

## UKRAINIAN FANTASY: BETWEEN THE SOVIET AND POSTMODERN TRADITIONS

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The fantasy genre is relevant due to its social and initiatory function, aiding in restoring existential meanings. The paper addresses the persistent misinterpretation of fantasy in Ukraine, rooted in Soviet ideological conflicts and subsequent postmodern dominance, which resulted in limited national scholarship.

The purpose is to identify the worldview foundations of contemporary Ukrainian fantasy and demonstrate its structural opposition to the Soviet (totalitarian) and postmodern (playful) traditions, substantiating its potential for national identification. Key objectives were: 1) To analyze ideological influence on fantasy reception, focusing on escapism. 2) To define structural differences between postmodern and mythological fantasy. 3) To define the principal national archetypes (anti-imperial ideas and the value of freedom) of the Ukrainian worldview matrix.

The research employs a systemic approach and the worldview-ideological mode of analysis to expose deeper meanings. Comparative and historical-genetic methods trace ideological influence (Soviet, postmodern) and examine the conflict between conceptual fantasy (Tolkien) and playful postmodernism. Analysis distinguishes between superficial folkloric elements and genuine worldview foundations.

The study confirms that the identification of Ukrainian fantasy was complicated by ideological confrontation. The major finding is that contemporary Ukrainian fantasy is structurally opposed to these traditions, grounded instead in the natural national myth. The key national archetypes identified are: anti-imperial ideas, the value of the individual, and the unconditional value of life and freedom. The study concludes that ideological analysis is essential to reveal the genre's capacity to foster national self-awareness.

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## УКРАЇНСЬКЕ ФЕНТЕЗІ: МІЖ РАДЯНСЬКОЮ ТА ПОСТМОДЕРНОЮ ТРАДИЦІЯМИ

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**Ключові слова:** *фентезі, українське фентезі, постмодернізм, радянська ідеологія, національна ідентичність, архетип, ескапізм, антиімперський дискурс.*

Стаття присвячена методологічним і світоглядно-філософським проблемам дослідження жанру фентезі та інших творів фантастичної парадигми. Актуальність дослідження жанру фентезі зумовлена його високою популярністю серед молоді та здатністю слугувати важливим ресурсом для пошуку ідентичності в епохи глобальних трансформацій. Незважаючи на глибоку міфологічну основу та виховний потенціал, жанр фентезі в Україні досі стикається із системними звинуваченнями в ескапізмі та недостатньо досліджений на матеріалі творів вітчизняних авторів.

Мета статті – визначити світоглядні основи сучасного українського фентезі та довести його опозиційність до радянської (тоталітарної) і постмодерної (ігрової) традицій, обґрунтувавши національно-ідентифікаційний потенціал жанру.

Для досягнення мети виконано аналіз впливу радянської ідеології та постмодерну на сприйняття фентезі, визначено структурні відмінності між постмодерним та міфологічним («концептуальним») фентезі, а також виокремлено ключові національні архетипи.

Методи дослідження. У роботі застосовано системний підхід та методологію світоглядно-ідеологічного аналізу для виявлення глибинних смислів та культурних кодів, втілених у текстах. Застосовано компаративний метод для зіставлення українського та російського/проросійського фантастичних наративів. Використано історико-генетичний метод для простежування ідеологічного впливу радянського літературознавства (зокрема, звинувачень в ескапізмі та штучного введення терміна «казкова фантастика») та структурно-функціональний аналіз для вивчення конфлікту між концептуальним фентезі (Дж.Р.Р. Толкін) та ігровим постмодернізмом.

Виявлено, що в радянському літературознавстві фентезі тлумачилося як «ідеологічно вороже» явище, що сприяло його знеціненню. Згодом, домінування постмодерну призвело до нівелювання змісту жанру, замінивши його ігровим (розважальним) характером та системою шаблонів. Це призвело до втрати зв'язку з колективним несвідомим, національним та актуалізованими архетипами, що спровокувало внутрішній конфлікт жанру.

Українське фентезі, навпаки, ґрунтується на природному міфі і є світоглядно опозиційним до цих традицій. Його світоглядна матриця актуалізує потужні антиімперські ідеї та цінність свободи і життя, що реалізується на рівні психологічного розвитку персонажів та їхніх вчинків.

Для розкриття ініціального потенціалу українського фентезі необхідно подолати шаблонізований підхід, що базується лише на фольклорному антуражі, на користь світоглядно-ідеологічного аналізу.

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**Introduction.** The relevance of studying the fantasy genre in contemporary literary discourse is undeniable. Its widespread popularity among adolescent and young adult audiences can largely be

attributed to the characters' ability to serve as guides to fictional worlds. By associating with the protagonist (or, less often, the antagonist), the reader “lives through” the described events, which contributes to

gaining important life experience. As fantasy is oriented towards a particular readership, it exhibits distinct genre characteristics that influence both narrative architecture and character typology.

Owing to their profound mythological foundations, fantastic genres possess considerable potential to influence readers. According to N. Krynytska, fantastic genres maintain a direct connection to philosophical thought. The Ukrainian scholar observes: “Certain scholars highlight a profound correlation between the poetics of the fantastic and the philosophical categories of ontology and epistemology. By its very nature, fantastic genres, more or less successfully, intrude upon the reader’s established worldview, either expanding or transforming it” (Криницька, 2017: 11). From this perspective, it becomes evident that the initiatory function of works within the fantastic paradigm remains relevant not only during adolescence, the period of personality formation, but also at later stages of life. At those stages, a mature individual may experience the need to replenish vital energy or to restore lost existential meanings – a process which, in the modern world, often unfolds under the influence of manipulative technologies.

The widespread appeal of fantastic literature – particularly the fantasy genre – among young audiences can be explained by a number of worldview-related factors. Among them is *the activist aspect*, which, as V. Kyzylova asserts, arises because “it is youth that is most filled with the desire to rebuild something in this world, to change it for the better” (Кизилова, 2015: 121). Equally important is *the post-totalitarian aspect*, since, as Yu. Zhuk observes, “the contemporary interest in fantastic genres is conditioned by the need for new values, the previously unthinkable opportunity to formulate these values in any other form, and a relative freedom from the dictates of religion or ideology” (Жук, 2018: 87). *The anti-totalitarian aspect* is also relevant, as fantasy “offers help in finding one’s own position in society” (Гнідець, 2010: 74). In addition, there is *the value-based aspect*, in which the fantastic genres is “most often... addressed when there is a loss of clear social and artistic guidelines or dissatisfaction with the existing order (social or worldview)” (Савицька, 2010). Finally, *the realistic aspect* underscores that “fantasy has always embodied certain ideals and reflected the problems of society” (Забіяка, 2018: 54).

Thus, fantastic genres become a crucial medium for the exploration of individual and collective identity. In eras of global transformation and instability, national identification, in particular, acquires special significance – and works within the fantastic paradigm may provide it. This effect arises from a symbolic return to mythological (or “crisis”) time, from

which the individual emerges renewed and energized through the experience of a primordial worldview myth – a myth most vividly embodied in the works of the fantastic paradigm, especially within the fantasy genre, characterized by highly developed psychological and structural frameworks.

The purpose of this article is to identify the worldview foundations of contemporary Ukrainian fantasy and to demonstrate its opposition to both Soviet (totalitarian) and postmodern (playful or game-based) traditions, while substantiating the genre’s potential as a vehicle for national identification.

To achieve this aim, the study sets out to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To analyze the influence of Soviet ideology and postmodernism on the critical reception of fantasy in Ukraine, with particular attention to the problem of escapism.

2. To identify the structural differences between postmodern and mythological (“conceptual”) types of fantasy and to describe the internal tensions between them.

3. To define the principal national archetypes of Ukrainian fantasy – most notably anti-imperial ideas and the value of freedom – as the foundation of its worldview matrix.

4. To substantiate the need to move beyond stereotyped or formalistic approaches to the fantasy genre in order to reveal its initiatory potential.

Scholars engaged in fundamental research on the fantasy genre generally agree that there is no universally accepted and cohesive definition of this literary phenomenon. Such a definition, ideally, should encompass all essential features of the genre, addressing them at both the formal and substantive (content-based) levels. In her dissertation, S. Khob points out the lack of terminological clarity and the absence of a structured classification system for fantastic literature in contemporary Ukrainian scholarship. She attributes this to the fact that, for a long time, the study of fantastic genres within Ukraine’s informational and cultural space was regarded as “irrelevant” (Хоб, 2017: 14).

The first scholarly attempts to explore works of the fantastic paradigm emerged in the late twentieth century. However, Ukrainian fantasy as a distinct literary phenomenon began to develop actively only after 2010. Consequently, these early studies relied predominantly on the material of foreign authors, a factor that considerably slowed the academic progress of research in this field.

It is important to recognize that the long-standing neglect of works belonging to the fantastic paradigm – and of the fantasy genre in particular – was rooted not in intrinsic literary limitations but in ideological conflicts and the struggle for influence over readers. This tendency characterizes both the Soviet

period and the subsequent era dominated by post-modern ideology.

Even today, scholarship in Ukraine remains limited in the area of fantasy studies, particularly in research that examines the literary works of Ukrainian authors and investigates the genre's structural and stylistic features. Most existing academic works focus primarily on the challenges of translating fantasy texts across various formats, while only occasionally addressing the creative output of individual Ukrainian authors within the broader context of their oeuvre.

At present, Ukrainian literary scholarship tends to focus primarily on widely recognized foreign authors, such as N. Gaiman, G.R.R. Martin, T. Pratchett, J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, and others. In contrast, comprehensive studies devoted to adolescent fantasy written by Ukrainian authors remain largely absent. This situation stands in stark opposition to the field of realistic prose for young readers, which has been examined in considerable academic depth.

The philosophical and epistemological foundations for literary studies of works within the fantastic paradigm have been established largely through the contributions of foreign writers who combined creative and scholarly pursuits. Among the most influential figures are J. Clute and J. Grant, N. Cornwell, S. Eloff, D. Hahn, C. Hume, R. Jackson, S. Lem, F. Mendlesohn, H. Milhorn, A. Sapkowski, E. Swinfen, C. Smith, J. Timmerman, J.R.R. Tolkien, R. Zelazny.

The theoretical foundation for studying fantastic literature in contemporary Ukrainian writing, as well as in related informational and cultural contexts, is currently being shaped by Ukrainian scholars. Among them, O. Zarytskyi has explored Czech fantastic literature of the second half of the twentieth century, while S. Oliinyk's research – though insightful – has shown a certain interpretative bias in understanding the nature of fantastic literature. Broader questions of genre theory have been examined by O. Bondareva, I. Chernova, N. Deviatko, N. Kopystianska, T. Kushnirova, T. Lytvynenko, O. Romanenko, N. Savytska, O. Shaposhnyk, O. Tykhomyrova, Yu. Zhuk, and others.

In recent years, several dissertations addressing this or closely related topics have been successfully defended. Among them are: O. Boiko, *Realization of the Category of Intertextuality in the Artistic Discourse of Fantasy* (Бойко, 2021); O. Filonenko, *The Renaissance-Baroque "Magic Code" in British Literature (Based on Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries)* (Філоненко, 2017); S. Khorob, *Genre Features of Ukrainian Fantastic Fiction of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries* (Хороб, 2017); A. Kryvopyshyna, *Mass*

*and Elite Literature: The Nature of Artistry in the Ukrainian Novel of the Early Twenty-First Century* (Кривопишина, 2018); O. Leonenko, *The Fantasy Genre in Ukrainian Prose of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries* (Леоненко, 2010); O. Stuzhuk, *Fantastic Fiction as a Metagenre (Based on Ukrainian Literature of the Nineteenth–Twentieth Centuries)* (Стужук, 2006); N. Sytnyk, *The Fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien: Archetypal Dimension of the Artistic Structure* (Ситник, 2009); O. Zhuravska, *The Dichotomy of the "Real" and "Irreal" Chronotope as a Categorical Genre Feature of the Ukrainian Chimerical Novel of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century* (Журавська, 2018).

At present, the most significant contribution to the conceptualization of adolescent fantasy among Ukrainian scholars has been made by V. Dudurych, V. Hura, T. Kachak, V. Kyzylova, M. Nikolaeva, L. Ovdiychuk, S. Shpylova, O. Styzhuk, H. Zabiya, and others.

Because Ukrainian fantasy began to develop only after 2010, the works of many authors have yet to receive systematic scholarly attention, and the Ukrainian fantasy paradigm itself has been examined primarily at the level of formal features. The evolution of fantastic genres, as well as the historical contexts that shaped their emergence, has largely remained beyond the focus of academic research.

**Material and methods.** The research material consists of works belonging to the fantastic paradigm, primarily contemporary Ukrainian fantasy texts, as well as scholarly studies devoted to the theory of fantastic literature. The conclusions are based on the author's long-term work with a corpus of more than 500 texts representing the development of fantasy within the Ukrainian cultural space. Due to the limits of the article, only selected representative examples are discussed in detail.

The research employs a systemic approach and a worldview-ideological mode of analysis in order to expose deeper semantic and cultural meanings. Comparative and historical-genetic methods are used to trace ideological influences (Soviet and postmodern) and to examine the conflict between conceptual fantasy (as formulated in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien) and playful postmodernism. The analysis also distinguishes between superficial folkloric elements and genuine worldview foundations in fantasy texts.

**Results and discussion.** One of the principal obstacles to studying the influential potential of fantasy – particularly adolescent fantasy – is the persistent accusation that the genre is inherently escapist. Escapism is frequently interpreted as a psychologically harmful tendency that impedes socialization. The difficulty of achieving a balanced understanding, objective assessment, and recognition of

fantasy's cultural value remains a shared challenge within the international academic community.

For instance, the British literary critic S. Egoﬀ categorically rejected interpretations of fantasy as a means of escaping reality. Instead, she emphasized the importance of moral frameworks and life-aﬃrming ideas that operate both within fictional fantasy worlds and in real life (Egoﬀ, 1988). Similarly, the French literary critic E. Swinfen highlighted the genre's capacity to pose and resolve moral and philosophical questions, as well as its ability to interpret reality in ways that lead to a deeper understanding of the human condition (Swinfen, 1984).

The Soviet literary scholarship regarded the fantasy genre with marked disapproval, frequently characterizing it as "ideologically hostile." This perspective resulted in a systemic pattern of opposition toward fantasy. A typical interpretation from that period describes it as "the imagination of a mystified consciousness, expressing confusion in the face of an incomprehensible reality and attempting to escape into a cognitively unproductive – though artistically gifted – play with fantastic images" (Нудельман, 1972: 895). At the same time, a number of Soviet literary scholars sought to conceptualize fantasy while remaining within the boundaries of the dominant ideological framework. This led to the artiﬁcial introduction of the term "fairy-tale fantastic fiction" (*kazkova fantastyka*). While this compromise made limited scholarly engagement with fantasy possible, it simultaneously imposed a reductive semantic frame, associating the genre with childishness and reinforcing its marginal status both in academic evaluation and cultural hierarchy.

The term "fairy-tale fantastic fiction" can be found in the work of V. Savchenko (Савченко, 1986: 267). The scholar makes an unusually bold claim for his time concerning the profound worldview connection between myth and what he calls "fairy-tale fantastic fiction": "...fairy-tale fantastic fiction is older than science ﬁction; its roots are lost in folk tales and legends – or, more precisely, in human memory" (Савченко, 1986: 267).

It is worth noting that even today – just as in Soviet times – this idea is often misunderstood or misinterpreted. The main reason lies in the persistent belief that fantasy is a younger genre than science ﬁction, supposedly emerging only in the second half of the twentieth century. This misconception could have been dispelled long ago; however, the underlying worldview principles of so-called mass literature are rarely explored and often dismissed as irrelevant due to longstanding prejudice against works of popular or genre ﬁction.

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the problem of the genre's misinterpretation remained unresolved within the post-totalitarian informational

and cultural space. This persisted despite the fact that both the reading public and the academic community had gained unrestricted access to various works belonging to the fantastic paradigm. Instead, the issue re-emerged in the form of a one-sided and predominantly negative understanding of the term "escapism," which, it was claimed, had to be "unswervingly fought against."

Nevertheless, Ukrainian scholars who study fantastic genres increasingly argue that the widespread accusations of escapism directed at the genre as a whole are unfounded. They maintain that escapism manifests itself only in certain segments of the genre's canon – or in works characterized by a limited degree of psychological complexity in the depiction of characters.

M. Nikolaeva clearly illustrates this shift in scholarly focus: "I also argue that the popularity of fantasy among adolescents is not accidental, and therefore fantasy certainly does not deserve the contempt it often meets. Reading fantasy is beneficial for young people because it stimulates their cognitive, emotional, ethical, and aesthetic development" (Ніколаєва, 2016: 144).

Admittedly, perspectives that conceptualize fantasy in a negative light because of its alleged escapism still prevail within the academic community. For instance, N. Savytska draws attention to the reader's opportunity to withdraw from the pressing problems of contemporary reality, a factor she identiﬁes as a primary source of the genre's popularity (Савицька, 2010).

The positive mythological potential of fantasy is rejected by V. Dudurych, who warns against the danger of "getting stuck" in myths and mythology, "as this leads to escapism" (Дудурич, 2018: 25–26). B. Shalaginov adopts an even more critical stance toward the fantasy phenomenon: his notion of fascination with fantasy as "voluntary self-isolation in the world of childhood" (Шалаґінов, 2011: 115) exempliﬁes the politicization and division between the "adult" and "childish" worlds, both characterized by instability. Considerable debate is observed even at the terminological level. At the same time, this very situation serves as an indicator of the phenomenon's intrinsic value – one that calls for comprehensive conceptualization.

Comparing works within the fantastic paradigm created under the influence of the Ukrainian and Russian informational and cultural spaces, O. Kolesnyk draws an important conclusion: "Ukrainian fantastic ﬁction, even when it does not appeal to traditional mythological images, unlike Russian fantastic ﬁction, is focused not so much on escapism, but rather on the creation of a universalistic value model of the world" (Колесник, 2013: 79).

In the Ukrainian context, this distinction has not

only theoretical but also practical relevance, since Ukrainian readers and authors develop within an informational space where Russian/pro-Russian fantastic narratives have long functioned as a dominant background. Therefore, outlining the main worldview tendencies of that background helps clarify what exactly Ukrainian fantasy resists at the level of values and mythological structures.

Further exploration of this topic and analysis of a broader corpus of texts suggest that a significant segment of contemporary Russian (or pro-Russian) fantastic fiction – both in print and online – are often grounded in either a postmodern (playful) or an imperial (totalitarian) worldview foundation. In such texts, the underlying mythological framework is technological rather than natural – the latter may be carrying a potential for national expression. Postmodern and imperial structural as well as ideological elements are often interwoven within these works. This interweaving intensifies their negative influence on readers. In contrast, the works of contemporary Ukrainian authors are based on various versions of the natural myth, regardless of the author's original language.

In other words, once the mythological nature of fantasy is treated as suspect, the genre becomes especially vulnerable to postmodern reinterpretation that replaces meaning with play. If escapism constitutes the first challenge encountered in the study of fantasy, the second major obstacle that impedes the comprehensive conceptualization of the genre involves understanding the complex relationship and conflicts between fantasy and postmodernism. The latter may currently foster a conscious opposition between conceptual, mythologically grounded fantasy and the playful postmodern worldview, a conflict shaped by the broader context of contemporary global and historical challenges.

The root of this problem lies in the fact that the mass popularity of fantasy coincided with the period of postmodernism's dominance as a worldview paradigm. In the second half of the twentieth century, postmodernism, as the prevailing intellectual framework, sought to interpret all phenomena through the prism of its own principles. Consequently, establishing a link between a literary genre – or even philosophical or socio-psychological discourses manifested in textual form – and postmodernism automatically determined the relevance of the subject and object of study.

For many scholars, even today, the contradictory nature of this correlation, or the conventionality of its relevance, seems to be of little importance, as this academic passage has long turned into a scholarly trend. The imprint of this “scientific fashion” – the almost “obligatory” reference to and veneration of postmodernism as an unquestionable

“foundation” – can be observed even in the works of leading Ukrainian literary researchers: postmodernism as the condition for the “natural” emergence of fantasy (Жук, 2018: 88); in the historical context (Качак, 2013: 34); and as the basis for the emergence of fantastic genres as a metagenre (Овдійчук, 2014: 95), among others.

J.-F. Lyotard, J. Baudrillard and I. Hassan, as the earliest theorists of postmodernism, asserted its worldview and creative potential, thereby substantiating the then-emerging synthesis of “high” and “low” art, science, and society as a whole. While this conceptualization was undoubtedly significant, it was also ideologically manipulative, given that such genre convergence had taken place nearly a century before the rise of postmodernism as a worldview phenomenon, made possible by scientific progress, social transformation, and the expanding potential of mass culture.

Within the framework of postmodernism's manipulative ideology, all forms of social, scientific, and creative progress were ascribed to postmodernism itself, which was presented as the most “free” worldview paradigm – and this notion of “freedom” was extended to everything it touched. Yet this was no longer mere manipulation but a clear distortion. At the same time, the totalitarian structures inherent in postmodernism – manifested primarily at the cultural and social levels in the twentieth century and increasingly at the political level in the twenty-first – remained virtually unexamined. Expressing such assumptions was tacitly prohibited and dismissed as “unscientific.”

To comprehend the essence of postmodern influence on literature, it is useful to turn to Brian McHale's seminal study *Postmodernist Fiction*, in which he identifies four principal types of postmodernist prose: “the world of the postmodernist historical novel,” “the world with fictional zoning,” “the world of science fiction,” and “the world with synchronized multisystems” – the latter being a terminological variant that effectively defines fantasy (McHale, 1987: 68).

Postmodern ideology perceives the world as a text, granting the author the freedom to construct their work from fragments of other texts or “world fragments,” to employ every possible form of intertextual borrowing, and to create a space for allusions and indirect quotations. From a formal perspective, fantasy and postmodernism are not merely similar but structurally convergent. This structural convergence allowed postmodernism to capitalize on the popularity of fantasy in order to disseminate its ideas and promote its playful worldview.

In these works, such “world fragments” often took the form of mythic constructions emptied of their original vitality. This lifeless structure increased the entropy of culture and social existence

as a whole, since this playfully destructive idea – harmful at the level of worldview – was manifested not only within the space of culture itself. In literature, according to O. Bondareva, there emerged a mass “replication and playful treatment of countless fragments of a decomposed myth” (Бондарева, 2006: 43). It is precisely this feature that is still frequently regarded as a defining characteristic of the fantasy canon.

Under the ideological and worldview influence of postmodernism in the last century, fantasy underwent profound transformations, acquiring a predominantly playful or entertaining character while losing much of its original existential foundation. The primary cause of this shift lies in one of postmodernism’s central tenets – the devaluation of content in favor of an excessive preoccupation with form.

The loss of connection with the collective unconscious and with the national dimension – which became largely decorative – as well as the neglect of actualized archetypes and the aesthetics of life, devalued the fantasy genre and provoked its profound internal conflict. For a long time, this conflict remained unconscious, concealed by the dominance of the prevailing worldview. Such a situation made it impossible to recognize the problem, both at the level of scholarly conceptualization and within the reading community. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the drama and depth of this internal conflict, along with its influence on the literary process, have become increasingly evident, demanding a dedicated and systematic study.

The problem has also manifested itself at the level of terminology. Even today, the term “postmodern fantasy” is seldom used or conceptualized as a distinct phenomenon. Only a few Ukrainian literary scholars employ this term, most notably M. Nikolaeva, who refers to it in her research (Николаєва, 2016).

This kind of terminological “silencing” is by no means accidental. From a logical standpoint, the very notion of “postmodern fantasy” necessarily implies the existence of “non-postmodern” fantasy, which would possess distinct features. Since postmodernism asserts its own claim to absolute worldview dominance, an explicit terminological distinction could potentially undermine its societal influence and openly contradict its ideological foundations. Within the literary sphere, such clarification would automatically detach a portion of works from its interpretative field, as these texts would demonstrate alternative – indeed, anti-postmodern – structures and principles. This, in turn, would generate worldview competition within the genre itself and, more broadly, within literature and culture, potentially paving the way for the rise of the next, anti-postmodern worldview paradigm.

Therefore, meaningful discussion and definition of the features of “postmodern fantasy” became possible only after the postmodern worldview lost its dominance – and, subsequently, its legitimacy – a consequence of its complete inability to respond adequately to historical challenges or withstand the test of time. This marks the second aspect of the broader global worldview crisis that has been mirrored in the literary process.

One of the core ideas of postmodernism is the glorification of play as the only form of being and as a legitimate communicative space. As these ideas gained global traction, writers ceased to feel responsible for the works they produced or for the impact those works might have on their audiences. The burden of responsibility for any resulting influence was shifted onto readers and viewers. A playful mode of existence permits one to “play” with everything. If members of the audience experienced trauma or manipulation, they were presumed to be “at fault themselves,” allegedly having misinterpreted the work in a way that produced worldview or psychological harm.

Since any game presupposes the existence of rules, this principle in artistic creation quickly evolved into a system of templates and clichés, the violation of which was considered unacceptable. These constraints were simultaneously shaped by the commercial dimension of creative projects and by the ideology of postmodernism itself.

As the author’s persona – embodied in the text and in the ideas of the work – lost its significance under the influence of postmodernism, the essence of the work itself consequently lost its value. This is logical, since only a self-aware creative personality is capable of investing genuine ideas into a work of art. When the notion of personality is devalued, the idea’s presence, its potential transformative impact, and the intellectual or emotional growth of the reader who engages with it are likewise diminished. What remains valuable is only the form, within which the basic aesthetic framework is constructed.

The emergence of postmodernism in its early stage was characterized by shock tactics (*épatage*) and the rejection of classical models and major life-affirming global ideas. Over time, however, it evolved into the imitation of already established commercial “genre” templates aimed at an uncritical audience – one that had, in fact, become such under the influence of previously consumed stereotypes.

Undoubtedly, alongside these formulaic works representing a distorted and simplified canon, there existed literature of a qualitatively different kind. However, its popularity, until a certain point, was largely accidental and depended on whether a work would reach its reader and achieve commercial success. Under such conditions, it was precisely these

works that contributed to the evolutionary development of literature, culture, and society, and that had the potential to become significant historical and social phenomena.

In the 21st century, as the postmodern worldview paradigm begins to lose its dominance – an erosion that precedes the emergence of the term now commonly defined as “metamodernism” – a semantic shift can be observed in various countries. Ukrainian scholarship has not been an exception.

For instance, Yu. Zhuk argues that it was precisely postmodernism that introduced complex worldview conflicts, philosophical dimensions, and value-related issues into fantasy literature (Жук, 2018), while M. Nikolaeva attributes to postmodernism the capacity to enhance the psychological complexity of both primary and secondary characters in fantasy works (Николаева, 2016), among others.

The playful postmodern principle has even contributed to ideologization and propaganda within individual scholarly works. For example, an attempt to oppose regional “peculiarities” within a single genre can be found in O. Shaposhnyk’s study: “The heroes of Anglophone fantasy are not characterized by elaborate personalities, the possibility of moral choice, or personal development; their images are not multifaceted. The only exception is postmodernist fantasy, whose character system rejects the division of characters into exclusively positive and negative and presupposes more skillfully constructed images. ... In the East Slavic literary tradition, fantasy heroes are outstanding figures, multifaceted in their qualities. They are characterized by intelligence, strength, confidence, and independence. An important mission falls on the shoulders of an exceptional, unique individual” (Шапошник, 2013: 186).

The cited passage simultaneously reflects two narratives: the first is a typically Soviet one, grounded in the ideologeme of contrasting the “good native” with the “bad Western”; the second is a consciously manipulative division of Western fantasy into the “good postmodern” and the “bad” everything else. The quotation also illustrates postmodernism’s attempt to distance itself from its own detrimental influence on art and its effort to “appropriate” works that, owing to their complex psychological depth, were least affected by its totalizing playful ideology.

Such ideas are not accidental and are articulated quite deliberately, both within scholarly discourse and by writers themselves. In Ukraine, one of the ideologues of postmodernism is the writer V. Yeshkiliev. He expresses his view on the crisis of postmodernism as follows: “The onset of a sudden isolation of postmodernism’s discourse from the average consumer (reader, viewer), who simply loses interest, can be felt” (cited in Гребенюк, 2007: 40).

Ignoring the natural causes of social evolution and the decline of postmodernist ideas as non-competitive in the modern world – which resulted in the loss of postmodernism’s worldview and aesthetic influence on the mass audience – V. Yeshkiliev proposes an “original” solution to this crisis: to “appropriate” the structural and conceptual foundations of “other” works and to re-legitimize their existence and popularity through the value system of postmodernism.

Possessing an imperial worldview, this writer and scholar is fully aware of the fundamental differences between postmodernism – with its emphasis on “playful non-obligatory nature” and “irony” – and the “super-narrative,” which he associates with “demiurgy” (grounded in faith and sacredness and, in his view, exemplified in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien). Therefore, the manipulation on his part is entirely deliberate. The prominent Ukrainian literary scholar N. Zborovska fundamentally disagreed even with V. Yeshkiliev interpretation of Tolkien’s work, let alone with the essential issue itself (cited in Гребенюк, 2007: 40–41), and defended the right of contemporary literature to develop beyond the boundaries imposed by the totalizing ideology of postmodernism.

Unfortunately, N. Zborovska’s ideas found almost no support at the time. The ideology of postmodernism rapidly spread throughout Ukrainian literature and culture, as it resonated strongly with the ideas and values of the literary formation that self-identified as “Suchlit” (Contemporary Ukrainian Literature).

The Ukrainian fantastic paradigm of that period was undergoing a stage of self-awareness and formation. Consequently, some authors partially supported the ideology of “Suchlit” (primarily writers of horror, chimerical prose, and scandal-driven experiments involving fantastic or mystical elements), while others recognized an internal worldview conflict within the genre and perceived their own potential opposition to the postmodern worldview. This activist opposition became more pronounced in the subsequent historical period, when postmodernism began to lose its global influence and articulating an alternative viewpoint became possible.

In Ukraine, the influence of postmodernism had an especially detrimental effect at the national level, as it was precisely in the 21st century that significant processes of national revival were taking place – processes that had finally gained sufficient social support, broad dissemination, and full actualization. The elevation of “Suchlit” to the status of the “only correct and valuable” national literature for a certain period slowed and distorted the processes of nation-building and the development of national self-awareness.



At the core of many fantasy works lies national mythology, which can either infuse a text with national energy or significantly undermine its psychological depth through excessive stereotyping. In works intended for any audience, national archetypes grow out of universal human archetypes, with which they maintain an energetic connection; however, they function as independent worldview structures, as they are shaped through national reinterpretation. When such a connection is absent, the archetype is not actualized, and any mythology is reduced to worldview-empty scenery (or merely an aesthetic backdrop).

It should also be taken into account that universal human archetypes have broad possibilities for realization within the national space. It is important to recognize that folklore represents only one variant of this figurative and ideological manifestation. Other common modes of archetype actualization include historical references and images that take the form of appeals to ancient history or are manifested through events and phenomena of contemporary socio-psychological reality.

The most complex form of archetype actualization is the worldview-ideological one, which necessarily manifests itself in behavioral and worldview models and may also generate its own mythological images.

This worldview-ideological form is the most challenging to analyze, as it requires thorough knowledge of historical processes and of previous historical actualizations of both universal human and national archetypes at the level of mass consciousness.

To grasp the global dimension of communication among symbols, mythological images, and actualized archetypes, one must understand how the national expresses itself in national literatures and what axiological significance this expression holds at the level of worldview ideology. This is essential for the correct interpretation of fantasy works whose characters originate from the mythologies of other cultures or whose settings are situated in other countries.

In the specifically Ukrainian actualization of archetypes at the national level, powerful anti-imperial ideas are foregrounded. These ideas may manifest as a struggle against totalitarianism in any of its forms or as a worldview-based rejection of characters' existence within an imperial space – one governed by totalitarian principles and embedded in a corresponding world order.

For this reason, an author with a well-formed Ukrainian identity is fundamentally incapable of depicting an empire as a positive form of statehood or social organization. Conversely, a writer whose worldview code is shaped in the opposite direction

will perceive a legitimate social order only within a state of the imperial type.

The following examples (not exhaustive) illustrate how these archetypes operate in contemporary Ukrainian fantasy. In contemporary Ukrainian fantasy, the anti-imperial worldview paradigm and the actualization of key national archetypes are embodied in a broad corpus of texts. In particular, anti-imperial ideas and the rejection of hierarchical domination are articulated in the works of Andrii Hulkevych (*The Fall of the Eagle, The Blood of Krykhdem*), Sashko Dermanskyi (*The King of Buckes, or the Secret of the Emerald Book, The Apple Kingdom*), Yaryna Katorozh (*Palimpsest*), Vitalii Klymchuk (*Ruthenia. The Witch's Return*), Miia Marchenko (*The City of Shadows*), Dzvinka Matiyash (*The Day of the Snowman*), and Oksana Radushynska (*When the Sun Had a Hundred Eyes. The Volkhv's Amulet*).

The second key archetype for Ukrainians is the value of life and worldview freedom – both one's own and that of others. The value of human life is unconditional and does not depend on hierarchy or acquired status. The affirmation of the individual's worth, as opposed to the primacy of hierarchy, forms the foundation of resistance – at the worldview level – to totalitarian ideology in all its manifestations.

The archetypes of the unconditional value of human life and worldview freedom are further developed in the works of Serhii Vdovenko (*The Immortal's Mistake*), Yaryna Katorozh (*Alchemy of Freedom*), Oleh Kulishov (*Illya and Agatha. The Magic Parcel*), Nataliia Matolinets (*The Amaterasu Academy, All My Keys and Gaia*), Taras Mykitchek (*The Valley of the Only Road*), Maryna Muliar (*The Game*), Anastasiia Nikulina (*The Snow Thieves*), Alex Papanov (*The Last Knight, or Very Long Holidays*), as well as in Volodymyr Rutkivskyi (*The Watchtower*).

Provided that at least one of these archetypes is actualized, the entire national worldview life-affirming matrix becomes engaged, and this inevitably finds direct embodiment in the literary work. This may be visible in the author's philosophical generalizations but, most importantly, it manifests through the deep psychological development of the characters, who encounter numerous situations of worldview choice and exhibit clearly articulated, complex psychological reflections.

However, this depth-oriented understanding of archetypes was not always dominant in literary-critical practice, where national belonging was often judged by external folkloric markers rather than by underlying worldview structures. Unfortunately, for an extended period, both Ukrainian authors and literary scholars demonstrated a biased attitude toward works that lacked folkloric scenery

or explicit references to Ukrainian mythology. This approach is explicitly articulated in the works of Ukrainian scholars who emphasize folklore and national mythology as the most valuable foundation for the fantasy genre, including A. Hurduz (Гурдуз, 2012), S. Dmytriuk (Дмитрюк, 2024), Yu. Zhuk (Жук, 2018), N. Lohvinenko (Логвіненко, 2016; 2018), S. Oliinyk (Олійник, 2017), and A. Sokolova (Соколова, 2016). A similar position has been voiced in the public intellectual discourse by contemporary Ukrainian authors, most notably Dara Korniy (Корній, 2016) and Halyna Pahutiak (Пагутьяк, 2012), who have repeatedly stressed the centrality of mythological authenticity in defining national fantasy traditions.

This kind of superficial vision of national belonging – through external markers rather than through underlying senses and meanings – contributed to the partial stereotyping and schematization of the Ukrainian fantasy genre. These tendencies also hindered national revival, as stereotyped works, deprived of initiatory depth and transformative potential, were unable to exert a constructive influence on readers.

**Conclusions.** Research into the historical dimension and into contemporary works that belong to the fantastic paradigm (particularly fantasy) confirms that for decades the identification of Ukrainian fantasy was complicated by ideological confrontation (including the influence of Soviet ideology and accusations of escapism) as well as by the impact of postmodern worldview practices, which reduced the genre's semantic richness to a merely playful form, thereby generating an internal conflict.

Contemporary Ukrainian fantasy is, to a great extent, structurally opposed to these earlier traditions. It is grounded in the natural national myth and in anti-imperial archetypes – such as the value of the individual, the struggle for freedom, and the unconditional value of human life – which together actualize the national worldview matrix. To reveal the identificational potential of modern literature within the fantasy genre, it is essential to abandon the formulaic folkloric approach and instead adopt a worldview-ideological mode of analysis that exposes the deeper meanings and cultural codes embodied in these texts.

Further research perspectives include the systematic analysis of individual authorial models within contemporary Ukrainian fantasy, with particular attention to the mechanisms of archetype actualization at the level of narrative structure and character psychology. A promising direction is also the comparative study of Ukrainian fantasy within broader post-totalitarian and post-imperial cultural contexts, as well as the exploration of the genre's influence on readers' worldview formation in different age groups.

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