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How the level of integration of the fantastic element into the fictional world influences reading – *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Dominion*, *Look Who's Back*, *and The Book Thief*

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Key words:
Fantastic literature, the fantastic element, level of integration, fuzzy sets, the pure fantastic, the fantastic as a means of expression.

Klíčová slova:
Fantastická literatura, fantastický prvek, úroveň začlenění, neostré množiny, vlastní fantastično, fantastično jako prostředek vyjádření.

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to show a correlation between the level of integration of the fantastic element into the structure of the fictional world and the potential of literary works to be successfully read as both fantastic literature and non-genre literature, valuable for their meaning, transcendence and art of narration. It will introduce four levels of integration of the fantastic element and focus on two neighbouring levels: the fantastic element used as a *platform* and as a *resource*.

Using four specific examples, I will try to distinguish very different attitudes toward the fantastic element and to argue that literary works using the fantastic element merely as a resource for expressing something else do not necessarily indicate failed fantasy, but create a specific fuzzy set within fantastic literature, which I call the *fantastic as a means of expression* (and which might be distinguished from the fuzzy set of the *pure fantastic*, characterised by the full contextualisation of the fantastic element within the fictional world). In contrast, using the example of *Dominion* by C. J. Sansom, I will point out that when the fantastic element is used as a platform but without adequate contextualisation within the fictional world the text fails as fantastic literature; however, it preserves its potential to express meaning and and its artistic merit.

Abstrakt:

Jak úroveň integrace fantastického prvku do fikčního světa ovlivňuje čtení: *Levá ruka tmy*, *Nadvláda*, *Už je tady zas* a *Zlodějka knih*

Cílem této studie je upozornit na vztah mezi úrovní integrace fantastického prvku do struktury fikčního světa a potenciálem literárního díla být úspěšně čteno současně jako fantastická a nežánrová literatura, hodnotná svým významem, přesahem a vypravěčským umem.

Představuji čtyři úrovně integrace fantastického prvku a zaměřuji se na dvě sousedící: na fantastický prvek použitý jako *platforma* a jako *východisko*. Na čtyřech příkladech zdůrazním velice odlišné postoje k fantastickému prvku a to, že literární díla používající fantastický prvek pouze jako východisko k vyjádření něčeho dalšího neindikují nutně nedotažené zapracování fantastického prvku, ale vytvářejí specifickou neostrou množinu uvnitř fantastické literatury, kterou nazývám jako *fantastično jako prostředek vyjádření* (a kterou lze odlišit od neostré množiny *vlastního fantastična*, pro niž je charakteristická plná kontextualizace fantastického prvku v rámci fikčního světa). Naproti tomu na příkladu *Nadvlády* C.J. Sansoma poukážu na to, jak dílo, v němž je fantastický prvek použit jako platforma, ale bez adekvátní kontextualizace v rámci fikčního světa, selhává jako fantastika, ale uchovává si svou výpovědní a uměleckou hodnotu.

Do we need to read fantastic literature differently from other forms of literature? Is it possible to read and enjoy a book as both inspiring science fiction (or fantasy) and as a wonderful work of literature at the same time? In the past, assertions about a line existing between fantastic and mimetic literature were commonplace[1]; today, however, criticism provides less strict and highly stimulating views on the relationship between these two branches of literature. Brian Attebery, while reflecting on the problematic topic of categories (or genres) in folklore in his latest book *Stories about Stories* (2014), points out the crucial role of the recipient, who judges into which category certain stories belong: "Are they myths or folktales? The question is not exactly meaningless, but any answer may say more about the observer than about the story itself" (ATTEBERY 2014: 35). Consequently, when focusing on fantastic literature, Attebery asks us to consider the following intriguing idea:

> The question of what genre a particular text belongs to will never be resolved, nor need it be. The interesting question about any given story is not whether or not is it fantasy or science fiction or realistic novel, but rather what happens when we read it as one of those things (ATTEBERY 2014: 38).

1) For example Samuel Delany in his essay *Science Fiction and "Literature"* (first published in 1979) claims that "we must think of literature and science fiction not as two different sets of labeled texts, but as two different sets of values, two different ways of response, two different ways of making texts make sense, two different ways of reading" (DELANY 2005: 102).

The aim of this study is not to oppose the demand of different reading strategies when reading fantastic (and especially science fiction[2]) and "mainstream" literature in general. It will focus on showing a correlation between the level of integration of the fantastic element into the structure of the fictional world and the potential of literary works to be successfully read as both fantastic literature, while the reader is focused on the coherence (credibility and consistence) of the fantastic element, and non-genre literature, valuable for their meaning, transcendence and art of narration. When considering four different levels of integration of the fantastic element, I will focus on two neighbouring levels – the fantastic element used either as a **platform** or as a **resource** – which I consider to be distinguishable in the four texts used as examples. According to the aim of the paper, I will pay more attention to those texts that show higher levels of integration (*The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Dominion*); the two texts in which the fantastic element is crucial for the meaning of the story and yet does not need to be fully contextualised will be analysed only briefly. I will also pay attention to the representation of actual world in the novels analysed. Accordingly, I will introduce two possible fuzzy sets of fantastic literature differentiated by the role of the fantastic element within the fictional world and the story.

However, as a first step, I briefly have to clarify what I mean under the term of fantastic literature. A fiction or a drama can be considered "fantastic" if its fantastic element (connected through family resemblances with at least one other piece of fantastic literature) plays an important role in the structure of the fictional world, e.g. it does not occur sporadically, i.e. while performing a specific function.[3] The fantastic element is represented by a deliberate departure from a consensual reality (e.g. an altered historical development in the case of alternative history, or the setting of an action in a future fictional world), by a physical impossibility in case of characters and entities or by a radical change in the natural patterns and rules of the fictional world. By defining a certain work as fantastic, we simultaneously analyse it in the light of its more detailed position (setting) in the internal structure of the genre on the basis of the resemblances

2) For example Damien Broderick considers the science fiction genre to create a megatext (BRODERICK 1995).

3) I adopted the condition of the prominent role of a fantastic element from the work of Nancy H. Trail *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Fiction* (1996). Trail uses the example of the play *Hamlet* to emphasize the need to take into account the number and function of fantastic elements in a literary text when searching for boundaries between the realistic and the fantastic fictional worlds. We would not hesitate to identify the ghost of Hamlet's father as a fantastic element; however, we would hardly consider *Hamlet* as an example of fantastic literature. We understand intuitively that the ghost appears on the walls of the castle simply to certify Hamlet's doubts, i.e. that there really is something rotten in the state of Denmark. His presence does not place the entire drama into the realm of the fantastic.

with the range of the fantastic texts we find in that genre. The first step in deciding whether a certain work is fantastic or not is thus intuitive (we perceive a certain work as fantastic); the second step involves the analysis of architextual patterns, which results in the placing of the analysed work within the context of a fantastic literature fuzzy set.

The fuzzy set theory within fantastic literature was developed by Brian Attebery and presented in his monograph *Strategies of Fantasy*[4] (1992). In applying the theory of fuzzy sets to the fantastic, Brian Attebery himself was inspired by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, especially by the idea of not defining genres by their boundaries, but by a centre. In the centre of the fantastic literature fuzzy set we can find prototypical works, whereas on its periphery there are works connected with the prototypical works at a certain level, which, however, we would hesitate to label as fantastic. To explain fuzzy set theory, Attebery adopts the well-known example of a fuzzy set denoting a class of birds: at its centre there are genera and species which do not arouse even the slightest doubt about their belonging to the realm of birds – for example, eagles and robins, while on the periphery of this fuzzy set we can include penguins, chickens and even bats. Likewise, the fuzzy set of fantastic literature has its centre and periphery. Into the centre we can place a number of prototypical fantastic stories such as *Lord of the Rings*[5], *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury 1953) or *Ubik* (Philip K. Dick 1969). On its periphery we can find works that, for various reasons, we might hesitate to include within fantastic literature (Is a story set in fantastic fictional world truly fantastic, if we know that it was created like a record of hallucinations?).

A crucial consideration when placing a certain work within the fuzzy set of fantastic literature is the level of integration of the fantastic element into the fictional world. In my monograph, I differentiate four levels of integration: the fantastic element as a **platform** (the fantastic element represents the core of story development while being authentically integrated into the fictional world; its integration is well elaborated); the fantastic element as a **resource** (the implementation of the fantastic element in the fictional world is not crucial; it is the consequences of its existence that play the important role); the fantastic element as a **goal** (this represents an even higher level of integration of the

4) The fuzzy set approach was introduced primarily on works of fantasy, but as a concept it can be applied to fantastic literature generally.

5) *Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien became the prototypical fantasy text of the second half of the 20th century not only because of its qualities, but also due to its vast popularity among readers and commercial success, which, as a result, produced a generation of Tolkien epigones.

fantastic element, which is characteristic of texts that are completely focused on the fantastic element and in which other aspects of the fictional world and the story serve to explain it); the fantastic element as a **coulisse** (the fantastic element is mainly a backdrop to (typically an adventurous) story that shows a relatively low level of integration) (DĚDINOVÁ 2015). The fantastic element used as the goal of a text is characteristic of a number of Hard SF works, especially from the 1940s and 1950s, which were literally built around a fantastic idea, without too much attention being paid to other aspects of the text.

As indicated above, in this study I will focus on two neighbouring middle levels of integration: the platform and the resource.

Left Hand of Darkness – the fantastic element as a platform

One of many possible works I consider as belonging to the centre of the fantastic literature fuzzy set is *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula Kroeber Le Guin, which uses fantastic elements as a platform. Of the loosely connected *Hain* series of novels, which examines the consequences of a clash of different worlds and cultures in a future galaxy in which the planets are freely grouped into the so-called Ekumen, the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* received the greatest recognition (receiving the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1970).

The fantastic elements, represented by the setting in fantastic space-time and by the depiction of a specific race and civilisation on the planet Gethen, are thoroughly integrated into the fictional world (which is, in fact, based on them) and are a contemplation on the need to accept and understand the Other on a general (the clash of two very different cultures) and personal (the relationship between the two main characters) level. In order to specify how the fantastic elements are integrated into the fictional world and how they relate to our actual world, I will briefly outline the story of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the concept of the Other contained within it.

Genly Ai from Terra (planet Earth) is coming to Gethen, which, due to its inhospitable climate, is also called Winter, as an emissary of Ekumen, the intergalactic coalition of intelligent species. His task is to introduce Ekumen to Gethen and to invite its citizens to become a part of it and to profit from the free exchange of information. The people of Gethen have not yet achieved the level of technology

required for space exploration beyond their own planet and the existence of at least eighty other intelligent species in the universe is almost beyond their comprehension. Genly Ai has to fight misunderstanding, disbelief, and suspicion. What is even more demanding than the need to orientate oneself in the political machinations of Gethen's as yet disunited rulers is the need to understand and accept the very different cultural, social, and physical environment. In fact, it is more alien than anything that the union of Ekumen has ever encountered. The essential difference lies in a divergent form of sexuality that affects all aspects of life in Gethen. The people of Gethen are ambisexual for most of the time; only once a month, during a period of sexual perceptivity called kemmer, do they adopt male or female attributes, depending on their current situation and relationships.

Imagine sentient beings unaffected by sexual stereotypes: there are no men or women, strong and weak halves, hunters and warriors on the one hand and mothers and nurses on the other. There are only human beings. Anyone can give birth; anyone can become a male during one kemmer and female during the next. The concepts of chauvinism and feminism make no sense on Gethen. Imagine a society which is not driven by sexual instinct all the time. During the period of kemmer everyone retires to private and focuses on their personal lives and relationships. No one is supposed to make professional, political or business decisions during that time. What does this mean for aliens accustomed to the fellowship of men and women?

> A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. On Winter they will not exist. One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience (LE GUIN 1987: 84–86).

The presented concept of Gethen humanity is powerful enough for a great science fiction work; however, Le Guin goes much deeper in examining human nature. She allows two of the main characters – Genly Ai from Terra and Therem Harth ir Estraven from Gethen – to endure an exhausting pilgrimage across a huge glacier after Estraven saved Genly's life and helped him to escape from prison, where he had been kept as a dangerous liar and manipulator. This pilgrimage is challenging both physically and psychologically and can be considered as the climax of the story. The goal is not only to survive extreme conditions, but to create a relationship, to overcome preconceptions, and to accept differences as they are.

Paradoxically, although Estraven is the only one who believes in Genly's honesty and the purity of his intentions, Genly feels only mistrust and suspicion towards him. Only slowly and painfully do they begin to really understand each other and to create a strong friendship, even love. It is both complicated and simplified at once, when Estraven enters the period of kemmer, which, for him, is very hard to go through without a partner in love.

> And I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear; what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality. [...] For it seemed to me, and I think to him, that it was from that sexual tension between us, admitted now and understood, but not assuaged, that the great and sudden assurance of friendship between us rose: a friendship [...], that it might as well be called, now as later, love. But it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came: and it was itself the bridge, the only bridge, across what divided us (LE GUIN 1987: 177).

Given the aim and brevity of this study, I must pass over a great deal of the meaning and transcendence in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. However, I consider the evolution of the connection between Genly and Estraven – a love and friendship not conditioned by the marginalization of differences, but on the contrary, by the acceptance of those differences from the very depth of the heart and soul – to be possibly the strongest message of the book. It is manifested by the symbol of a bridge in various contexts within the story: the ceremony of the completion of the bridge at the very opening of the book, and then the building of metaphorical bridges between Genly and Estraven, light and darkness, life and death, and the beginning of the journey and its end.

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there is a tradition in SF criticism that a fantastic narrative demands a special reading, one that is different from the reading of a mainstream narrative. *The Left Hand of Darkness* might be read as fantastic literature and as non-genre literature at the same time. We can read the novel both as a thought experiment and as a profound character study and touching story.

The connection between *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the actual realities of our world is rather loose – planet Earth is called Terra and little is said about it. What is important are the deeper connections – let us say bridges – between Genley's mentality and our own, between his and our ways of understanding

reality. Genly will never be able to fully understand how it feels to be Gethenian; however, he finds a way entirely to accept his friend's nature. It is something deeper and more intimate than mere tolerance and suggests a strong message applicable to our everyday reality. Le Guin created an independent and complex fictional world, at once valuable in its own right and enriching readers with new perspectives on our own narratives, questions, and relationships. For this reason, I consider *The Left Hand of Darkness* to belong to the thought centre of the fuzzy set of high quality fantastic literature.[6] The fantastic elements are both elaborated in terms of the fictional world and create a platform for deeper meaning and transcendence.

Dominion – the fantastic element as an unsuccessfully elaborated platform

Dominion was published in 2012 as an alternate history. C. J. Sansom introduces the reader to the alternative year 1952, in which the United Kingdom is a puppet ally of Nazi Germany, Winston Churchill is the head of the Resistance, and Germany is still leading an exhausting war with the Soviet Union in Siberia. Sansom describes the point of divergence at the very beginning of the book: at a meeting of senior government representatives on the 9th May, 1940 Winston Churchill agrees to the choice of Lord Halifax as Prime Minister after the resignation of the discredited Chamberlain. As a consequence, Churchill does not deliver his famous speech about blood, toil, tears and sweat on the 13th May and the United Kingdom slowly and inevitably abandons any idea of resistance. We are guided through the fictional world by a group of characters presenting various attitudes toward the political and social reality: David Fitzgerald, a former pacifist with Jewish ancestry, lately a member of Resistance; his wife, who still believes in the politics of appeasement; and the mentally labile Frank, hiding in a sanatorium after he accidentally uncovered the secret of a horrific weapon capable of changing the course of the war. At the opposite end of the spectrum are a German investigator and an ambitious British collaborator.

Despite the obvious fantastic element in the story, the alternate history seems, in fact, to be merely a basis for the development of a story and the depiction of

6) Together with a number of other books.

a society under great pressure. The indicators are as follows. Too little attention is paid to the historical consequences after the point of divergence (although the historical context before May 1940 is portrayed accurately and with great erudition). Sansom creates an alternate reality which responds to the needs of his story and underplays historical credibility. Even maps illustrating the situation from the alternate year 1952 show discrepancies with some of the historical starting points shared by both the fictional and actual worlds. Although these details do not have a crucial influence on the novel, they raise doubts about the consistency of the alternative history of *Dominion* as a whole. More importantly, the conflict between the SS and the Wehrmacht after Hitler's death, resulting in the total collapse of the regime in Europe, is described in only a few paragraphs at the very end of the book. Thus, if *Dominion* is read as alternate history, the result is disappointing. If the reader approaches the novel as a case study of a whole society in crisis and appreciates the impressive portrayal of ambiance, he/she will find real merit in it.

The second half of the story is imbued by smog as a metaphor, the heavy fog of hypocrisy and silenced truth lying on the shoulders of society. *Dominion* portrays the racism hidden in so-called ordinary people, the politics of appeasement as a convenient excuse to avoid conflict, and the failure of pacifism in the face of unscrupulous power. Adolf Hitler is depicted as a peacemaker, the Resistance is demonized for adopting violent methods, and Great Britain is presented as willing to sacrifice its Jewish community in order to maintain the status quo and to strengthen trade agreements. More salient than the political chicanery are the actions of Sansom's ordinary people, the episodic appearances of the good Britons, who make no secret of their anti-Semitism and contempt for "inferior" nationalities. A large part of the society willingly closes its eyes to the bestial behaviour of its Nazi allies in order to protect its comfortable position, an animosity aimed against Resistance is in the first place caused by its distortions of false peace of the puppet country. The complex of national superiority can also be seen among members of the Resistance movement: they consider the inhabitants of colonies to be generally inferior and believe that society in India would have failed without British colonisation; a colonel active in the Resistance owns a dog named Nigger; and almost everyone observes mentally unstable Frank with suspicion and prejudice.

Dominion is also an admitted allegory; in the postscript, Sansom himself actualises the problem of nationalism towards the contemporary referendum on independence for Scotland. The fantastic element is connected to the actual world

in at least three layers: first, the shared history prior to the point of divergence in 1940; second, the warning in the postscript aimed at modern forms of nationalism; third, the critical commentary on British society with its prejudice and discrimination against other nationalities. (This could easily be extended beyond the boundaries of Great Britain towards western society in general.)

Overall, however, compared to the *Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dominion* seems to be less successful in integrating the fantastic element into the fictional world. The alternate history has to be contorted to fit the story, and, as a consequence, we can perceive the fantastic element and the story and meaning of *Dominion* as two somehow separate aspects. This stands out even more prominently due to the fact that credibility of alternate history (i.e. fantastic element) depends also on the comparison with the actual world. The author struggles in the narrative to unify them, but only with partial success. Thus, *Dominion* is a text using the fantastic element as a platform to express its ideas, but given the insufficient elaboration of its alternate history the question of underestimating the rules of fantastic narrative arises.

Look Who's Back and The Book Thief – the fantastic element as a resource

The following two texts will be presented only briefly, as the fantastic elements in them are not integrated as fully into the fictional world as in the previous examples, and a general analysis of textual examples is not the intention of this work.

The prosaic debut novel by Timur Vermes, *Er ist wieder da* (2012, English translation *Look Who's Back*, 2014), employs only one fantastic element: the survival of Adolf Hitler, who mysteriously (possible explanation would be completely beyond the intention of the text) appears in 2011 near the Reich Chancellery, probably above the underground complex – the Führerbunker – where Hitler spent the end of the Second World War in hiding:

> I remember waking up; it must have been early afternoon. Opening my eyes I saw above me the sky, which was blue with the occasional cloud. It felt warm, and I sensed at once that it was too warm for April. One might almost call it hot. It was relatively quiet; I could not see any enemy aircraft flying overhead, or hear the thunder of artillery fire, there seemed to be no shelling nearby or explo-

> sions, no air-raid sirens. It also struck me that there was no Reich Chancellery and no Führerbunker (VERMES 2014: 11).

There is definitely an intention to shock readers, but the essential aim of the novel is to make an emphatic statement about our world. *Look Who's Back* is a political and social satire; through the character of Adolf Hitler, it shows the helplessness of modern society, which deliberately ignores the obvious. Within a short period of time, Hitler gains considerable influence in spite of the fact that he does not conceal his intentions regarding the future development of Germany. Although he does not manifest the whole range of his opinions (e.g. the future of Jewish citizens) absolutely openly, he does not lie when asked. Paradoxically, he is recognized as a satirist and pacifist highlighting the vices of contemporary society. He even becomes the victim of an attack by neo-Nazis for allegedly vilifying his own memory. The scene in which Hitler convinces war victim whose family perished in a concentration camp that he is behaving acceptably (once again without telling a single lie) is truly chilling.

Vermes stretches his readers' forbearance to breaking point – in quite a few sections of the text it would be possible to sympathise with the main character, particularly because of the apposite criticism of the contemporary situation in Germany. If only it was not Adolf Hitler. Certainly, the mirroring of today's society in *Look Who's Back* would lose a quite fundamental dimension without its controversial main character; however, the fantastic element is still largely a means of intensifying the commentary on the real world.

The Book Thief (2006) by Markus Zusak would be "only" an immensely compelling story of an unusual little girl named Liesel and of her surroundings under the dramatic conditions of World War II, describing the power of words in many layers of meaning, were it not for the novel's unique narrator: a personified Death, who is both detached from, and fascinated by humans and their stories, which she considers surprising and terrifying at once.

The evocation of the children's world from a supernatural perspective enriches the story with a unique ambience: the distinctive narrator enters the story by means of a commentary and being an entity freed from the chains of the linearity of time, she observes the story and the characters with full knowledge of their fates (for it is she who is waiting at the end of all human affairs). Even everyday events estranged through her eyes acquire surprising dimensions. As the story progresses, the narrators' laments humanize her in the eyes of the

reader and make her truly sympathetic. Death attempts to explore human life through the narration of Liesel's story; however, even the supernatural entity is not able to comprehend the nature of human reality in all its complexity:

> I wanted to tell the book thief many things, about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her about those things that she didn't already know? I wanted to explain that I am constantly overestimating and underestimating the human race – that rarely do I ever simply **estimate** it. I wanted to ask her how the same thing could be so ugly and so glorious, and its words and stories so damning and brilliant (ZUSAK 2006: 366).

Without the fantastic storyteller, the story itself would retain considerable literary value; however, it would be deprived of a great deal of its meaning and transcendence.

Fuzzy set of fantastic literature

If we arrange the fuzzy set of fantastic literature on the basis of the level of integration of the fantastic element into the fictional world, of the four given texts *The Left Hand of Darkness* would be centremost, being a narrative with the fantastic element most elaborated and contextualised into the fictional world. According to the level of integration of the fantastic element, *Look Who's Back* and *The Book Thief* would be somewhere on its periphery. *Dominion* would also fall outside the centre of the fuzzy set in virtue of its not entirely successful integration of the fantastic element – its alternate history – into the fictional world.

In general, in the centre of this fuzzy set would be works sharing certain attributes, i.e. works that focus on the fantastic element and on its vital role in the fictional world. In such works, the fantastic element is elaborated and contextualised in the fictional world, the consequences are thought through. Regarding extratextual aspects, these are works typically, though not necessarily, connected in some way to the fandom and to the canon of fantastic literature. The authors know each other's works, reflect them in their writing, and together shape the development of the genre. In contrast, the lower the level of integration of the fantastic element, the closer to the periphery of the fuzzy set a certain work is situated. Nowadays, there are a growing number of so-called mainstream works employing the fantastic element in the structure of the fictional

world, but without full contextualisation. But the question is: should we think about these works in the same way as about works in the genre of the fantastic (for example science fiction or fantasy)? They do not usually work with the same strategies as employed in the genre of the fantastic, and the lower level of integration of the fantastic element does not necessarily mean the failure of the fictional world structure. Furthermore, they also tend to share certain characteristics and thus also create a fuzzy set with its own centre and periphery.

Consequently, there is the possibility to envisage more fuzzy sets of fantastic literature than the one proposed by Brian Attebery (1992). Following the model of an intuitive definition of fantastic literature as a whole, we can think of a number of fuzzy sets within the parent fuzzy set of fantastic literature. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two fuzzy sets only: on the fuzzy set with a high level of integration of the fantastic element, which may be called the **pure fantastic**, and on the fuzzy set with a considerably lower level of integration of the fantastic element, which nevertheless does play an essential role within the structure of fictional world and cannot be successfully interpreted as a mere coulisse. I call this fuzzy set the **fantastic as a means of expression**. At its centre, we can find works sharing the following attributes: the fantastic element is essentially a resource for developing the story and for emphasising the meaning of the text. Typically, there are no explanations of the exact nature of fantastic element, i.e. how it appeared in the fictional world; the authors of such works do not attempt a scientific explanation nor do they try convincingly to integrate the fantastic element into the structure of the fictional world. They are not seeking a semblance of probability (Adolf Hitler simply appears in the middle of Berlin). The aims of these works can be substantially different from those typical of the pure fantastic. Often they are focused on an intimate story, the depiction of ambiance, and the expression of deeper meaning etc. From the extratextual point of view, these works are mostly created outside of the fandom structure and also often without particular knowledge of the fantastic canon.

In *The Hills of Faraway: A Guide to Fantasy*, Diane Waggoner wrote "a fantasy that fails to establish a credibly numinous universe fails not only in a formal sense, but fails entirely, regardless of the quality of the writing or the artistic goals of the author" (WAGGONER 1978: 10). This assertion is entirely true when applied to the pure fantastic (and not exclusively fantasy literature). In the fantastic as a means of expression, the "credibly numinous universe" might not be so essential. The goal of this broad category of the fantastic often lies somewhere else.

Brian Attebery, in his most recent book *Stories about Stories* (2014), identifies perhaps the greatest benefit of fuzzy set theory: It allows the involvement of not only resemblances, but also degrees of membership[7]. "Instead of asking whether or not is a story science fiction (SF), one can say it is mostly SF, or marginally SF, or like SF in some respects" (ATTEBERY 2014: 33). And this is exactly what fuzzy sets are about.

Into the centre of the fuzzy set I call the fantastic as a means of expression we can include both *The Book Thief* and *Look Who's Back*, although the role of the fantastic element in these works is not identical; while *The Book Thief* would, to a considerable extent, preserve its meaning even without the fantastic element (Death as the narrator), *Look Who's Back* would, if there was a different narrator, lose most of its impact.

The two proposed fuzzy sets within fantastic literature overlap each other; inside this overlap there are works using the fantastic element as a platform, but not with complete success. In these works the rules or demands of fantastic narratives are sometimes underestimated, as, for example, in C. J. Sansom's *Dominion*, in which the proposed alternate history lacks credibility. As a result, the fantastic element is not a natural and vivid part of the fictional world.

To conclude: While in the centre of the **pure fantastic** fuzzy set we can find works which can be successfully read as both fantastic literature and non-genre literature, in the centre of the **fantastic as a means of expression** fuzzy set there are works that do not aim to be read as fantastic literature and yet work with the fantastic element and form an important part of fantastic literature as a whole. On the overlapping peripheries of these fuzzy sets are works that aspire to be read as both fantastic literature and non-genre literature, but in which the fantastic element is not fully contextualised and in which all the consequences are not entirely thought through. Therefore such a works can be read as non-genre literature but at least partially fail as fantastic narratives.

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