THE MOTIF OF THE GRAIL QUEST AND ITS IMPACT ON FANTASY FICTION

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The medieval motif of the quest for the Holy Grail became an integral part of the Arthurian myth and was rediscovered in the age of Romanticism. The Grail's distinctive features include magical qualities, while its origin is often shrouded in mystery. Grail quests that reveal heroes' moral fibre have been immensely influential for fantasy fiction. The search for a mysterious and powerful artifact serves as a metaphor for the hero's spiritual initiation and aspiring for higher goals, concurrent with the given secondary world.
Keywords: fantasy, Grail, hero, motif, myth, quest.

Середньовічний мотив пошуку Грааля став невід'ємною частиною Артурівського міфу і був заново відкритий в епоху Романтизму. Грааль має магічні властивості, а його походження, як правило, лишається загадковим. Квести Грааля, під час яких герой проходить моральне випробовування, справили потужний вплив на літературу фентезі. Пошук могутнього таємничого артефакту метафорично віддзеркалює духовну ініціацію героя і його прагнення до вищих цілей, що вписуються в контекст відповідного фентезійного світу.
Ключові слова: герой, Грааль, квест, міф, мотив, фентезі,

Since its first appearance in medieval literature as *"un graal"* in Chrétien de Troyes's story of Perceval, the Holy Grail became a prominent motif in Arthurian legends. Its association with the Biblical myth was initiated by Robert de Boron in his romance *Joseph d'Arimathie,* which also established the connection of the Grail with Britain, as well as the pattern of secret guardianship, an essential component for the Grail story. Other important medieval sources include *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Vulgate Cycle and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The Grail is traditionally envisaged as a vessel (a cup, a chalice or a salver), although other variants, such as a stone, can also be seen. Juliette Wood in her research of the Grail's origins pinpoints its *"eucharistic and Pentecostal overtones"*, emphasizing at the same time the novelty of several ideas, introduced in the romances [4, p. 20]. Explanations of the Grail's mystery within the Pre-Christian pagan paradigm (particularly Celtic) have been offered since the 19th century, while the most influential scholarship in this field was Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) with its emphasis on ancient fertility rituals.

Both literary and scholarly portrayals of the Grail have greatly contributed to the shaping of the quest motif in fantasy fiction. The birth of the metagenre can be traced back to the 19th century when the fantastic became one of the cornerstones of Romantic aesthetics. It is possible to speak of the Grail's significance both within the Arthurian universe, which impact on the fantasy genre was formative, and separately, treating it as a universal archetypal motif. As the latter, it can be viewed, in Monika Potkays' terms, as *"a container for meaning"* [3, p. 12], which is filled according to the text's ideological parameters (Christian virtues, pagan mysteries, esoteric knowledge, etc.) Whatever ideological context the quest is placed into, it serves as a metaphor for the hero's spiritual initiation and aspiring for higher goals. The artifact itself is both mysterious and powerful, possessing certain magic qualities and being extremely hard to obtain, while the heroes reveal their moral core and undergo some kind of spiritual transformation in the process. Besides, the motif of secret guardianship / fellowship has also played a part in entrenching the Grail story deeply in fantasy worlds.

Contemporary Arthurian fantasy boasts elaborate worldscapes, many of which incorporate extensive historical, archeological, linguistic and ethnographic data.

Authors differ in their approaches to medieval literary heritage (although Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* remains the most influential source) and in their portrayals of magic, which in its turn, determines heroes' quests. Magic is often coupled with the motif of thinning, *"the passing away of a higher and more intense reality"* [2, p. 942]. For example, in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon,* steeped in Celtic mythology, magic is realized through the pagan cult of the Goddess. The main conflict of the story lies between matriarchal pagan beliefs and patriarchal Christianity combined with aggressive chivalry. It is thus the heroine's quest to achieve the balance between the opposing forces and, failing that, to preserve the memory of the Goddess. The ancient magic is passing away from the world, but through the Grail, the heroine manages to anchor it to the new reality, at least metaphorically. Monica Porkay highlights the story's propensity to turn objects and places (Grail, Avalon, Goddess) into symbolic entities, which can be gained by those who believe in them: *"The memory of the Grail persists in the world; through it anyone may attain entry to Avalon"* [3, p. 56].

Grail narratives in fantasy fiction do not necessarily require an Arthurian setting per se. After all, fantasy secondary worlds are saturated with the motifs from Celtic mythology that is inherent in all Arthurian legends, regardless of the setting. The most prominent among these motifs are the chronotope of the Otherworld, the liminal space between the worlds, the conflict between mortality and immortality and quest for sacred objects (often hidden in the Otherworld). J. R. R. Tolkien's mythology of Arda, for example, is based on the opposition between Middle-earth and immortal lands in the West, which determines the quest strategies of the heroes. The thinning motif is very palpable in this universe: immortal Elves are destined to leave Middle-earth and sail to the West. Artifacts in Tolkien's mythology (the Silmarils, the Rings of Power, etc.) boast highly symbolic loading and association with the sacred lore of the West. Various quests of the heroes integrate into one major metaquest, which aim is to preserve the fellowship between mortal and immortal races, as well as heal the land and cherish the memory of the passing age. Each hero's morality is tested within this paradigm: Aragorn, for instance, succeeds in the restoration of the royal line of the Dúnedain (People of the West) by demonstrating his healing power, renewing the memory of older days, gathering symbolic artifacts, amending the *"epic mistakes"* of his predecessors (especially Isildur), and resisting the temptation of greater power [1, p. 176—178].

The epic potential of Grail narratives is sometimes exploited in fantasy worlds that are set in various historical or quasi-historical eras. One such example is Michael Moorcock's *The War Hound and the World's Pain* (1981). The story unfolds in Europe during the Thirty Year' War. The hero, Ulrich von Bek, is an unexpected candidate for the Grail quest since he is a killer and a mercenary; nevertheless, he is sent to find the Grail by Lucifer himself, who seeks reconciliation with God. The Grail's symbolism exploits the concept of healing: it is viewed as *"cure for the world's pain"*, and the hero's quest promises self-redemption for the whole humanity, without the interference of God or Lucifer, as long as people are brave enough to think for themselves.

To sum up, medieval Grail stories have shaped one of the central motifs and narrative strategies of contemporary fantasy fiction: the mythic quest. It is

particularly evident in epic fantasy, where conflicts engage the whole secondary world and its inhabitants. Quest strategies that follow the Grail patterns may be employed in fantasy fiction without the image of the Grail itself and in various settings, not necessarily Celtic (although the Celtic heritage is ubiquitous in the metagenre). The best examples of Grail narratives in fantasy texts show the originality of the worldscape actualized during the quest and tend to recontextualize the Grails' inherent symbolism, as well as offer new ways of testing heroes' moral fibre.

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РЕНЕСАНСНА МАГІЯ І ЛІТЕРАТУРА ФЕНТЕЗІ: МАГІЧНІ МОДУСИ, КОДИ ТА ОБРАЗИ.

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В статті йдеться про вплив західноєвропейських магічних уявлень періоду Ренесансу/Бароко на тогочасну літературу та остаточне формуванням літературних модусів магічного та ізоморфних їм магічних кодів, серед яких виокремлюється модус та код Magic з трьома субкодами: позитивний – Magic proper, негативний – Sorcery та осміяння магії – Mockery. В англійській літературі на базі цих субкодів виникають три "магічні історії" – про шляхетного мага Просперо, чорнокнижника доктора Фауста та шарлатана Сатла, що стають архетиповими для подальшого розвитку літератури.
Ключові слова: магія; магічна історія; модус магічного; магічний код; фентезі; мономіф; Ренесанс; Просперо; Фауст; Сатл.

The article deals with the influence of Western European magical ideas of the Renaissance/Baroque period on contemporary literature and formation of literary modes of magic with corresponding magic codes. Special attention is paid to the modus and the code "Magic" with three subcodes: positive – Magic proper, negative – Sorcery and Mockery. In English literature, on the basis of these subcodes, were created three "magical stories" — about noble magician Prospero, sorcerer Doctor Faust and charlatan Subtle, which became archetypal models for the further development of literature.
Keywords: magic; magical story; mode of magic; magic code; fantasy; monomyth; Renaissance; Prospero; Faustus; Subtle.

Стосунки магії та літератури завжди мали специфічний характер із двох важливих причин: по-перше, через генетичний зв'язок (література завдяки механізмам сугестивності – здатності навіювати певні змінені стани свідомості – може розглядатись як особлива "магічна" діяльність), а по-друге, через специфічне для західноєвропейського культурно-історичного континууму ставлення до магії і наближених до неї явищ як до чогось поза межами загальноприйнятих культурних норм, що часто маргіналізувало магію, а відтак і літературні твори, де магія репрезентована.

Для західноєвропейського культурного континууму визначальними щодо створення літературного образу магії та носіїв магічних потенцій є уявлення, які

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