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Diversity and Multiplicity of Fantasy Genre in Modern Literary Criticism

Abstract. *Fantasy as a genre has a long and complex history of formation. The history of fantasy is as old as humanity itself. Its legitimate predecessors are a fairy tale, a novel and a fable. Fantasy aims to build up not only the realm of dreams, but also seeks to establish itself as a significant and indispensable system. The literary fantasy genre usually starts with obvious or concealed subtext about the existence of several realities and moves in the direction of awakening heroes' previously unknown parts of themselves. The fantastical genre, having greater freedom in creating an image of the world, has the opportunity to defend and prove "in practice" the importance of eternal humanistic values. Many scientists disagree not only in defining fantasy as a type of literature, but also on its components. In order to determine similarities and differences between the existing theories of fantasy division, the main types of fantasy worked on by Kootun, Shidfar, F. Mendlesohn and others are described using descriptive, comparative and other literary methods. All the scientists studied have been doing their research for the past hundred years, which gives a wide field for analysis. During the review of existing theories, it was revealed that the main elements of fantasy move from one classification to another, changing only the names.*

Keywords: *literary studies, fantasy, classification, fantastic, heroic fantasy, horror, portal fantasy.*

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Introduction. Such a popular nowadays variety of fantastic genres was formulated in the previous century and firmly occupies its place in modern literature. Being contemporary fantastic literature, fantasy often has its basic epics and myth of different nations of the world. The reality of fantasy is originally considered by the readers as an imaginative fantastic world and the composition loses its utilitarian potential, yielding the place for the aesthetic experience. The narration in fantasy structurally is similar to movement: in the center of the narration is the journey to the aim and obligatory homecoming. Such a cyclical journey is a metaphor of searching for oneself, for the person's identity. As one of the fantasy guides puts it – "to be at home" spiritually and mentally with oneself is the main aim of our earthly existence. Ptchelkina T.R., Matershova A.I. in their article *The Formation of Fantasy Genre in Kazakhstan* write "The purpose of fantastic literature is to establish a harmony within a person. This harmony is one of the main reasons why fantastic literature and especially fantasy is so popular among readers" [1, p. 63-67]. The main goal of the study is to research classification theories of Kazakhstani and foreign fantasy researchers. The tasks of the study are to describe the theories of fantasy divisions, analyze and compare them with each other.

Research methods. Fiction literature has been the focus of attention of literary scholars since the late XIX century. A large number of scientific papers and monographs were written, among them Kazakhstan authors Ptchelkina T.R., Matershova A.I.; Mamurbayeva B.Z.; Zhumsakbayev

A.T.; Russian and Western literary critics and researchers like E. Kovtun, R. Shidfar, F. Mendlesohn, S.N. Manlow and many others. In the article modern and classical research papers are used to scope a wider range of opinions and get a better understanding of when and how the fantasy genre emerged and how it developed throughout the time. The fantasy genre saw significant change in the 1970s and 1980s. Research materials from this era offer insightful perspectives on the growth, development, and maturation of fantasy literature. These writings offer scholarly analyses, interpretations, and discussions of various works of fantasy. They create a deeper grasp and appreciation of the literary merits of the genre and lay the groundwork for further investigation.

The main methods of study are descriptive, comparative, cooperative, etc.

Discussion and outcome. Fantastic (from Greek – the art of imagining) is a specific method of literary display of life, that uses literary form-image (subject, situation, world), in which the elements of reality are combined in a way that is unusual for it – incredibly, “miraculously”, supernaturally [2, p. 8].

Genres could be factiously divided into two groups: genres of content and genres of form. Genres of content consist of thrillers, romance, detective stories, etc. The second group has epos, poems, drama. We can place the fantasy genre both to the genre of content and to the subgenre, depending on the used classification. Genres of the content may also include the genre of form that is why if we consider fantasy one of those, it could be divided into short fantasy stories, fantasy novellas, fantasy poems, etc. As Melnova K.V. mentions in her article “as a genre fantasy tries to strengthen unconscious world of dreams, establish not only in human’s psyche but also as a valuable, vital entity” [3, p. 20-21]. Literary fantasy genre usually starts with obvious or concealed subtext about the existence of several realities and moves in the direction of awakening hero’s previously unknown parts of themselves.

Fantasy as a genre had a lot of critique starting from it being too superficial and even dangerous for people. Despite all of that the theme of fantasy is still in the center of attention in academic circles. The scientists studying fantasy genre try to prove its seriousness and originality. Mostly all those scientists agree that fantasy is one of the oldest types of literature. Despite numerous studies, scientists cannot give an exact definition of the fantasy genre. Rosemary Jackson at the beginning of her work “*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*” writes that it turned out to be quite difficult to find the right definition of the term “fantasy” [4, p. 7]. Similar thoughts were expressed by J. Clute and J. Grant, who described the term fantasy as rather superficial, including all the literature of one country or one period, which for certain reasons were considered unreal by people [5, p. 17].

For the first time, the term *fantastique* was used by French author Charles Nodier in 1830 and ever since then the phenomenon was under scrutiny. An adequate assumption about the existence of different definitions and why scientists cannot come to an understanding about the genre was expressed by Charlotte Burcher. “Forms and genres in literature are changing and the boundaries between them are blurring” [6, pp. 226-231]. In other words, adaptations and changes of literature to new borders and forms make it hard for the scientists, who work on those topics, to find the right definitions.

Results. M. White considers one of the ancestors of the fantasy genre the 18th Baron Dunsany Edward John Morton Drax Plunkett [7, p. 15]. He became the first author who created an imaginary world that was endowed with all necessary attributes of the real world. The imaginary world had its geography, history, and mythology. That world was a part of the cycle of stories called *Gods of Pegana*. Their basis was Irish myths. However, later those stories were considered to be primitive and too superficial.

Each nation has its own myths and folklore, which convey the basic lessons of survival and part of history. Fantasy as an independent genre is a recent invention. For a long time it was considered a secondary part of science fiction literature. R. Jackson traces the history of fantasy to oral tradition: “As an eternal literary style, fantasy can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art”. She also lists the features of fantasy in romantic literature, such

as Gothic fairy tales and novels; fantastic realism (for example, Bronte novels) and Victorian fantasies in the works of Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald or Charles Kingsley.

Fantastic literature can be found in various ancient stories and fairy tales. Stories in which gods and heroes are present at one time could be considered fantastic stories, but now we refer them to the genre of legends and myths. For example, Homer's *Odyssey* or *The Epic of Gilgamesh* can be considered the foundations of modern fantasy literature. One of the earliest fantasy stories is the epic poem "Beowulf". After being translated from Icelandic into English, it influenced many science fiction writers. These include J.R.R. Tolkien, Alan Garner and Neil Gaiman.

In the Middle Ages, fantastic stories could be found in more romantic works, such as "The Tale of King Arthur". This kind of chivalric literature often had a pronounced political subtext. F. Mendleson and E. James note that "the cycle about Arthur was periodically revived to support the English monarchy," which also explains the revival of such stories in the middle of XIX century, since it "gave moral authority to the aristocracy." [8, p. 1-6]

N.G. Komlev gave the following definition of fantasy (from English "phantasy") which is considered as a literary genre that appeared in the first half of XX century in English prose [9, p. 300]. It holds a transitional place between science fiction and fairy tale. Fantasy traces its ancestry from national epics of European countries, i.e., Kalevala or Beowulf or Fairy Tales. Fantasy is full of poetic bizarre images; it represents supernatural and unrealistic events and characters. The stories with gods and heroes in previous centuries were considered fantastic. A.T. Zhumsakbayev agrees with it and adds that fantasy is also a part postmodern culture where imagined literary world consists of different plot-image constructions that came from myth, religion, chivalry romance; that are completely different in origin but work seamlessly together [10, p. 128]. Though he critiques the creation of the single classification of fantasy genre calling it despairing because all that appears from it are registries based on tastes and likes of researchers.

Modern fantasy originated in XIX century, after a period of chivalrous European novels and fairy tales, the fantastic elements of which were still considered somewhat plausible. The Scottish writer George MacDonald, whose novel *Fantasies* (1858) tells about a young man drawn into a dream world where a series of adventures awaits him, is credited with writing the first explicitly fictional fantasy for adults.

Ursula Le Guin in one of her books writes that "people consider books that have dragons or hippogriffs fantasy if the action happens in Celtic places or Middle-Ages. Such assumption is false" [11, p. 25-30]. Nevertheless, there are certain moments, that help define the creation as the fantasy of any other genre. F. Mendlesohn and E. James refer to such key points as "magical transformations, strange monsters, mages, dragons and supernatural creatures of the world" [8, p.15-17]. If we compare the statements from Ursula Le Guin, F. Mendlesohn and E. James, we can notice that there are many more elements that we can consider as part of fantasy literature than in any other genre. But similar elements can be also found in myths and dream stories. Thus, those elements are more of a hint. A.T. Zhumsakbayev adds to this list a quest that is one of the core elements of fantasy literature that is also close to magical fairy tale. He writes that quest becomes second reality only when it is ruled by order. Such story can be unusual for the reader but should not contradict readers' understanding of the history or moral background [12, p. 47].

Susan Mandala differentiates two types of stories – plot based and character based. Usually fantasy stories are plot based. In them, the plot does not reveal the motives and characters of the heroes, but on the contrary, the heroes are the central elements in the disclosure of stories. Due to the fact that the narrative follows the heroes of the story, the reader often knows more than the heroes of the work. When the narrator is omniscient, they can influence how much the reader knows. Often the narrator is a third person and cannot give more information than just a description of what is happening to the characters of the book. This means that the protagonist knows as much as the readers and together they reveal all the details of the journey [13, p.36-37].

There are several ways to organize fantasy. One of the simplest approaches was the division of fantasy into high and low. "In the high fantasy narration, actions happen in a secondary world,

where everything is completely normal, and magic is not considered as something strange”, B.J. Mamyrbayeva writes [14, p. 259]. Examples of such books are Robin Hobb's *The Farseer trilogy* and Brandon Sanderson *The Way of Kings*. Low fantasy books are the ones where everything that happens to the characters and the world is in the original one. Magic and creatures that appear in the original world are unusual or unnatural. For example, in Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* or Neil Geyman's *American Gods*. Even though this classification is the shortest, it split a lot of critics and scholars into two camps. Nevertheless, there are a lot of books that do not refer to the first or the second type of fantasy. For example, in *Yarilo's manuscript* by M.Kozinaki and S. Avduykhina two of the main characters come into the secondary type of the world or a city that is very close to the main world to learn about magic and go through the initiation. The same can be said about J.R. Rawling's *Harry Potter* or any other book that uses similar types of worlds. The book *Resurrecting Legends* by Kazakhstani writer Timur Yermashev is another of such examples, where two friends are thrown into the past of nomadic Kazakh community where they had to fight not only Dzungar but also dark magical forces. That is why scholars got other classifications of fantasy and fantastic literature and covered more ground. For example, Elena Kovtun, in turn, divides fantasy into four types: mystical-philosophical fantasy, metaphorical fantasy, “black” fantasy and heroic fantasy as can be seen in Figure 1 [15, p. 54-78].

Fantasy division made by Elena Kovtun is unique due to it being based on her own observations and classification. E. Kovtun pays special attention to metaphysical, philosophical and social aspects in fantasy dividing it into types that allow the analysis of various themes, atmosphere and aims of the works. Her typology focuses on deep themes and metaphorical usage of fantastical elements in the study of real problems and social issues.

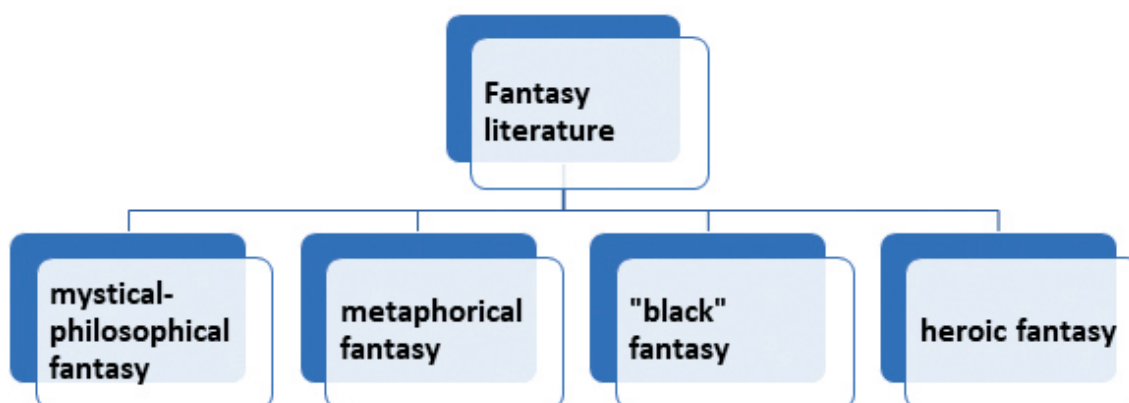


Figure 1. E. Kovtun's classification of the fantasy genre

1. *Mystical-philosophical fantasy*. A kind of fantasy where a fantastic assumption determines the essence and meaning of the story. The fate of the hero and their life choice completely depend on the fantastic reality created in the work. In the works of this variety, the mystical-philosophical aspect is the main meaning of the being and the only goal worthy of attention and service.

2. *Metaphorical fantasy*. A kind of fantasy where the fantastic assumption is a kind of ideal image of the miraculous. In this variety of fantasy, the inner world of a person, their mental and spiritual qualities are at the forefront. The heroes of the works are people with a complex inner world, and the plot is built around their experiences and rethinking of the world around them.

3. *Black fantasy* (here Kovtun means horror literature). A kind of fantasy, where otherworldly forces invade the seemingly unshakable everyday reality. These forces are incomprehensible to people and embody the most terrible properties.

4. *Heroic fantasy*. A kind of fantasy, where a fantastic assumption turns into a decoration, a design of the Spatio-temporal world. The basis of the works is the adventurous journey of the protagonist. Worldview issues for this kind of fantasy fade into the background. [15, p. 101].

Another classification of fantasy was created by R. Shidfar, a Russian translator, who singled out four directions in fantasy:

- 1) heroic fantasy based on Celtic folklore.
- 2) folk-tale fantasy, which is characterized by the fact that the action takes place in the real world, where characters from myths also live.
- 3) "Might and Magic": this direction of fantasy has a heroic-epic character, in the center is the adventure of the protagonist. However, the difference between this direction and the heroic one is not indicated by the author of the classification.
- 4) "myth-forming" fantasy when the author creates their own mythology and world [16, p. 90].

Tzvetan Todorov distinguished the following fantastical genres: "extraordinary in its purest form", "extraordinary fantastical", "fantastical miraculous", and "miraculous in the purest form" as shown in Figure 2 [17, p.24-58].

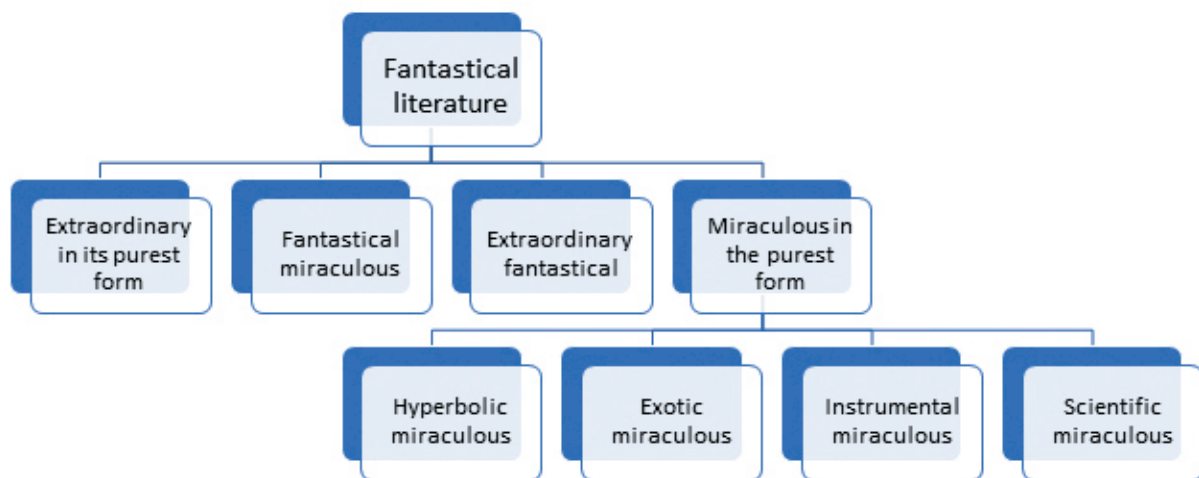


Table 2. T. Todorov's classification of Fantastical literature

The extraordinary in the purest form usually frightens and amuses but does not give any doubts. Those are horror stories, that are possible and natural in their surrounding.

The second one gives doubt and indecision to the happenings in the story. It feels as if something supernatural has intruded, but the ending is quite rational and simple.

Fantastical miraculous is the opposite of the previous one. The ending is irrational and unreal.

Miraculous in the purest form does not give any hesitancy in the reality of the story. It also can be divided into four parts: hyperbolic miraculous, exotic miraculous, instrumental miraculous, and scientific miraculous (science fiction).

F. Mendlesohn identified four types of fantasy based on the setting in which the stories take place. These include haunting fantasy, immersive fantasy, portal fantasy, and liminal fantasy. Farah Mendlesohn's subcategories in "Rhetorics of Fantasy" are distinctive in that they offer individual features through which it is possible to examine and comprehend numerous facets of fantasy literature.

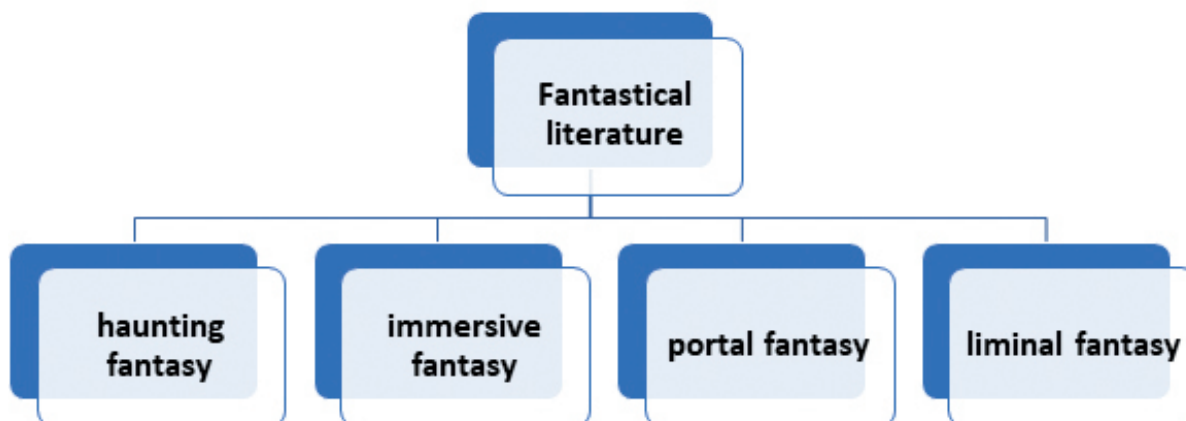


Figure 3. Mendlesohn's classification of the fantasy genre

In the first type of fantasy, the supernatural or fantastic makes its way into the ordinary or fantastic world. Such an invasion is the beginning of a conflict, change or threat that moves the story forward. Neither the hero nor the reader has ever faced such a threat before, and as the story progresses, everyone comes to terms with it.

In immersive fantasy, the world is familiar to the hero, they live and act in it. Immersive stories are characterized by the deterioration of the state of life in the world, its extinction. Finding and returning the world to its former possibilities is the basis of such literature. The reader needs to deal with the rules of life and culture in such a story.

Portal fantasy, also known as search fantasy, is characterized by the fact that the main character must leave their homes, familiar world for various reasons and set off on a journey through new lands. Typical is the presence of a "guide" who helps the protagonist navigate and who explains the history of the country and the world.

Liminal fantasy is the hardest to describe. Fantastic elements are at the very edge, and it is difficult for both readers and characters of the story to determine whether they exist. In such stories, the action takes place in a familiar world where fantasy elements already exist. The hero reacts to them not as in immersive stories, but unusually or extraordinarily. An example of this type of story is F. Kafka's novel "Metamorphosis". In it, the hero feels the same discomfort from becoming a bug as the reader themselves [18, p. 132-156].

Various narrative strategies, themes, and places used within the fantasy genre are highlighted by these subcategories, which offer various objectives that allow exploring and interpreting fantasy literature. They draw attention to the distinctive ways that authors develop their stories, involve readers, and produce engaging and inventive reading experiences.

Conclusion. All the theories on types of fantasy are valid and important to understand fantasy as a genre and what divisions are there. The author of each classification highlights some universal principles underlying all works of this genre. But at the same time, some of them were done a long time ago and the literature has changed a lot and those types don't suit the narrations anymore. T. Todorov's organization, for example, mostly covers the low type of fantasy. As he considers this type of fantastical genre as the only real ones, R. Shidfar's categories are more suitable, but again they do not cover every aspect of fantasy and fantastic literature.

In literary studies, fantasy is understood as "a creative fiction that depends on a strange place of action (another world or time) and heroes (supernatural beings)". We consider the classifications by F. Mendlesohn and E. Kovtun the better ones because they embrace the biggest parts of fantastic literature that is present nowadays. The uniqueness of E. Kovtun's typology lies in the fact that it offers an alternative view on the diversity and multiplicity within the genre of fantasy. It also emphasizes the importance of thematic and philosophical study of the genre. It provides another perspective for the analysis and discussion of fantasy works and contributes to a

deeper understanding of their variety. But they still don't concern different types of that literature. Fantasy is very diverse and includes many subgenres, themes and styles that may not fit into the proposed types. A thorough framework for comprehending and evaluating the fantasy genre can be created by combining Farah Mendlesohn's subgenres with Elena Kovtun's classification of the fantasy genre. They partially cover and complement each other. For instance: Liminal Fantasy (F. Mendlesohn) and Mystical-Philosophical Fantasy (E. Kovtun) The two studies would investigate mystical and philosophical fantasy stories while emphasizing transitional or in-between places. These writings frequently questioned established beliefs about reality and prompted readers to consider more profound philosophical issues. E. Kovtun's concept of Metaphorical Fantasy and F. Mendlesohn's concept of Haunting Fantasy refer to the use of symbolism, allegory, and metaphor in fantasy stories to analyze contemporary themes or make social commentary. These issues would be metaphorically represented by the introduction of fantasy elements into the real world. E. Kovtun's "Dark" Fantasy and F. Mendlesohn's Immersive Fantasy: By incorporating complex secondary worlds and darker, gritty themes, this combination would include fantasy stories that tackle these topics. These works may have ethically complicated characters and difficult ethical conundrums in realistic, immersive situations. The fusion of Portal Fantasy, as described by F. Mendlesohn, and Heroic Fantasy, as outlined by E. Kovtun, involves the integration of epic quests and heroic journeys undertaken by larger-than-life protagonists within secondary worlds accessed through portals or gateways. These stories would explore themes of heroism, fate, and the conflict between good and evil while embodying conventional hero's journey patterns.

Combining these categories allows us to develop a multifaceted analysis of fantasy literature that considers both thematic and narrative facets of the genre. It offers a wider framework for comprehending the various range of storylines available within the genre and enables a deeper investigation of the subtleties and complexity present in fantasy works.

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Қазіргі әдебиеттанудағы фэнтези жанрының ауқымы мен жан-жақтылығы

Андатпа. Фэнтезидің жанр ретінде ұзақ және күрделі тарихы бар. Фэнтезидің тарихы адамзаттың өзі сияқты көне. Оның заңды алғышарттары – ертегі, роман және мысал. Фэнтези жанры арманның бейсаналық әлемін нығайтуға, адам психикасында ғана емес, сонымен бірге құнды, өміршең тұлға ретінде орнығуға тырысуы. Әдеби фэнтези жанры әдетте көп шындықтың бар екендігі туралы ашық немесе жасырын субтексттерден басталып, кейіпкерлердің өздері бұрын белгісіз болған бөліктерінің оянуына қарай жылжиды. Дүниенің бейнесін жасауда үлкен еркіндікке ие фантастикалық жанр мәңгілік гуманистік құндылықтардың маңыздылығын «тәжірибеде» қорғауға және дәлелдеуге мүмкіндік алады. Көптеген ғалымдар қиялды әдебиеттің бір түрі ретінде анықтауда ғана емес, оның құрамдас бөліктерінде де ерекшеленеді. Қиялды бөлудің қалыптасқан теорияларының ұқсастықтары мен айырмашылықтарын анықтау үшін сипаттамалық, салыстырмалы және басқа әдеби әдістерді қолдана отырып, Ковтун, Шидфар, Мендельсон және т.б. зерттеген қиялдың негізгі түрлері сипатталған. Зерттелген ғалымдардың барлығы соңғы жүз жылдағы зерттеулерін жинақтады, бұл талдауға кең өріс береді. Қолданыстағы теорияларды талдау барысында қиялдың негізгі элементтері бір классификациядан екінші классификацияға ауысып, тек атауларды өзгертетіні анықталды.

Түйін сөздер: әдебиеттану, классификация, фантастикалық, қаһармандық фэнтези, хоррор, порталдық фэнтези.

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Диапазон и многогранность жанра фэнтези в современном литературоведении

Аннотация. Фэнтези как жанр имеет долгую и сложную историю становления. История фэнтези настолько же стара, как и само человечество. Его законными предшественниками являются сказка, роман и басня. Как жанр фэнтези пытается укрепить бессознательный мир сновидений, утвердиться не только в психике человека, но и как ценная, жизненно важная сущность. Жанр литературного фэнтези обычно начинается с явного или скрытого подтекста о существовании нескольких реальностей и движется в направлении пробуждения ранее неизвестных частей самих героев. Фантастический жанр, обладая большей свободой в создании образа мира, имеет возможность отстаивать и доказывать «на практике» важность вечных гуманистических ценностей. Многие ученые расходятся не только в определении фэнтези как вида литературы, но и его составляющих. Для того, чтобы определить схожести и различия между существующими теориями деления фэнтези, с помощью описательного, сопоставительного и других литературоведческих методов описаны основные виды фэнтези, изученные Ковтун, Шидфаром, Мендельсон и другими авторами. Все исследуемые ученые составляли свои исследования в течение последних ста лет, что дает широкое поле для анализа. В ходе анализа существующих теорий было выявлено, что основные элементы фэнтези переходят из одной классификации в другую, меняя только названия.

Ключевые слова: литературоведение, классификация, фантастическое, героическое фэнтези, хоррор, порталное фэнтези.

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