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“STONE SOUP”: A MONTAGE OF GENRES IN ROBERT RANKIN’S *THE ANTIPOPE*

In Robert Rankin’s novel entitled *Nostradamus Ate My Hamster* one of the characters tells an old Irish story about stone soup. A hungry and exhausted wanderer who wants to find some place to spend the night reaches a castle right after dusk falls. Unfortunately, a merciless cook from the castle believes that the wanderer is a beggar. The man admits that he does not have any money but instead he can show him a magic trick. Apparently, the wanderer has a stone that changes water into an appetising soup. The cook agrees to let the man demonstrate the power of the stone. If it really works, he will keep it in exchange for a meal and shelter. So the wanderer throws the stone into a pot with boiling water. After some time the cook tries the soup which, of course, tastes like water with a boiled stone inside. The wanderer suggests they add some herbs. The cook tries the soup but it still tastes like highly seasoned water with a boiled stone inside. This time the wanderer suggests adding chicken broth to the soup but the cook complains that now it is just seasoned water mixed with some chicken broth and a stone inside. So they add some poultry, some parsnip and a pinch of corn flour. They also add carrots, mushrooms and a few potatoes. After they sprinkle it with salt, the soup is ready. They eat it with slices of bread smeared with butter, and wash the meal down with some wine. After supper the cook keeps the stone. The next day, when the cook observes

the wanderer from the battlements, he sees the man pick up a new stone which he hides inside his pocket¹.

It seems that Robert Rankin creates his stories in a similar fashion. Instead of a magic stone, however, the author uses one single idea around which he constructs his intricate plots. The idea is usually uncomplicated and rather formulaic. In *Nostradamus Ate My Hamster*, for example, one reads about the conventional invasion of Earth carried out by some evil forces. Many such stories have already been created, and they might have been deemed unoriginal by readers and critics alike. However, Rankin, like the wanderer from the story, adds more and more elements to his plot, making it complex and elaborate. *Nostradamus Ate My Hamster*, for instance, includes time travel, holograms, extraterrestrial technology, Hitler and the Nazis travelling in spacecrafts, and an insectoid being that some characters in the novel consider a god. In another of his novels, *The Book of Ultimate Truths*, Rankin's characters embark on a quest for the eponymous book. But again, the plots concerning various grimoires are numerous. That is why the author spices up his story with, for example, mysterious territories called the Forbidden Zones that are unknown to human beings, or a monastery occupied by well-built and clearly homosexual monks. Thus, using elements borrowed from different genres, Rankin adorns his original idea, expands it, and makes it more delectable, just like the soup in the old Irish tale. However, in this way the author tends to blend various genres in one work, and therefore he makes his novels really difficult to categorise. His first novel, *The Antipope*, is a fine example of Rankin's typical work, and contains elements of science fiction, gothic fiction, horror, B movies, slapstick, camp, and the grotesque. The purpose of this paper is to analyse *The Antipope* as a homage paid to these popular genres and styles.

The story presented in the novel is, as is the case with Rankin's other novels, fairly complex. Nevertheless, the basic idea which the plot revolves around seems again rather conventional: Brentford, where the novel is set, is under attack from evil powers in the shape of Rodrigo Borgia, the Dark One, who wants to regain the Papal throne. The protagonists are two regular visitors to a local pub, Jim Pooley and John Omally, who unwillingly become involved in the conflict with Borgia, and together with Professor Slocombe they wage a campaign against the enemy. Rankin, however, develops and refines his initial

¹ R. Rankin, *Nostradamus Ate My Hamster*, London: Corgi Books, 1997, pp. 267-271.

idea and adds certain elements, motifs and characters to his plot that make *The Antipope* a real montage of genres.

Robert Rankin does not refer to gothic fiction as we know it. Instead of classical themes and elements typical of works by, for instance, Horace Walpole, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Edgar Allan Poe or Mary Shelley, Rankin's novel features aspects that are characteristic of modern horror fiction. The author does focus on the supernatural elements that are present in the plot, but he does not include in his story motifs or images such as gloomy castles, abandoned mansions, opened coffins, or women who are buried alive for that matter. Nevertheless, even without the hallmarks of gothic fiction, *The Antipope* still fits neatly into the genre. It is noticeable, for instance, that the story bears certain similarities to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which we will discuss later.

The Dark One, or, as it is revealed later in the novel, Pope Alexander VI, appears at the beginning of the novel disguised as a tramp who walks around Brentford and accosts other characters. Since they do not recognise him, some of the characters believe that he may be a wandering Jew who, according to the legend, offended Christ, who was about to be crucified². The tramp tends to appear right next to the person when least expected, and he also disappears without notice. His presence makes the characters feel uneasy. What is more, he seems to know things about other people that have never been revealed, and he appears to be able to hypnotise other characters. Suspiciously polite to all his interlocutors, he eventually reveals himself as a supernatural entity, but even then one of the characters who talks to him, Norman, is not sure if what he sees is real. Put into a trance by the tramp, he experiences a ghastly vision of his own body being consumed by fire:

Norman became transfixed. The tramp's eyes, two red dots, seemed to swell and expand (...). Two huge red suns glittering and glowing, gleaming with strange and hideous fires. Awesome and horrendous, they devoured Norman, scorching him and shrivelling him to a black-ended crisp. He could feel his clothes crackling in the heat, the skin blistering from his hands and the nails peeling back to reveal blackening stumps of bone. The glass melted from his wristwatch and Mickey's face puckered and vanished in the all-consuming furnace. Norman knew that he was dead (...) and that he was far, far away watching this destruction of his human

² R.Rankin, *The Antipope*, London: Corgi Books, 1991, p. 39.

form from some place of safety. Yet he was also there, there in that blazing skeleton, there inside the warped and shrinking skull watching and watching³.

Except for the powers of reading other people's minds and his ability to control them, Alexander VI has got five demonic servants that are born of the five magic beans that, according to the tramp, have got "*outré* qualities"⁴. The creatures that Alexander VI calls his "children"⁵ are appalling and terrifying entities. At first small, they gradually assume human form. Rankin describes them as beings that are "twisted as the gnarled roots of an ancient oak" with slime that oozes from their "ever-moving orifices and down over their shimmering knobby forms"⁶. When they have grown, their appearance is even more grotesque and horrifying:

The beings were dwarf-like and thickly set, composed of knobby root-like growths, a tangle of twisted limbs matted into a sickening parody of human form, dendritic fingers clutching and clawing at the door. Forward the creatures sham-bled, five in all. They stood clustered in the centre of the room, their gnarled and ghastly limbs aquiver and their foul mouths opening and closing and uttering muf-fled blasphemies⁷.

When the creatures carry out a violent attack on the protagonists, Omally has the chance to see closely the hideous visage of one of them, which has "an expression of diabolical hatred". Its "toothless mouth like that of some vastly magnified insect opened and closed, dripping foul green saliva upon him; eyes, two flickering pinpoints of white light; and the entire horrific visage framed in a confusion of crimson cloth"⁸. However, this time the protagonists manage to defeat the creature, which results in yet another gruesome scene in which the author presents the violent and painful death of the demon. Since the creature is stuck in the chimney, the characters burn the devastated Professor's valuable books and grimoires in the fireplace. When the demon falls into the fire, Pooley starts beating it with a poker. The protagonist fights against the creature in the mysterious atmosphere of what is called the Holy Exorcism, performed by the

³ Ibidem, p. 35.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 20.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 188.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 157.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 189.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 233.

Professor and accompanied by “vile blasphemies” uttered by the other monsters waiting outside “in their rasping inhuman voices”:

Slowly raising his hand in benediction he spoke the magical words of the Holy Exorcism. The creature groaned and twisted in the flames, its arms flailing at its tormentors. Pooley held it at bay and as the Professor spoke and Omalley applied more fuel to the fire, its movements began to slow and presently it crumpled in upon itself to be cremated by the all-consuming flames⁹.

Even though Rankin aims to create a sinister mood, he still remains a humorist who parodies the genre. He skillfully introduces comic relief into a hair-raising scene. The solemn ritual performed by the Professor is interspersed with the sound of the severe blows of the poker delivered by Pooley, and when the creature is defeated, the Professor suggests they share a bottle of port, for which he is applauded by Omalley, and to which Pooley answers: “What else can happen?”¹⁰ The author himself clearly acknowledges his creative inspiration. In one scene he describes a kind of frightening and eerie briefing that the creatures receive from Borgia, whose face is “rigid and pale as a corpse, a face cut from timeless marble”¹¹. The only witness to this spine-chilling scene, which Rankin considers “gothic fantasy”¹², is Pooley sitting on the roof of the building. From his observation post he spots the demons’ appallingly deformed body parts:

Beneath the hems and cuffs of their embroidered garments, touched upon briefly by the cold sunlight, there showed glimpses of their vile extremities. Here the twisted fibrous claw of a hand, here a gnarled and rootlike leg or ankle, for here were no human worshippers, here were the spawn of the bottomless pit itself¹³.

Except for these obvious elements that allow us to categorise *The Antipope* as a horror story, Rankin introduces into his plot certain features that seem to be borrowed from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Even though Rodrigo Borgia does not have any archetypal vampiric qualities, certain elements of the story mirror those that have their origins in *Dracula* and have already been recycled by other authors or directors. Just like Count Dracula, whose nemesis is Abraham Van

⁹ Ibidem, p. 234.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 235.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 212.

¹² Ibidem, p. 213.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 212.

Helsing, Alexander VI must also face a worthy opponent – Professor Slocombe seems to be Van Helsing’s counterpart. Slocombe is highly educated and holds numerous degrees. The author notes that the “string of doctorates, master’s degrees and obscure testimonials ran in letters after his name like some Einsteinian calculation”¹⁴, which may be an allusion to Van Helsing’s university degrees visible at the beginning of his letter to Dr Seward, which are “M.D., D.Ph., D.Litt., etc., etc.”¹⁵ Additionally, Professor Slocombe dabbles in esotericism and the occult, and he spends long hours in his library. Its unique atmosphere of mystery conjures up images of “medieval alchemists bent over their seething cauldrons in search of the philosopher’s stone”¹⁶. On the other hand, Van Helsing is, according to his former student, “a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day”¹⁷. What is more, both Professor Slocombe and Professor Van Helsing are the characters who are asked for help and who first recognise the seriousness of the situation: Slocombe is able to identify the magic bean as *Phaseolus Satanicus* thanks to his knowledge of works by Jean-Francois Champollion and James Murrell, whereas Van Helsing manages to convince other characters that Lucy Westenra has become the Un-Dead, and he eventually cuts off her head¹⁸.

One of the characters in Rankin’s novel is Captain Carson, who runs the Seamen’s Mission – a dilapidated hostel for sailors. Unfortunately, the new member of the Foundation that maintains the Mission wants to sell it to the Council. The tramp manages to control Captain Carson, just like Dracula controls Renfield, and he takes over the Mission. Since he does not want to lose it, he decides to get rid of a troublesome member of the Foundation. He invites him to a dinner organised in the Mission and kills him in a gruesome way. Once again Rankin’s liking for the macabre is exposed when he describes Crowley’s death in graphic detail:

The young man sank slowly to his knees, his eyes rolling horribly until the pupils were lost in his head. A line of green saliva flowed from the corner of his mouth and crept over his shirt. He jerked forward, his manicured nails tearing into the parquet flooring, crackling and snapping as convulsions of raw pain coursed through his body. ... Crowley raised a shaking hand, blood flowed from his

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 45.

¹⁵ B. Stoker, *Dracula*, London: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 138.

¹⁶ R. Rankin, *The Antipope...*, p. 46.

¹⁷ B. Stoker, *Dracula...*, p. 137.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 260.

wounded fingertips, his face was contorted beyond recognition. He bore the look of a grotesque, a gargoyle, the skin grey and parched, the lips blue, bloodless. ... Another convulsion tore through his body and flung him doll-like to the floor where he lay, his limbs twisted hideously, his eyes staring at the face of his destroyer, glazed and sightless. Brian Crowley was dead¹⁹.

The other guest, Councillor Wormwood, is also killed, and his grotesquely positioned body indicates that he too died in torment:

His hands grasped the table top in a vice-like grip, his eyes were crossed and his head hung back upon his neck like that of a dead fowl in a butcher's window. The skin was no longer yellow, but grey-white and almost iridescent; his mouth lolled hugely open and his upper set had slipped down to give the impression that his teeth were clenched into a sickly grin²⁰.

The novel's subplot about Captain Carson bears a certain resemblance to the story of Renfield in *Dracula*. Even more analogous is the motif of the local women who seem to be under Borgia's spell. Like the female characters in Stoker's novel (Dracula is mostly after women, and he controls the three sisters in his Transylvanian castle), the women in Rankin's novel also appear to be bewitched by the antagonist, and they gather in The Church of the Second Coming to worship the New Messiah²¹. The Church is actually the old Mission where, as one of the characters observes, Alexander VI "will install himself upon his Papal throne and 'sanctify' his 'Holy See'. The Mission is to be his new Vatican"²². One of the worshippers is a local wife who wants to have sex with Omally in front of a portrait of Alexander VI. The woman behaves in a strange manner; she quotes Latin maxims, and Omally believes that the portrait is watching them in good old gothic fashion. When Omally suggests they cover the portrait with a dishcloth the woman becomes aggressive and offensive. "'He' is the only man in Brentford, the only man in the world," she exclaims, "He is the born again, the second born ..."²³.

Rankin's novels are humorous by definition. They include, for example, elements that are typical of slapstick comedy, and the author introduces into his

¹⁹ R. Rankin, *The Antipope*..., pp. 135-136.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 259.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

story various examples of comic relief. Therefore, it seems that Rankin is not completely sure whether he wants his novel to be humorous or rather serious in tone. The grotesque and macabre elements that have already been presented belong to horror fiction, but the general tone of the novel is rather comic. The characters are clumsy; they are definitely not fit to become heroes that could save the world from evil. Pooley and Omally appear to be womanisers who spend most of their time in the local pub. Pooley's greatest achievement, for example, seems to be the destruction of the Guinness clock hanging on the wall of the pub, which he hit with a pint pot. This heroic deed earned him a reputation as a "despoiler of pub clocks"²⁴. Other examples of Rankin's penchant for absurdist humour include, for instance, the scene in which one of the characters, Archroy, learns that his wife has sold his car for magic beans, or the story of how another character, Norman, decides to build a machine that will allow him to wade from England to France. His projects include such absurd devices as inflatable rubber boots, stilts, and floatable underwear. However, one of the most surreal scenes in the novel is the one in which the protagonists try to open a parcel that is addressed to the Professor. It probably contains one of his grimoires (interestingly, in one of the earlier scenes the Professor reads the *Necronomicon*²⁵, which is Rankin's homage to one of the most influential authors of horror fiction), but the characters find it impossible to open. Even though they try using a pocket knife, a can opener and a meat cleaver, the parcel remains unscratched. Before one of the characters manages to use his blowtorch, Archroy enters the pub. He is now famous among his colleagues since he apparently knows Dimac, which is, according to the Dimac manual he carefully studied, "the deadliest form of martial arts known to mankind ... whose brutal tearing, rending, maiming and mutilating techniques have for many years been known only to the high Lamas of Tibet, where in the snowy wastes of the Himalayas they have perfected the hidden art of Dimac"²⁶. So when the protagonists cannot open the parcel, Archroy comes to the rescue. He wears "a full-length black kimono emblazoned with Chinese characters embroidered richly in gold thread", and his feet are shod in "the high wooden shoes much favoured by Samurai warlords of the fourteenth Dynasty".

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 9.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 47.

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 195-196.

Additionally, he seems to have acquired “a pseudo-Japanese accent”²⁷. So the men hold the box and Archroy attacks it with a karate blow:

Archroy took a step back and performed a series of ludicrous sweeping motions with his arms. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes; slowly he drew back his right arm, knotting the fingers of his hand into a fist with a sickening crackle of bones and gristle.

‘Woosah!’ he screamed.

Those who watched him throw the punch say to this day that they never saw his hand move; one moment it was suspended motionless at shoulder height behind him, the next it was similarly motionless but outstretched, fist clenched, at the spot where the parcel had just been²⁸.

The parcel flies across the room and breaks a hole in the wall. The whole scene may be evidence of Rankin’s fondness of B movies, especially cheap martial art films with horribly bad dubbing and over-the-top stunts. At the same time the scene is constructed with the dose of surreal humour so characteristic of all Rankin’s novels. Archroy’s over-dramatised entry to the bar (“Did somebody call me?” he asks upon hearing his name being mentioned by one of the characters²⁹), his elaborate outfit, fake accent and generally overacted gestures are fine examples of a certain campiness that pervades this as well as Rankin’s other novels. However, it is best summarised by the sentence that describes the moment Archroy appears in the doorway: “Framed dramatically by the Swan’s doorway, which had always been so excellent for that sort of thing, stood an imposing figure which the startled throng recognized with some difficulty as none other than Archroy”³⁰. By “that sort of thing” Rankin means the sudden and theatrical entrance made by a hero that, in a film, is frequently accompanied by some thrilling, yet camp, musical piece while the camera zooms in on the character.

What is more, Rankin’s novel draws heavily on fantasy and fairy tales. In the first chapter of Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz’s *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Hunt, who refers to Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, claims that “fantasy seems to have, like the folk tales from which it sprang, a restricted number of recurrent motifs and elements: there are young,

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 220.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 221.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 220.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 220.

questing heroes, wise controlling sages, irredeemably evil monsters, and (although, mercifully fewer these days) damsels in distress ...”³¹. *The Antipope* meets these criteria. Jim Pooley and John Omally are reluctant heroes who are tasked with defeating the Dark One. The wise man is, of course, the Professor, whose invaluable assistance and expertise in esotericism and the occult are a considerable asset in their quest to foil Borgia’s plan to “usurp the Papacy, to reclaim his lands and duchies”³². However, he is not the only ally the protagonists gain against Borgia. In Brentford one can meet “the semi-mythical entity known as the Other Sam”, who apparently lives “within an uncharted region of the Royal Botanical Garden at Kew”³³, which is Rankin’s witty allusion to all the distant regions that the readers learn about from fantasy literature. Even though the Royal Botanical Garden is very real and Kew is not that far from Brentford, it still appears to be a mysterious land whose certain parts remain unexplored. No one knows who the Other Sam really is:

Pooley had never spoken with the Other Sam, but felt a certain strange comfort in the knowledge of his being. The stories which surrounded him were uniformly weird and fantastical. He was the last of a forgotten race, some said; daylight would kill him, some said, for his eyes had never seen it. Others said that during her pregnancy his mother had observed something which had gravely affected her and that the midwife upon seeing the child had dropped it in horror, whereupon the tiny creature had scampered from the room and disappeared into the night³⁴.

His role in *The Antipope* is similar to the one played by, for instance, Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings*. With a face that holds “an indefinable grandeur, an ancient nobility”³⁵, he acts as a comforter or a wise adviser and, unlike the Professor, he seems to be endowed with certain preternatural qualities (his wisdom is said to have been born “of natural lore”³⁶; nevertheless, he confesses that his “powers are limited”³⁷).

The eponymous character is the “evil monster”, and in Rankin’s novel one can even find some “damsels in distress” in the shape of the bewitched local

³¹ P. Hunt and M. Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, London: Continuum, 2001, p. 2.

³² R. Rankin, *The Antipope...*, p. 227.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

women. As one of the characters observes, it “seems that there’s some sort of New Messiah fellow started up in business, very popular with the ladies he is”³⁸. What is more, one of the elements of Rankin’s plot that allows us to classify *The Antipope* as fantasy is a bizarre episode that takes place in the gloomy tunnels dug beneath Brentford. One of the characters, Soap Distant, is the president of the Brentford and West London Hollow Earth Society, and he believes that there exists a subterranean kingdom of which only a few men know:

Beneath the surface of the globe ... is the vast and beautiful land of Agharta, and in that sunken realm at the very centre of the planet, Shamballah, capital city of Earth. Here in unimaginable splendour dwells Rigdenjyepo, King of the World, whose emissaries, the subterranean monks of black habit, weave their ways through the endless network of ink-dark corridors which link the capital cities of the ancient world³⁹.

Of course, Distant’s belief is based on Buddhist teachings. Nevertheless, when Omally mocks him, Soap warns him that when “the portals are opened then the smile will flee your face like a rat from a sinking ship”⁴⁰. He eventually invites both Omally and Pooley to his house, where they discover a deep cavern. According to Soap, he comes from a long line of guardians of the Great Mystery, who started the excavation many years ago. Clearly insane, Distant claims that he is really close to opening the Portals to the subterranean kingdom. Much to the protagonists’ surprise, they actually find what Soap calls “the legacy of the Distant”⁴¹ – the colossal old doors that look “capable of holding back the force of several armies”⁴². What attracts Omally’s attention is a massive mechanism and something that looks like an unknown coat of arms. Soap’s madness (at one moment he is even foaming at the mouth), the age-old maps he owns, the gate that really seems to be an ancient portal, and the labyrinth of tunnels – all these appear to be elements of subterranean fiction. Additionally, the sinister atmosphere is created by the almost Lovecraftian invocation that Soap utters just before he opens the doors⁴³. Rankin, however,

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 174.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 70.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 81.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 82.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 84.

once again turns out to be a master humorist. Omalley realises (albeit in hindsight) that the coat of arms he noticed on the gate is used by the Grand Junction Water Works, and what Soap opens is actually a floodgate. Once he opens it, the local canal dries out completely.

The Hollow Earth references are not the only elements of fantasy or fairy tales that can be found in Rankin's novel. The other ones include, for instance, the aforementioned beans – a reference to *Jack and the Beanstalk*, a tale in which the protagonist sells his cow for some beans that he receives from a stranger. When he plants them, a beanstalk grows in his patch, which reaches the place where a cruel giant dwells. Rankin's story is a loose adaptation of this fairy tale, or rather its opening part. Archroy's wife is a female version of Jack. Although less naïve than the protagonist in the fairy tale (she actually appears to be an exploiter who later becomes one of Borgia's most devoted followers), she does sell Archroy's Morris Minor to a gypsy for the magic beans. Archroy may be perceived as Jack's mother. Similarly to her, he cannot comprehend the absurdity of the whole situation, and he suspects that his wife is unfaithful to him: "'Magic beans,' he grimaced as he turned the offenders over in his palm. 'Magic bloody beans, I'll bet he gave her more than just magic bloody beans'"⁴⁴. Even though Rankin's story unfolds in a different way, the magic beans seem to be borrowed from *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

The blurbs that can be found inside his books present Robert Rankin in a humorous manner. Always different, each of these short notes about the author is fictionalised and written in a style similar to the one in which Rankin writes his novels. Absurd and amusing, they are Rankin's means of manifesting his jovial attitude towards himself and his works. In *The Antipope*, for example, we read that the author is "a collector of Victorian curiosities and a student of the occult" who has already worked as an "illustrator, off-licence manager, market-stall trader, rock-singer and garden gnome salesman ..."⁴⁵. In the second part of his *Brentford Trilogy*, entitled *The Brentford Triangle*, Rankin is said to be "a man in his early twenties" who was "born during the first years of Queen Victoria's reign" and who "divides his time between wearing old straw hats, collecting whales and commuting between the planets"⁴⁶. What is more, in *The Book of Ultimate Truths* we learn that Rankin is "a Twelfth Dan Master of

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 1.

⁴⁶ R. Rankin, *The Brentford Triangle*, London: Corgi Books, 1992, p. 1.

Dimac and Magus to the Illuminated order of the Celestial Sprout”⁴⁷. The same kind of self-deprecating humour is noticeable in his tongue-in-cheek attitude towards his works. Rankin claims that his novels belong to a genre called “Far Fetched Fiction”, which is stated on an official website run by the author himself. As claimed on the website, Far Fetched Fiction is “the name he ascribed to his work in the hope of getting his own special shelf in bookshops. This was not to be, and so his books now reside in the Science Fiction section, where they find themselves comfortably at home”⁴⁸. Therefore, Rankin’s novels are frequently classified as science fiction, even though the author himself does not consider this label correct. For Rankin, to write a novel is to play with literary conventions. He juggles motifs around and crams his works with intertextual references which, in fact, does allow him to create his own category of books. Therefore, *The Antipope* is not only an amalgam of different genres but, based on the traditional motif of the struggle between good and evil (which is Rankin’s stone in the soup), and spiced up with Rankin’s own complex and amusing, yet at times slightly macabre, plots, it has become the author’s first crucial step in fostering his own genre (according to his website, Rankin is considered The Father of Far Fetched Fiction⁴⁹).

Streszczenie

Powieści Roberta Rankina nie dają się łatwo sklasyfikować. Autor łączy w nich elementy zapożyczone z różnych gatunków, miesza style, bawi się konwencjami i motywami. Jego książki, mimo iż często uznawane za powieści z gatunku science fiction, w rzeczywistości wydają się być kolażami gatunkowymi. Celem tego eseju jest próba sklasyfikowania pierwszej powieści Rankina, zatytułowanej *Antypapież*, i przedstawienie nawiązań i intertekstualnych odniesień, które uważny czytelnik zapewne dostrzeże.

⁴⁷ R. Rankin, *The Book of Ultimate Truths*, London: Corgi Books, 1994, p. 1.

⁴⁸ R. Rankin, *Robert Rankin*, <http://www.farfetchedbooks.com/robert-rankin/> [15.12.2015].

⁴⁹ *Ibidem* [28.11.2016].