Marcela Vrbatová, *The Relationship of Religion and Fantasy: The Influence of Christianity on the Fictional Religion in the Fantasy Genre*

BA Thesis
Opponent’s Review

The thesis attempts to map elements of Christianity in selected works of fantasy, from Tolkien’s 1950s trilogy to the sagas published in the early 21st century, such as the Harry Potter series. The focus is, however, primarily on three authors and their major writings, J. R. R. Tolkien, George R. R. Martin and Stephen R. Donaldson.

The student’s method consists in detailed reading of the motifs which could have been inspired by existing religious systems, as the fictitious “otherworld” of fantasy reflects the actual world of the reader and in this way ensures that a certain degree of familiarity is retained (according to C. Manlove, one of her critical sources). Her interpretation is moreover supported by what can be derived from the family background of the studied authors and also from what these authors themselves reveal, in interviews and elsewhere, about their attitudes to Christianity and its use in their fiction. This background study precludes speculation, which is important (some motifs may relate to other religions, e.g. Hinduism, but the question is whether such a reading would be justifiable). The analysis of the texts shows that British fantasy novels of the second half of the 20th century are nourished by Christian mythology (no exception is found, though the sample is very narrow indeed), both on the level of content (characters modelled after central biblical figures, the idea of good and evil, some institutional characteristics, etc.) and form (especially the language of worship or address), but that the purpose for utilizing Christianity differs. This is what could have been presumed; the thesis, however, is valuable for showing how specifically these popular writers employ Christian elements and in what way their motifs may echo biblical passages and other sources. In this respect, I believe, the thesis achieved its assigned task successfully.

Where it, unfortunately, fails to meet the standards perfectly is its language. The errors are not substantial but quite frequent, be they uncorrected typos or e.g. missing articles where their use is indisputable (*the Middle Ages, the mid-1950s, the Bible,* and even *The Lord of the Rings* in 2.1.1), a wrong congruence or dropped words ("the degree his upbringing"). This is English, still a foreign language for the student, but an appalling fact is that she makes basic mistakes in her Czech abstract in the use of capital letters. Does it mean that our students are not able to realize that the two language systems differ in their orthography too or that they are not able to remember the basic differences? I may sound fastidious but I believe that the same amount of care should be invested in the language of a thesis as it is to its contents.

Conclusion: I recommend M. Vrbatová’s thesis for defence with a preliminary suggestion of a grade to be either excellent or very good (*výborně až velmi dobře*).

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran

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