



DEPARTMENT OF STUDIES IN DRAMA
AND PRE-1800 ENGLISH LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY OF LODZ, POLAND

**1st Circular
&
Call for Papers**

for the 3rd Łódź Fantastic Literature Conference (2016)

Religious Topics in Fantastic Literature

19-21 September 2016

The very nature of fantastic literature, its readiness to explore alternative worlds and dimensions of reality, makes it into a fertile ground for all kinds of religious, quasi-religious, and even anti-religious conceptions. It seems that religion in fantastic literature appears in at least three distinct ways. First of all, we have to do with what might be called religious apologia, where a specific religion is defended and propagated. This is how C.S.Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been often described and criticized because few people nowadays seek religious propaganda in fantasy books. The question to what extent this characterization of the Narnia tales is adequate is naturally an already well established bone of contention among the readers and critics of this kind of literature. On the opposite end of the scale, one would be tempted to place Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* inasmuch as it can legitimately be regarded as anti-religious, and specifically anti-Christian, though again there are some who do not share this perception of Pullman's work. In between those extremes, we would have probably J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter series which some would label as Satanistic, others as neo-pagan, and still others as fully compatible with Christian values, or even crypto-Christian.

But there seems to be also another way of interaction between religion and fantastic literature. Particularly relevant here seems to be Max Scheler's conception of "spiritual values" evoked in Christopher Garbowski's book *Spiritual Values in Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings*: "Scheler understands spiritual values as something of a different order than religious values – in a sense clearing the way for them – encompassing among other things our need for beauty, justice, and truth." This perception seems to suggest that specific works of fantastic literature, and, naturally, literature in general, may contain what might be called religious climate, without necessarily subscribing to any, institutional or non-institutional, religion. They could then be seen as propagating a conception of the natural law, as understood, for example, by the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius, according to whom, the natural law, even though it was established by God, would have been the same even if God had not existed, or was totally indifferent to human matters. It is perhaps to this category that the great classic of fantastic literature, J.R.R.Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and Peter Jackson's film based on it, belong.

Apart from the above, rather serious, ways of relating to religion, one may easily come across, in fantastic literature, with a jumble of religious, or para-religious, ideas and motifs which seem to be chosen, or adapted, for reasons that seem very distant from any didacticism. If we consider the way Terry Pratchett, in his *Discworld* fantasy novels, used the Old Indian, and essentially religious, conception of “the world supported on the backs of four elephants, themselves resting on the back of a turtle,” we might conclude that the motif in question is used simply for the fun of it, without any ulterior motive. Such a conclusion might, however, be premature.

As can be seen in the above preliminary sketch, the topic of religion in fantasy calls for careful reflection carried out by inquisitive minds. We would like to encourage theoretical contributions that probe the issues mentioned above, and, naturally, also related issues the existence of which we, the organizers of the conference, have so far little inkling of.

Alongside papers dealing with fantastic literature proper, we also invite proposals dealing with the intersection of the religious and the fantastic in medieval and early modern English literature, especially in works that may have served as inspiration for fantastic literature as we know it today. We are particularly interested in such proposals that emphasize the complex nature of the medieval and early modern religiousness with its Christian (both orthodox and heterodox) and non-Christian strains.

Deadline for submissions (abstracts of 300-400 words): 27 March 2016

Conference fee:

300 PLN (participants from Poland)

100 EURO (participants from other EU countries)

200 PLN (doctoral students and participants from non-EU countries)

The fee includes conference materials, snack refreshments and a sightseeing tour of Lodz. It does not include accommodation or meals. The language of the conference is English. The conference will be held in Lodz, Poland. Additional information about accommodation and plenary speakers will be included in subsequent circulars.

For submissions and enquiries please contact the organisers at:

lodz.fantastic.lit@gmail.com

For updated conference information please see:

www.filolog.uni.lodz.pl/engdrama/fantastic

Organising Committee:

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