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**ANALYSING FAIRY TALE
PATTERNS OF FANTASY IN
J.R.R. TOLKIEN
AND J.K. ROWLING**



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INTRODUCTION

My book discusses two British authors, J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling, whose work is both similar and different in terms of fantasy literature patterns, style and language, construction of characters and social and cultural impact. Their volumes reflect the manner in which they considered appropriate to react and answer to the reality of their time. It is important to have in mind that they wrote in different periods of time, but both moments had been marked by political struggles together with other transformations in literature, art, psychology, philosophy, and technology. Overall, my book presents how the social, political and cultural environment has influenced the development of fantasy literature in general and of children and young adults' literature in particular, with the focus on J.R.R. Tolkien's volumes *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Silmarillion* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and the prequels *Fantastic Beasts*.

J.R.R. Tolkien is a well-known writer of fantasy due to the above mentioned titles and Peter Jackson's adaptations of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings* for the cinema, which have re-established the interest in his work. My interest in Tolkien's creation was sparked by his worldwide success, but went beyond it. It became associated with his declared concerns about literary theory, his arguments to support the connection between the human mind and imagination, the explanations related to the author's capacity of acts of creation similar to the ones of the divinity. Even from his earliest interest in literature, Tolkien ventures into finding answers to questions related to the value and significance of literary works in shaping humans' lives and he brings into discussion all the elements that make a piece of writing valuable. He is particularly interested in proving the worth of the fairy-story, which he believes has been mistakenly considered literature for children, therefore of a lower quality. Tolkien's writings, both theoretical and fictional, are set stones for fantasy literature and

represent evidence that fairy tales are not simple stories read at bed time, but, on the contrary, they are complex narratives that allow the author's and reader's imagination to develop and project the most astonishing imagery.

The choice for studying J.K. Rowling came from the worldwide phenomenon that evolved after the launching of the first *Harry Potter* book and continued with the rest of the volumes and with her later work, *Fantastic Beasts*. I find it interesting to study and discuss how her narratives belong to the genre of fantasy literature, but, at the same time, gather influences from other types of novels and why they appeal so much to the public. I argue that her volumes are of great interest for the contemporary literary world as they come to answer the need of the readers for this type of fiction. Compared to Tolkien, Rowling does not write theoretical studies about fantasy or about her work, nor does she offer insights on what good fantasy would be for her. The only comments that Rowling makes related to her fictional worlds are found in articles, news magazines or conference recordings. However, she considers necessary to provide explanations and to answer the public's questions as long as it doesn't disclose details that are yet to come in her long waited part three of *Fantastic Beasts*.

The book is divided into four chapters that look into the status of the literature for children, the genre of fantasy literature, Tolkien's and Rowling's contribution to this genre's popularity and stability through their creation of self-contained imaginary worlds. Each chapter is divided into subchapters as follows.

Chapter one, "The Status and Reception of Children's Literature", presents the critics' perspective upon this branch of literature and how it evolves during history. Hence in the pages of the two subchapters, "1.1. Defining children's literature" and "1.2. Understanding Fantasy as a Genre: Fantasy for Children and Young Adults", I discuss concepts such as the implied reader/author, books for and with children, the worth and value of children's literature, the message of this type of literature. Also I provide several critical definitions regarding children's literature, together with a description of what fantasy as a genre represents. I suggest that this field is in a continuous development and all the characteristics need to be adjusted to the audience's needs.

My purpose in the first subchapter is to provide a description, not necessarily a definition of children's literature. I consider it important to understand the characteristics of the genre, rather than trying to fit the literary works according to a rigid definition. Therefore defining children's literature in my perspective is in reality a presentation of its characteristics, a struggle to demonstrate that children's literature is a type of literature that is necessary for the psychological development of children, but also necessary for young adults and adults in order to preserve their sense of wonder and the positive thinking in relation to real life struggles.

My aim is to overcome the preconception of viewing these works as only "children's books" and demonstrate that they can be complex works, worthy of study and attention. Therefore I start by presenting Aidan Chambers' positive opinion about children's literature and his faith in the potential of this type of literature. Similarly to his approach is Peter Hunt's perspective according to which children's literature is neither inferior, nor superior to other types of literature, claiming they are not comparable as one cannot compare an apple to an orange and establish one as superior. Therefore my argument is that children's literature does not include books written *only* for children, but *especially* for children. My research focuses at this stage on the difference in the message a child and an adult receive after reading these types of books, and I argue that, due to the differences in emotional development and life experiences, children might not get the entire complexity of the narratives, as the adults are able to do. In other words, I argue that the message is partly deciphered by children and partly by adults. However my argument also implies the particularities of the reader regardless of age, therefore I debate the idea that the level of appreciating a children's book depends on the previous reading experience. Moreover, for easier understanding, I provide the classification into sub-genres of children's literature as it is given by critics over the years. It is definitely recommended to notice how these sub-genres are established based on themes and motifs, purpose and plot.

After focusing mainly on the critics' perspective upon children's literature and its main sub-genres, in the pages of the second subchapter I present the evolution of fantasy and how it is strongly connected with

branches of psychology, art and technology. A better understanding of fantasy for children and young adults is a starting point for understanding the literary works my book is focused on. Consequently, a theoretical approach is necessary so that we are able to understand the role and function of fantasy. Moreover I argue that fantasy literature is effective during adolescence in the maturation process as it determines the readers to reflect upon their real lives and helps them engage in empathic relationships with the people around them.

My purpose is first to explain how fantasy is the result of the brain process and how imagination functions as the major element of the process. In order to achieve my purpose I explain that the process of fantasizing is a normal one that occurs daily and helps people avoid boredom. However, when referring to the process of fantasizing in relation to a literary work, my plan is to illustrate how the desire for fantasy literature flows from the human's need to solve the struggle between good and evil. Moreover I support the theory according to which fantasizing is a beneficial process that helps the human mind to create several possible scenarios for the real life and eventually choose the right one. To support my perspective, I present Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Beginning Place* (1980) that tackles the matter of right and wrong uses of magic together with heroic quests.

Further on, I make a presentation of the history of fantasy mentioning the most important works from the earliest period of the genre and I discuss the characteristics of fantasy literature as they are presented by Pamela Gates (2003: 5-6). These help me to establish the elements that are to be expected from good fantasy works, namely the presence of magical creations and characters with similar traits as the human ones. Consequently I continue my argument with establishing that fantasy should be viewed as mere fiction and readers should not confuse it to reality. All my arguments illustrate the fact that fantasy is a genre in continuous development and, as I consider Gates' classification of fantasy the most appropriate one, the last part of the first chapter deals with a detailed presentation of the three main categories of fantasy, namely fairy tales, mixed fantasy and heroic-ethical fantasy. This presentation opens the path to exploring patterns of fantasy in the works I bring into discussion as I illustrate that they do not fit into the frames of only one sub-genre, but, on the contrary, they borrow features from each of them.

The second chapter of my book is dedicated entirely to J.R.R. Tolkien and it comprises four subchapters as follows: "2.1. Influences on Tolkien's work: war, the Inklings, Christianity", "2.2. The creation of the imaginary world", "2.3. Art and imagination" and "2.4. Tolkien and the virtues of fantasy".

The first subchapter presents how Tolkien's work has been enriched by his war experiences, his connections with the Inklings and his education in the Roman-Catholic church. All these have influenced his views of the world, therefore the manner in which he chose to create and build his imaginary universe. My presentation of the events that influenced Tolkien throughout his creative years takes into consideration the works mentioned above as it is important to offer clear examples of how those events have modelled his approach to literature. Therefore I offer a brief inquiry into the moments spent in the trenches, together with the ones spent in convalescence, while explaining how his already built ideas about an imaginary world overlapped with the war's cruelty and the loss of his friends. At the same time, my attention focuses on illustrating how, despite denying any involvement of the war in his texts, Tolkien uses images from the landscapes encountered in the trenches, portrays soldiers considering the real ones and develops strong camaraderies in his secondary world, such as the one between Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*. To achieve my purpose I study Tolkien's *Letters*, where he makes comments on his work, comments, that I believe, help the reader consider some passages from his narratives relevant to establish a connection to war, and I also present Arne Zettersten's (2011: 112) perspective, who claims that Tolkien uses the writing process as an escape from the traumatic experiences during the years in the trenches. I continue my argument providing an insight into Tolkien's group, the Inklings, and I offer a mapping of their work presenting how they shared similar characteristics in terms of the influence of mythology and imagery, but also dissimilar ones, in terms of the narrative methods, implications of Christian teachings and the manner in which they build their secondary world. I also point out that Tolkien was less influenced by the Inklings in the writing process, but he was strongly encouraged by them to complete his work. As Christianity was important for all the Inklings, after I briefly present how it influenced their work, I focus on

illustrating how the Catholic beliefs are reflected in Tolkien's work. Moreover I argue that his intention is not to merely transmit those beliefs or use them for didactic purposes, but as an attempt to portray the struggle between good and evil, and to complete my argument I provide those examples from his literary text which I consider relevant in this discussion.

The second subchapter discusses the writer's creation of the imaginary world, with the focus on the relation between fantasy and the real world. While illustrating the literary theorists' perspective according to which imagination is the tool authors need to make use of when creating a fictional world, I present their theoretical ideas about the characteristics of a good fairy tale. Together with them, I discuss Tolkien's perspective on fairy tales and explain that he considers literature closely connected to the mind and the ability of imagining pictures at the beginning, afterwards of using language properly so that the picture one had in mind could be "translated" into words. Therefore I start by presenting Coleridge's ideas about fantasy and imagination as they stand at the basis of Tolkien's studies about the relationship between fantasy and reality. According to Coleridge, there are three concepts important in the process of constructing fantasy, namely fancy, primary imagination and secondary imagination, and my aim is to illustrate how they function in reshaping reality. Moreover I explain how Tolkien adds value to this theory as he claims and supports the idea according to which the artist is created in God's image and I illustrate the meaning of these concepts in relation to the creation myth from *The Silmarillion*, together with the specificity of Tolkien's creative process. My focus moves then to Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories", as I consider necessary to present his perspective on fairy tales in general, not related only to his own literary work. Then I discuss the elements of good fairy tales and I present several perspectives together with Tolkien's, namely Robert Darnton's, G. K. Chesterton's and Barfield's theoretical approach about poetic language. This approach has also influenced Tolkien's sub-creative process as it discusses the importance of metaphor for achieving images able to develop the reader's consciousness and later on to offer knowledge about the world.

After presenting Tolkien's theoretical approach to the genre, I continue, in the third subchapter, to focus on how the process of sub-creation takes place and how art and imagination construct fantasy. In order to illustrate this, I debate upon Tolkien's creation myth, *The Silmarillion*, and I explain how the secondary world is built by the author similarly to how the primary world was built by the Creator. Therefore I present the story of the genesis of the Middle-earth, together with the destiny of the primeval jewels, the Silmarilli and the story of the Elves and their journey from Valinor to Middle-earth, pointing out that this is a more academic text in comparison with the others. My purpose is not to simply provide an account of the narrative, but to demonstrate how the sub-creative process functions in the building of the narrative. Consequently I provide comments that Tolkien makes in his letters about the creation of *The Silmarillion* and I clearly illustrate the distinction between creation and sub-creation, and how the latter is used to portray both good and evil. Moreover, I present Tolkien's autobiographical story "Leaf by Niggle" to illustrate how he develops his views about the elements of a successful literary work and his ideas about the value of fantasy. In my presentation of the story I make several comments meant to highlight that Niggle is in fact a description of Tolkien, as they both show a constant care for their creations. I also explain how metaphors function in Tolkien's secondary world, and I focus on the tree as a metaphor for sub-creative art supporting the idea that the literary work is similar to a large canvas that grows together with the author's imagination, revealing more and more with every page. Considering the tree an important symbol for Tolkien, I end this subchapter discussing instances of trees in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Last but not least, in the fourth subchapter I offer a detailed description of the virtues of fantasy according to Tolkien, namely recovery, escape and consolation and I explain how these three stages function during the reading process and help the readers connect differently with reality. In order to illustrate these advantages as accurately as possible, I base my discussion on Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" and I offer extracts from it to illustrate exactly his perspective. Consequently I provide the description of the three concepts, together with examples from Tolkien's texts so that it is easier

to understand how fantasy functions and what its advantages are. I also make the necessary connection between the terms to point out that recovery leads to escape, and the happy ending, once the reader has experienced the escape stage, leads to consolation. Moreover I debate upon the idea that fantasy is the only one which can determine this process in the readers' mind due to the imaginary places and the possibility given to the readers to contribute in picturing projections of the stories according to their needs. Related to this I discuss Umberto Eco's attempt to establish how places, both real and imaginary, have contributed to the larger picture of humanity and I argue about the manner in which these places trigger the readers' imagination and understanding of the reality of their imagination. After presenting how these concepts work, I pay attention to the eucatastrophe moment, which is necessary for good fantasy and I explain how it applies to our real lives claiming that it determines a change in behaviour and it opens the perspective for a better life.

The third chapter of my book focuses on J.K. Rowling and in the pages of four subchapters I discuss her approach to fantasy literature looking into the patterns of fantasy from the *Harry Potter* series and the prequels *Fantastic Beasts*.

In the first subchapter, entitled "3.1. Origin and context in Rowling's fantasy writing" I present the background of her narratives, the main influences that are more or less evident in her fictional world and the manner in which she chooses to use the social and political stage so that she provides a type of fantasy work that appeals to the worldwide public, following that in the next subchapters I investigate whether she steps on the same fairy tale patterns as her precursors or she allows certain influences while she is building her own path. Therefore I consider it appropriate to start by making a comparison between Rowling and Roald Dahl, claiming that their works are similar due to the themes employed and the popularity worldwide, and dissimilar in the manner they portray their children characters' relation with the adults. I continue with the inclusion of the *Harry Potter* series in the genre of fantasy literature supporting that it has been perceived as children's literature, while the other work, *Fantastic Beasts* is aimed to a different public, namely young adults and adults. Further on I provide an account on how reality is constructed in her works and I explain

the differences between real life, illusions of reality, and fictional real life, concluding that Rowling's work does not blend these concepts, but, on the contrary, she builds them as two separate entities. Along with these characteristics of her work, I debate upon the rise of internet and its importance in promoting Rowling's literary works arguing that it played an immense role in constructing the Potterverse, the world built due to her stories. The worldwide success of her literary works has determined critics to debate upon her narratives from a theological point of view. Therefore I focus on proving that, in what concerns Christianity, Rowling does not transmit a clear message like Tolkien, and allows the reader to enter her secondary world, interpret the events on their own, while learning about values and ideals promoted by religion, such as immortality, sacrifice and love.

Therefore the second subchapter, "3.2. The Other World in Rowling's writing", focuses on the creation of her secondary world and its immersion within the real world. I consider it important to illustrate how she builds her imaginary world within the real world, but at the same time drawing clear limits between the two. Definitely these limits represent a continuous source of conflict between characters, together with the presence of Magic as a defining element of the secondary world, as it will be shown in the respective subchapter. My purpose in this subchapter is to illustrate that Rowling creates her secondary world in an original manner, making magic part of the primary, yet fictional, world. I describe how her secondary world coexists with the real world, how the entrances to it are marked through portals and how only the wizards or those who possess certain characteristics can enter it. Moreover I argue that Rowling develops Coleridge's concept of the suspension of disbelief within the story itself as one has to believe in the existence of magic to be able to see it, while those who refuse to believe in it are not aware of the signs and I support my idea with examples from the two works. Further on I explain that the concept of multiple worlds has developed in physics as well and I move on to present the multiverse paradigm, which claims the existence of a four-layered universe. I also pay attention to the importance of space, both public and secret, in literature, connecting all this information to Rowling's other world and explaining how magic and non-magic work in her narratives.