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**PROVISION OF NON-ALTERNATIVE LEXIS IN TRANSLATIONS OF WORKS OF THE
FANTASY GENRE**

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: Similar to the late recognition of translation as an academic field and a respected profession, appreciation of fantasy fiction used to be modest and restricted to a selected few. “For a long time, fantasy has been seen either as silly stories about monsters or a genre packed with stories so mammoth and dense that viewers or readers needed an encyclopedia of that world to understand what is going on.” (Howden 2012: 57)

INTRODUCTION

In his guide *Game of Thrones A-Z*, Martin Howden sets out to explain the subordinate role fantasy as a genre has played within the literary canon for many years. Alternative worlds that feature fantastical and sometimes even magical characters were frowned upon and not taken seriously, or dismissed as children’s literature. This was changed by Peter Jackson’s movie trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (the first part, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, was published in 2001), which is based on the also very successful books by J.R.R. Tolkien (cf. Howden 2014: 57). “It changed fantasy overnight and was the start of making fantasy mainstream,” Howden states (2014: 58). *The Lord of the Rings* series trained viewers in watching fantasy on the big screen and enticed them to read epic fantasy novels; it thus proved to producers that fantasy could be a lucrative genre and appeal to a large audience. In this respect, it paved the way for the other bestselling series that are discussed in this thesis: Joanne K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* and George R.R. Martin’s series *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989: 722f.) offers several definitions for the term ‘fantasy;’ among them are the following: “imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present; extravagant or visionary fancy; a product of imagination, fiction, figment; an ingenious, tasteful, or fantastic invention or design; a genre of literary compositions.” With regard to fantasy as a genre of literary composition, Tzvetan Todorov, author of *The Fantastic: A Structural*

Approach to a Literary Genre, characterizes fantasy fiction as texts that produce a disruptive presence that is fluctuating around a narrative and blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary (cf. 1975: 25). What is disruptive is the non-realistic subject matter; fantasy fiction foregrounds magical, mythical, and supernatural elements, and includes motifs from old myths, legends, folktales and fairy tales. The stories often feature characters like dwarves, giants, witches and wizards, or fantastical animals. The plot usually takes place in a fictitious world that more or less differs from our reality, and is therefore often characterized by a departure from the accepted rules by which we perceive the world around us. Fantasy fiction has many overlapping sub-genres and neighboring genres, for example Romance Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Alternative History, Dark Fantasy, Epic Fantasy, Magical Realism, etc., and the line between fantasy and Science Fiction can be very thin. The defining trait of fantasy fiction is that the author does not have to rely on history or natural laws of reality in order to be coherent, but rather creates a coherence between the imaginary elements of the story. Supernatural elements are not necessary but are often part of the plot. An important difference to the neighboring genre of Science Fiction is that in fantasy, unlikely narrative elements do not need to be explained or even scientifically possible. The author rather has to rely on the readers' willing suspension of disbelief; the reader has to accept the unbelievable or impossible in order to enjoy the text and immerse themselves completely in another world. As mentioned, there are certain elements of the plot, theme or setting in a fantasy fiction narrative that can be interpreted as typical genre markers (cf. Online 3 and 4):

- **The Setting:** the backdrop for fantasy fiction stories can be our real world; a lot of times, however, the plot will take place in an imaginary realm (e.g. Middle Earth in *The Lord of the Rings* or Westeros and Essos in *A Song of Ice and Fire*) or characters will enter the fantastic realm through a portal (e.g. the Hogwarts Express that takes the witches and wizards in *Harry Potter* from London to Hogwarts, or the wardrobe that serves as a portal between the 'real' world and the magical kingdom of Narnia in *The Chronicles of Narnia*). Often, the fictitious world is reminiscent of past historical epochs such as the Middle Ages. This results in worlds that often seem archaic and out-of-date to the modern reader due to political, cultural and technological conditions.

- **Peoples and Races:** most fantasy worlds are inhabited by humans but can also be populated by a large number of different magical and mythical beings and creatures such as dragons, angels, demons, the undead, witches, unicorns, mermaids, dwarves, or giants. The non-human fantasy races used by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, i.e. dwarves, elves and orcs, are especially popular in fantasy fiction. They are inspired by old folk and fairy tales about fays, elves, dragons and goblins; their specific character traits and mannerisms, however, have been defined largely through fantasy literature. Additionally, some fantasy novels feature undead characters such as zombies or vampires, human-animal hybrids such as centaurs or minotaurs, taken from Greek mythology, as well as halflings and many more.

- **Motifs and Narrative Structure:** fantasy fiction often relies on classic tropes from adventure fiction, e.g. sword fights, encounters with monsters, journeys to exotic places, epic battles, and the fight between good and evil (hero vs. a dark power). The narrative is mostly linear and often evolves in the form of a quest; a quest is a difficult journey towards a goal, during which the hero has to overcome many obstacles before he or she can reach their goal and grow personally through the challenges and the journey, which shows the influence of the classical Bildungsroman on the genre of fantasy. Besides the characteristics concerning plot, theme, and setting, fantasy fiction can also be characterized by its

complexity and the vast alternative universes created by many authors of fantasy. Fabrizi (cf. 2016: 2) argues that it is quite difficult for the modern reader to comprehend a magical world so different from our own, where the physics within the literary representation are not shared and automatically understood by the reader, where witches, trolls or dragons exist and words have the power to change reality. All this may happen in the reality of the text, and it forces readers to read the text more closely and participate more actively in the authorreader transaction “in order to understand this foreign world which may not conform to the literary or mundane conventions they have become used to.” (Fabrizi 2016: 2). Additionally to these unknown worlds, readers of fantasy fiction must familiarize themselves with the oldfashioned and archaic language the works are often using in order to signal that the story is taking place at a different time and place from ours. Lawrence Venuti argues that in order to create bestselling fiction, which relies on the reader’s sympathetic identification with the characters, “the narrative must be immediately comprehensible, and so the language must fix precise meanings in simple, continuous syntax and the most familiar lexicon” (cf. 1998: 126). However, the success of fantasy fiction proves this to be a limited point of view, since many works of fantasy that are known for their archaic, complex and intricate language have become bestsellers. In this case, identification is still possible for the modern reader because of the easily-identifiable values represented by the characters, proving to be more important than simple and familiar language. Still, the readers will only be able to construct meaning if they engage actively, intellectually and reflectively with the text (cf. Fabrizi 2016: 2). As a result, works of fantasy fiction can be very engaging and tend to draw the reader into the fantasy universe created by the author, even long after they have finished the novel(s). This can especially be seen when we take into account the hype created around fantasy series such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire*. All three series have amassed faithful and devoted fandoms that have carried the story out of the novels into fan-written fan fiction archives, social networks specifically targeted at the fans of a certain series, or conventions and cosplay events that allow fans to dress up as their favorite characters and further explore the fantastical world of the novels. This very intense engagement with a literary work at hand is typical of the genre of fantasy fiction and encouraged by authors who tend to interact very closely with their fans such as George R.R. Martin and Joanne K. Rowling do on Twitter.

Challenging Genres, editor Mark Fabrizi explains that fantasy fiction, while often derided as superficial and escapist, is still one of the most enduring genres of fiction worldwide, and has been received over the past decades with rising popularity. As already mentioned, fantasy fiction has roots in and is inspired by old legends and heroic epics, for instance Homer’s *Iliad*, the *Nibelungenlied*, or versions of Arthurian Legend. Due to humankind’s fascination with the supernatural, there is a long tradition of legends and fairy tales in most cultures, many of which were passed on from generation to generation, orally or in writing; this contributes to the factor of timelessness that can be felt in fantasy fiction. During the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century, adventure and horror stories such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* proved to be popular. Fantasy as the literary genre we know today, however, was only established in the twentieth century and became known to a wider audience in the 1960s, when Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* sparked the first fantasy boom. Since then, works of high fantasy have gradually entered the mainstream, with popularity peaking in the twenty-first century, evidenced by the bestselling status of the *Harry Potter* and the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. In addition to the novels, several fantasy fiction film adaptations have achieved blockbuster status over the past twenty years, and television adaptations have been done very successfully. The so-called ‘spreadability’ (cf.

Jenkins 2013: 3) of fantasy works is a major factor that contributes to the current market boom of the genre: it is multimedial (i.e. there is the possibility for transmedial storytelling), and a lot of crossovers are taking place – fantasy is not only represented in literature and films but in other areas of pop culture as well, such as music, art, comics, board games, roleplaying or computer games. The reasons for this new appreciation of the genre are numerous.

For instance, Fabrizi argues, that the genre of fantasy occupies such a significant role in Western culture because it has a great deal to offer for the critical modern reader in terms of complexity and relevance. “One of the most interesting aspects of fantasy literature is that it tends to ask the ‘big’ questions of life,” making readers reflect on and consider such topics as “the nature of good and evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism and the quality of one’s character, the role of the individual in society, and the importance of cultural diversity.” (Fabrizi 2016: 1) All these issues are addressed in rich and compelling narratives that capture the reader’s attention.

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