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THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL TENDENCIES IN FANTASY LITERATURE: FROM TOLKIEN TO MENDLESOHN

ROCHA, Fabian Quevedo da[1]

ABSTRACT: This research discusses the postulates about fantasy literature proposed by the scholars J. R. R. Tolkien, Brian Attebery, and Farah Mendlesohn. It deals mainly with the essay "On Fairy-Stories", by Tolkien, the works *Strategies of Fantasy*, by Attebery, and *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, by Mendlesohn. Starting from the discussion of the central elements of these productions, it is proposed that the changes in the way in which fantasy as a literary genre presents itself, in different historical-geographic moments, are related to the social demands of the context of the works. It is argued that new theories tend to emerge to accompany such changes and offer theoretical-critical tools that encompass the genre in its various aspects and that enable more plural approaches to fantasy. The study begins with a discussion of how Tolkien's essay and his novel *The Lord of the Rings* played a central role in popularizing fantasy and establishing a model for the genre. Then, Attebery's theory is discussed, which proposes that the fantasy genre can be seen as a fuzzy set. The paper concludes with an analysis of Mendlesohn's theory, which proposes that different fantasy texts can be studied based on how the fantastic appears in the narrative.

KEYWORDS: Brian Attebery, Fantasy literature, Farah Mendlesohn, Literary theory, J. R. R. Tolkien.

TENDÊNCIAS TEÓRICO-CRÍTICAS NA LITERATURA DE FANTASIA: DE TOLKIEN A MENDLESOHN

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa discute os postulados acerca da literatura de fantasia propostos pelos teóricos J. R. R. Tolkien, Brian Attebery e Farah Mendlesohn. Aborda-se o ensaio "Sobre Histórias de Fadas",

[1] É Doutorando e Mestre do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul na área de Estudos de Literatura, vinculada à linha de pesquisa Sociedade, (Inter)Textos Literários e Tradução nas Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas e bolsista CAPES. É graduado em Letras - licenciatura, com ênfase em Língua Inglesa pela mesma universidade. Seus temas de interesse são Literatura Inglesa do século XX, Literatura de Fantasia, Literatura Comparada e Literatura e Sociedade.

de Tolkien, e as obras *Strategies of Fantasy*, de Attebery, e *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, de Mendlesohn. Partindo da discussão dos elementos centrais destas produções, propõe-se que as mudanças na forma com a qual a fantasia como gênero literário se apresenta, em diferentes momentos histórico-geográficos, estão relacionadas com as demandas sociais do contexto das obras. Argumenta-se que novas teorias tendem a surgir para acompanhar tais mudanças e oferecer ferramentas teórico-críticas que abranjam o gênero em suas variadas vertentes e que possibilitem abordagens mais plurais da fantasia. O estudo inicia com uma discussão acerca de como o ensaio de Tolkien e seu romance *O Senhor dos Anéis*, tiveram um papel central na popularização da fantasia e no estabelecimento de um modelo para o gênero. Então, discute-se a teoria de Attebery, que propõe que o gênero fantasia pode ser visto como um conjunto difuso. Conclui-se com uma análise da teoria de Mendlesohn, que propõe que diferentes textos de fantasia podem ser estudados a partir do modo com o qual o fantástico surge na narrativa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Brian Attebery, Farah Mendlesohn, Literatura de fantasia, J. R. R. Tolkien, Teoria literária.

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century, especially its second half, is the source of several works of fantasy fiction that helped create a model of what is understood by fantasy as a literary genre. Although this genre did not originate in that century, it was during that period, it may be argued, that its popularization took place. Works such as *The Lord of the Rings* and J.R.R. Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories" not only expanded the genre to a great extent but also considerably shaped the way fantasy writers who followed them structured their own narratives. It is possible to find traces of the Tolkienian legacy in works by authors such as Neil Gaiman, J. K. Rowling, Katherine Paterson, Patrick Rothfuss, among others. Studies that seek to understand how fantasy narratives are structured also became more frequent after the success of Tolkien's works: works such as *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) and *Stories about Stories* (2014) by Brian Attebery, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) by Farah Mendlesohn, and *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981) by Rosemary Jackson, figure among the most important on the subject.

However, it is interesting to note that if, on the one hand, a considerable amount of fantasy works that came after *The Lord of the Rings* seemed strictly to try to follow the Tolkienian pattern, such as Cristopher Paolini's *The Inheritance* series, for example, others,

such as *Neverwhere* by Gaiman, Rowling's *Harry Potter* saga, and Rothfuss's unfinished *Kingkiller Chronicle* trilogy, propose a dynamic that, apparently, seeks to follow different paths from Tolkien's (although it is possible to see certain echoes of Tolkien's work in them). In this sense, it can be argued that this differing dynamic, proposed by writers from different contexts, is related to the postulate of Jane Tompkins (1985), who proposes that "[...] the text is engaged in solving a problem or a set of problems specific to the time in which it was written [...]." (TOMPKINS, 1985, p.38). Consequently, it is possible to argue that writers in different historical-geographical contexts use different narrative strategies in order to address issues relevant to their time and place. Thus, this research discusses ways of approaching fantasy literature that diverge, to a greater or lesser extent, from the formula proposed by Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" and that propose new ways of looking at and discussing the genre. Above all, I contrast Tolkien's (2001) propositions with those of Mendlesohn (2008) and Attebery (1992), and call attention to the idea that the popularity of fantasy literature does not simply reside in a formula, but rather, as proposed by Attebery (2008), in the fluidity of the genre, which allows it to adapt to changes in intellectual currents and to be used as a means of approaching and discussing the different social demands of the contexts in which the different fantasy works are inserted.

THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL TENDENCIES IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" derives from a lecture given by him in March 1939 at St. Andrews University in Scotland. First published in 1947, this text is intrinsically connected to the development of the writer's most popular work of fiction, *The Lord of the Rings*, published between 1954 and 1955. As theorist Verlyn Flieger (2017) suggests, the essay can be read as an explanation of the author's creative process as it relates to his novel; in other words, it is possible to identify in it several elements present in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is interesting to note, however, as scholars such as Tom Shippey (2001) and Humphrey Carpenter (2000) propose, that Tolkien began working on his novel in December 1937, just over a year before he gave the lecture that gave birth to the essay. It may be argued, therefore, that the development of "On Fairy-Stories" followed that of the novel. In this sense, as proposed by Flieger (2017), it is possible to see "On Fairy-Stories" as a kind of formula used by the author in the creation of his novel (not very different from what Edgar Alan Poe does in his text "The Philosophy of

Composition"). Therefore, an attempt to understand the Tolkienian view concerning fantasy literature often involves not only the study of the author's novel but also of his essay. Central to the writer's thinking are the concepts of *Faërie*, Secondary World, internal consistency of reality, recovery, escape, and consolation.

Faërie, as Flieger points out, derives "[…] from Old French fae or fée, meaning "fairy," with the suffix ery/erie extending the root noun to a process or state, as fay-ery, meaning "the practice of enchantment or the state of being enchanted" […]. (FLIEGER, 2017, p. 60). *Faërie* is, in this sense, the realm where fantastic events occur and fantastic beings inhabit, a world apart from our own, where fantasy stories take place. The concept of *Faërie*, Flieger (2017) proposes, equates to the concept of Secondary World, which is a world "[…] your mind can enter. Inside it what he relates is true: it accords with the laws of the world. You, therefore, believe it, while inside" (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 37). To achieve such credibility, however, a fantasy story must possess what Tolkien (2001) refers to as the internal consistency of reality; narrated events must conform to the rules of that fictional universe. In other words, the dynamics of the Secondary World, however peculiar they may be, must make sense within the fantasy world in question, for it is this consistent dynamic that will, as Tolkien explains, make that world credible:

> Fantasy may be, as I think, not less but more sub-creative; but at any rate it is found in practice that 'the inner consistency of reality' is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World. It is easier to produce this kind of 'reality' with more 'sober' material. Fantasy thus,- too often, remains undeveloped; it is and has been used frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains merely 'fanciful'. Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough - though it may already be a more potent thing than many a 'thumbnail sketch' or 'transcript of life' that receives literary praise. To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of art: indeed

> narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 49).

It is interesting to note that, in the excerpt above, in addition to discussing the importance of the internal consistency of reality in fantasy narratives, Tolkien also states that such consistency is not easily attained; it requires a high technical level that is rarely achieved. The writer goes further and remarks, in a considerably critical way, that fantasy is only fully developed when an author manages, in fact, to create an internally consistent Secondary World. In this sense, it is observed that Tolkien proposes, in his essay, a formula for the creation of fantasy narratives that is, to a certain extent, millimetric and authoritative, as if the only way for an author to develop a narrative of this specific literary genre satisfactorily, and not "merely decorative", was through the parameters designated by him. This is not indicative, however, that the model proposed by Tolkien is without merit; a considerable number of successful fantasies, such as George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Patrick Rothfuss's *The Kingkiller Chronicle*, largely draw on the Tolkienian formula. However, such a model, as proposed below, is considerably limited, as it does not contemplate several other structural possibilities of fantasy literature.

In addition to being set in an internally consistent Secondary World, the ideal fantasy narrative, for Tolkien (2001), has the social function of providing those who read it with what the author calls recovery, escape, and consolation. These three elements, which are connected to each other and to the other aspects of fantasy proposed by the author, are central for Tolkien to answer the question he raises at the beginning of his essay: what is the use of fairy-stories? Briefly, recovery is the element present in fantasy narratives that allows those who read such texts to see the Primary World, the actual world, in a renewed way. As the author explains,

> We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses— and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. […] Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining— regaining of a clear view. (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 57).

Therefore, recovery allows one to see elements of the Primary World, after contemplating them in an adapted way in the Secondary World, with greater clarity. Tolkien proposes that recovery is linked to the return and renewal of health, as it allows one to see what had become ordinary in a renewed way. One sees, for example, the harmful effects of greed in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, or the problem of excessive desire for power and domination in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, and suddenly, as Tolkien proposes, one begins to see, again (but critically), these same issues in the Primary World.

Escape, on the other hand, is a mechanism that, as proposed by Tolkien (2001), may help human beings in times of distress and suffering, making them regain perspective and maintain hope. Tolkien wrote his works in a context in which the dangers and catastrophic results of the two world wars were experienced almost daily by a large part of European citizens. In a conjuncture like that of Tolkien's contemporaries, ravaged by war and chaos, fantasy narratives meet what the author classifies as "the desire to escape": "It is part of the essential malady of such days—producing the desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery—that we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil." (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 65). It is important to point out, as the author proposes, that escape is intrinsically connected to consolation; if the first element provides a regaining of perspective, the second provides maintenance of hope. To explain how the consolation of fantasy narratives works, Tolkien coined the term *Eucatastrophe*, the "good catastrophe", which ensures that the narrative, however grim the events it recounts, ends well. According to the author, the *Eucatastrophe* plays a central role in fantasy narratives, since it is from it that the consolation of the happy ending comes. As the writer explains,

> [...] it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe[2], of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; […]It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat, and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given

[2] Term also coined by Tolkien, it means the opposite of *Eucatastrophe*.

> by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality. (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 69).

Such is the importance of the *Eucatastrophe* in fantasy narratives that the scholar almost risks saying that every complete fantasy must possess it (TOLKIEN, 2001). The parameters proposed by Tolkien in his essay, and manifested in his works, especially in *The Lord of the Rings*, played a fundamental role in the conventionalization of what is called "high fantasy", narratives that take place in internally consistent Secondary Worlds and that are often utopic-like and have some kind of connection with medieval aspects. For some years, a considerable number of writers working with this literary genre have strictly followed the Tolkienian – and some still do. It is interesting to note that this tendency can be observed not only in Anglophone fantasists like Christopher Paolini but also in writers from other nationalities, such as the series *Dragões de Éter*, by the Brazilian author Raphael Draccon, and the series *Wiedźmin* (The Witcher), by the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. However, although Tolkien's essay is, as Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (2012) propose, the most iconic text for an approach to fantasy literature, it is not the only one. Theorists such as Attebery (1992) and Mendlesohn (2008) propose other ways of approaching the genre, which can be seen as more comprehensive and inclusive.

In his work *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery (1992) proposes that literary genres can be seen as fuzzy sets, which allows them to be defined not by their borders, but by their centers. To clarify how such sets work, the scholar turns to linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2003), who propose, in their book *Metaphors we live by*, that the way of categorizing used by human beings is based on prototypes and similarities. Therefore, the category "fantasy" consists of central prototypical texts[3] that are surrounded by other texts that share more or fewer elements with those situated in the center. In this sense, Attebery proposes, a book can be considered a classic example of fantasy, more or less fantasy, or even be seen as fantasy in a certain way: "[t]he category has a clear center but boundaries that shade off imperceptibly, so that a book on the fringes may be considered as belonging or not, depending on one's interests." (ATTEBERY, 1992, p. 12). For Attebery, therefore, there is not just one way of making and thinking about fantasy, but different ways of seeing the genre; a proposal that allows broader studies of fantasy when compared to what is proposed by Tolkien (2001). However, Attebery's

[3] Even though fantasy manifests itself in a variety of media, I decided to make use of the term "text" since it speaks more directly to the discussion proposed in this work.

conception presupposes the existence of a central model of what is meant by fantasy, a model that may guide the debates and that may dictate the parameters about what fits in the genre (and at what level it fits) and what does not.

To define the central element of the fuzzy set of the fantasy genre, Attebery (1992) carried out a non-scientific experiment that consisted of the analysis of 40 literary texts, chosen by the scholar himself, by academics in the area, known to the author. These participants were then asked to rate the chosen texts on a scale from 1 to 7. As shown in the table below, the lower the score obtained, the more in the center of the fuzzy set the text is located:

Classification given	Meaning
1	Quintessentially fantasy
2	Basically fantasy
3	Technically fantasy
4	Fantasy in some respects
5	Like fantasy
6	Not really fantasy
7	By no means fantasy

Table 1: **Categorization of Fantasy Texts** (made by the author)

Among the texts chosen by Attebery, there are works by authors such as Mary Shelley, Aldous Huxley, Ray Bradbury, Gabriel García Marquez, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and others. Of the 14 responses collected (including Attebery's own), the work that obtained the lowest score and, consequently, was defined, with almost unanimity, as the central model of the fuzzy set of the fantasy genre was *The Lord of the Rings*, by Tolkien. Regarding the results of the study conducted, Attebery makes the following considerations:

> [...] [My experiment] has no scientific validity. However, it does reinforce my own impression that with the publication and popular acceptance of Tolkien's version of the fantastic, a new coherence was given to the genre. […] Tolkien's form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception. One way to characterize the genre of fantasy is the set of texts that in some way or other resemble *The Lord of the Rings*. (ATTEBERY, 1992, p. 14).

Having defined which text is at the center of the fuzzy set, Attebery discusses which would be the elements present in *The Lord of the Rings* that could be seen as a parameter to categorize a text as part or not of the fuzzy set of the fantasy genre. According to the scholar, works that are commonly classified as fantasy resemble Tolkien's work in three ways: in terms of content, in terms of structure, and, finally, in terms of reader response. Each of these elements is, in turn, intrinsically connected with what Tolkien proposes in his essay "On Fairy-Stories": the content is linked to the break with reality, the Tolkienian notion of escape. The structure, on the other hand, is related to the movement proposed by John Clute and John Grant (1996) in their work *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*: according to the authors, a fantasy text can be described as a literary work that has a narrative pattern that begins with the emergence of some kind of problem that is followed by its recognition by the protagonist, who is, then, propelled to act. Finally, his actions allow the emergence of the *Eucatastrophe*, which, in turn, results in the happy ending and the healing process of that fictional universe. It is interesting to note that the model used by Clute and Grant derives from the narrative pattern proposed by Tolkien, so much so that the authors use the term coined by the writer to elaborate their description. Finally, as for the readers' response, this is linked, Attebery (1992) proposes, with the *Eucatastrophe* expressed in Tolkien's essay, with the consolation of the "happy ending". Although this "happy ending" has Christian implications on the part of the English writer, it has been effectively appropriated by writers not necessarily Christian, like Úrsula Le Guin in her *Earthsea* Cycle. It is also connected with Tolkien's notion of recovery, which combines the familiar with the impossible in order to produce a sense of wonder in those who read.

It is worth noting that, while Attebery's theory is a little more comprehensive than Tolkien's, allowing for a more plural study of fantasy texts in terms of their structure, it remains considerably dependent on Tolkien's postulates. On the other hand, the approach proposed by Farah Mendlesohn (2008), in her work *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, provides theoretical contributions that allow, on a large scale, an even broader and more inclusive debate on the genre. For Mendlesohn (2008), fantasy literature is a literary genre that depends considerably on the dialectic between (implicit) author and (implicit) reader, especially for "[...] the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief." (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 13). Such a dialectic, says the writer, is conditioned both by expectations and by narrative conventions about the genre. To build her argument, Mendlesohn starts from Attebery's proposition that fantasy authors work with well-defined structures, using narrative

strategies that, while establishing a relationship between the Primary World and the Secondary World, also separate them (ATTEBERY, 1992). Based on this idea, the scholar investigates how such narrative techniques work and what their impact may be. In other words, Mendlesohn analyses how fantasy writers use different literary techniques to meet the expectations of the genre.

Central to Mendlesohn's argument is her assertion that fantasy texts can be classified into four categories according to how the fantastic appears in their narrative. They are portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusive fantasy, and liminal fantasy. In portal-quest fantasy, as the name suggests, the fantastic appears in the narrative after the protagonist crosses a portal that separates the real world from the characters in the fantasy world; in immersive fantasy, writers build a fantasy world that has its own internal consistency of reality, which means that the fantastic is perceived by characters as normal and belonging to that universe; in intrusive fantasy, the fantastic elements invade or are hosted in the characters' world, which is not a fantasy world per se; finally, in liminal fantasy, the key element is dissonance: both readers and characters perceive the fantastic element, but it may be seen and interpreted in different ways. The liminal fantasy is the fantasy of doubt and ambiguity, as the narratives that fall into this category have structures that allow reading both through a fantastic and non-fantastic perspective of these texts. However, it is interesting to note that Mendlesohn's objective is not "[...] to argue that there is only one possible taxonomic understanding of the genre. The purpose of the book is not to offer a classification per se but to consider the genre in ways that open up new questions. It is a tool kit, not a color chart." (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 15). Based on these considerations, I offer below examples that illustrate each of the categories proposed by the author.

The classic example of portal-quest fantasy, as Mendlesohn (2008) proposes, is the novel *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by Irish writer C. S. Lewis. In Lewis' work, the Pevensie siblings leave their familiar environment, the Primary World, through a portal that takes them to another universe, the Secondary World. In this new universe, Narnia, the protagonists are foreigners with no knowledge of the dynamics of the place, which makes them decode that Secondary World as they explore it. Therefore, the presence of one or more characters who play the role of guide to the protagonists, helping them to explore the fantasy world, is common in this type of narrative. In Lewis' novel, this role is initially played by the character Mr. Tumnus, who is then replaced by Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who guide the protagonists in their first incursion into Narnia. It is important to note that, in

this type of narrative, the reader's knowledge about the fantasy world is limited to what the protagonists see and understand, because, as proposed by Mendlesohn (2008), the reader's position in this type of fantasy is that of a companion-spectator, dependent on the protagonists to decode, interpret and understand what is narrated. Still about the functioning and characteristics of portal-quest fantasies, Mendlesohn proposes the following:

> Modern quest and portal fantasies rely upon very similar narrative strategies because each assume the same two movements: transition and exploration. The portal fantasy is about entry, transition, and exploration, and much quest fantasy, for all we might initially assume that it is immersive […], adopts the structure and rhetorical strategies of the portal fantasy: it denies the taken for granted and positions both protagonist and reader as naive. Characteristically the quest fantasy protagonist goes from a mundane life, in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist) to direct contact with the fantastic through which she transitions, exploring the world until she or those around her are knowledgeable enough to negotiate with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm. (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 2).

Further works that share the characteristics mentioned above and that, therefore, can be approached from the point of view of the portal-quest fantasy include the *Harry Potter* saga, by J.K. Rowling, the novel *Neverwhere*, by Neil Gaiman, *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien, among others. It is important to note, however, that some of the examples cited can be approached through the lens of more than one of Mendlesohn's categories. Both *Harry Potter* and *Neverwhere*, for example, can be treated not only as portal-quest fantasies, but also as intrusive fantasies. However, when a text transits between more than one category, proposes Mendlesohn (2008), it can be observed that writers adopt different narrative strategies, such as changes in the narrative rhythm or in the way events are presented to the reader. The first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, for example, has characteristics typical of intrusive fantasy: events are perceived to occur that disturb the order and normality of the Primary World, bringing chaos to the narrative, as can be seen from the following excerpt:

> When Mr. and Mrs. Dursley woke up on the dull, gray Tuesday our story starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country. [...] It was on the corner of the street that [Mr. Dursley] noticed the first sign of something peculiar -- a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr. Dursley didn't realize what he had seen -- then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light. Mr. Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr. Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now reading the sign that said Privet Drive -- no, looking at the sign; cats couldn't read maps or signs. Mr. Dursley gave himself a little shake and put the cat out of his mind. (ROWLING, 2013, p. 2-3).

As it turns out in the course of the work, the fantastic element that disturbs the normality of events in the Primary World is brought about by wizards and witches who are celebrating the defeat of the dark wizard, Voldemort. The intrusion remains present in the novel, especially in the first four chapters. In chapter 5, however, the protagonist crosses one of the portals that mark the border between the Primary World and the Secondary World of the novel, and the fantastic returns to its place of origin. It is interesting to notice that the perception of the narrated events changes as the narrative transits between the intrusive and the portal-quest categories: if in the first chapter the readers have a broader view of the narrated events, from the second chapter onwards this view becomes limited to what the protagonist sees and understands, as it is characteristic of portal-quest fantasies.

Another example in which an intrusive element is clearly observed entering the Primary World of the protagonists and bringing chaos occurs in the novel *The Magician's Nephew*, by C.S. Lewis. The novel begins with the protagonists Polly and Digory living in the normality of their Primary World, London, until Digory's uncle forcibly sends them to an unknown Secondary World through the use of magic rings. After a few chapters exploring the new world, the protagonists return to the Primary World. However, they end up bringing with them the sorceress Jadis, who, for not being part of that universe, brings with her turmoil and chaos. The normality of the Primary World only returns when, at the end of the narrative, Polly and Digory manage to send Jadis back to the fantasy world. The narrative structure of Lewis' novel is in accordance with the way intrusive fantasy is organized, which, Mendlesohn proposes, follows

a direct trajectory: “the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled.” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 115). Other characteristics relevant to this type of fantasy are, the scholar says, stylistic realism, excess of explanations and descriptions, and the assumption that the reader shares the protagonist's naivete, which means that the language used in this type of narrative often presents a tone of astonishment.

If, on the one hand, the intrusive fantasy has as one of its central characteristics the excess of explanation, this element is considerably absent in the immersive fantasy, which “[...] seems to be described in part by what it is not. We do not enter into the immersive fantasy, we are assumed to be of it: our cognitive estrangement is both entire and negated. The immersive fantasy must be sealed; it cannot, within the confines of the story, be questioned.” (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 20). As this type of fantasy tends to assume that the reader has prior knowledge of the Secondary World in question, descriptions are scarce, possibly causing estrangement to the reader. It is important to emphasize, however, that the estrangement that occurs in immersive fantasy is different from what is observed in the portal-quest type: in this, the protagonist and reader share the estrangement caused by the incursion into the Secondary World. There is also often the presence of a guide that helps the protagonist and the reader to decode that universe. In immersive fantasy, on the other hand, the estrangement occurs only on the part of the reader, who has to make an effort to understand the workings of the Secondary World on his own. Classic examples of this type of fantasy are the works *The Silmarillion*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, the saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by George R. R. Martin, and the still unfinished trilogy *The Kingkiller Chronicle*, by Patrick Rothfuss. It is also common that in immersive fantasy the reader perceives that the narrative takes place in a world apart from his own, with different functioning and rules, right from the first lines of the narrative, as can be seen in this excerpt from the first volume of *The Kingkiller Chronicle*: “[i]t was Felling night, and the usual crowd had gathered at the Waystone Inn. Five wasn’t much of a crowd, but five was as many as the Waystone ever saw these days, times being what they were.”. (ROTHFUSS, 2007, p. 3). The term “Felling”, right in the first line of chapter 1 of the work, possibly makes the reader realize that the narrative that has just begun takes place in a different world than the Primary. Along with the question “what is Felling?”, it is likely that the reader will also ask himself, “what is the current situation and why has it made the Waystone Inn receive few customers?”. The answers to such questions only come to the reader as he advances in the

narrative. However, they arise not in the form of an explanation, but rather from the conversations that the characters have throughout the novel.

Finally, the liminal fantasy is the most complex among the four categories proposed by Mendlesohn (2008), as its composition depends, sometimes, on the elaboration of stable irony, and at other times, on the construction of opposition between how the protagonist and reader perceive the fantastic element in the narrative, or even both techniques. As stated before, the liminal fantasy leaves room for different interpretations, especially regarding the existence or absence of fantastic elements in the work. An example that fits into this category is the work *The Turn of the Screw*, by Henry James, where, at the end of the narrative, there is doubt about the narrated facts: do the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint really surround Bly Manor and influence Flora and Miles' behavior, or are they simply figments of the housekeeper's imagination? Both readings are possible, as there are elements in the narrative that allow for both interpretations.

A more recent work that fits the parameters of liminal fantasy is *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, by British writer Neil Gaiman. The novel tells the story of an unnamed protagonist, who, when visiting the place where he lived for part of his childhood, recalls a remarkable episode of his boyhood. It is the account of the events that occur soon after the seventh birthday of the protagonist, who, having almost no friends, spends a good part of his time reading, above all, fantasy narratives. When the protagonist's parents begin to have financial and marital problems, fantastic events start to occur: the character Lettie Hempstock, who comes from a family composed, above all, of women who have supernatural powers, appears in the narrative. There is also Ursula Monkton, the boy's nanny, who, he believes, is the personification of a monster found by Lettie and him in the vicinity of the Hempstock farm. Soon after Ursula's arrival, the protagonist discovers that she and his father are having an adulterous relationship. Due to the imaginative nature of the main character, it can be argued that the fact that he sees Ursula as the personification of a monstrous being may be connected with the notion of what the nanny represents, a rupture in the relationship of his parents, as can be argued from the following passage:

> As I ran, I thought of my father, his arms around the housekeeper-who-wasn't, kissing her neck, and then I saw his face through the chilly bathwater as he held me under, and now I was no longer scared by what had happened in the bathroom; now I was scared by what it meant that my father was kissing the

> neck of Ursula Monkton, that his hands had lifted her midi skirt above her waist. My parents were a unit, inviolate. The future had suddenly become unknowable: anything could happen: the train of my life had jumped the rails and headed off across the fields and was coming down the lane with me, then. (GAIMAN, 2013, p. 79).

Therefore, it is possible to claim that the fantastic elements in Gaiman's narrative have the function of helping the young protagonist to explain the problems his parents are going through. In this sense, it may be argued that the presence of such elements is the result of the imagination of a child who is going through situations that are too complex for his age and who, in order to assimilate and justify such situations, resorts to the fantastic. As in the case of *The Turn of the Screw*, Gaiman's work also leaves room for multiple interpretations, depending on the way it is approached.

Through Mendlesohn's approach, as it may be argued based on the propositions above, a study of fantasy literature, in its various aspects, becomes possible. More than simply proposing an inflexible model, the scholar argues that the structure of narratives of this genre is subject to modifications that meet the possible intentions of the authors and also the expectations inherent to them. Mendlesohn, as she proposes, does not seek to define the genre, because the debate about its definition "[...] is now long-standing, and a consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable 'fuzzy set', a range of critical definitions of fantasy. It is now rare to find scholars who choose among Kathryn Hume, W. R. Irwin, Rosemary Jackson, or Tzvetan Todorov […]." (MENDLESOHN, 2008, p. 13). What is more likely to happen today, proposes the theorist, is that academics and scholars in the field choose this or that theory according to their research interests and how they intend to approach a given text. Mendlesohn's theory, therefore, seeks to understand how the fantasy genre is constructed, focusing on the different narrative strategies used by different fantasists, as a means to offer critical methodologies that allow a more in-depth and plural study of the genre.

SOME FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Fantasy literature, as well as the ways of approaching it, has changed considerably since its popularization in the mid-20th century. With the success and popularity of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, parameters were defined that, for years, were considered as the model for how

narratives of the genre should be constructed. The writer's essay "On Fairy-Stories" greatly helped to establish such a formula, since the postulates present in his essay can be observed in his novel. However, as new questions and ways of seeing the world emerge, the way fantasy develops is also gradually changing. Attebery (2008) proposes that fantasy literature is a fluid genre, allowing it to adapt with a certain ease to historical-social changes, making it possible for writers to address issues related to the historical, geographic, and social context in which they are inserted. Similarly, Tompkins (1985) believes that different texts in different contexts have, as one of their functions, to solve one or more problems pertinent to the time and place of their publication. Taking these scholars' assertions into consideration, together with Tolkien's postulates in "On Fairy-Stories", one can think about the social function of fantasy.

Therefore, in addition to trying to understand what a particular text intends to say, it is pertinent to think about the form used in the text in order to say it, the motivation for the text to make such statements, and the motivation behind the form used. With this type of approach, one can reflect on how the structure of different fantasy narratives mirrors (or not) the context in which they are inserted and vice versa. Consequently, from such considerations, a broader understanding of what makes fantasy take different forms in different historical-geographical moments can be achieved, as well as the importance of theories that enable a more pluralistic and gender-inclusive approach.

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