle’s Transformations of the Mythic Unicorn,” which was published in *Mythlore* (33.1/2014, pp. 53–65). I would like to thank the journal for their kind permission to revise and reprint the article in this book.
2. The Far East was, in particular, regarded by ancient and medieval people as a place inhabited by fantastic races and dangerous creatures. A fine example of this tradition is the text known as *The Wonders of the East* (or *The Marvels of the East*), written in Old English ca. 1000 AD (Kim and Mittman 1–3).
3. For a more detailed study of the symbolism of the unicorn in medieval culture see Rafał Boryślawski’s essay “*A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes...: The Commanding Love in La Dame à la licorne of the Musée de Cluny*” (*In the Space of Arts: Interdisciplinarity, Identity, (Post)Modernity*, ed. by Ewa Borkowska, 2004).
4. In terms of popularity, Robin Hood can be bested only by King Arthur (in Ruud 543). Since his appearance in medieval poetry and ballads, Robin Hood has been embraced by generation of historians and writers, who either sought to verify his existence or reconstruct him according to the sentiments of a given time period (in Ruud 543–545). Captain Cully’s wish to become like Robin Hood is the projection of desires for freedom and adventure, which became associated with Robin Hood’s legend. For a complex reading of the legend see *Robin Hood and the Outlaw/ed Literary Canon*, edited by Lesley Coote and Alexander L. Kaufman (Routledge, 2019). Cully’s desperate attempts can also be read in terms of postmodern irony: *The Last Unicorn* is a novel aware of its own structure and deliberately recycles popular motifs and sentiments—see Weronika Łaszkievicz’s essay “Konstrukcje narracyjne w tekstach Petera S. Beagle’a” (in *Tekstowe światy fantastyki*, 2017).
5. In traditional unicorn lore, the ki’lin is the unicorn of China and the karkadann is of Persian origin.

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## NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

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