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**THE GENRE MATRIX OF AN EPIC FANTASY NOVEL «THE LORD OF  
THE RINGS» BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN**

*Аннотация:* в данной статье описаны результаты исследования жанра фэнтези. Предпринимается попытка построения жанровой матрицы эпического фэнтези на основе выявления жанровых признаков. В качестве иллюстративного материала был выбран роман-эпопея английского писателя Дж. Р. Р. Толкина. Выявленные компоненты могут быть применены ко всем романам, относящимся к жанру эпического фэнтези.

*Ключевые слова:* фэнтези, жанровая матрица, жанровые признаки, эпическое фэнтези, антагонист, главный герой.

*Summary:* the article reveals the results of an epic fantasy genre study. The study attempts to build the genre matrix on the basis of generic features. By way of illustration the novel «The Lord of the rings» by J.R.R. Tolkien was used. The identified components can be applied to all novels written in the genre of epic fantasy.

*Keywords:* fantasy, the genre matrix, generic features of the matrix, epic fantasy, antagonist, protagonist.

The problem of genre forming is of current interest in contemporary literary theory. In view of absence of the complex researches in the field of fantasy genre forming our research is of high actuality. Under genre forming we understand a comparative analysis of generic structures of a number of novels. According to M.V. Norets[1, p.433] this analysis represents a set of typologically similar codes of genre forming, the so called genre matrix. In our study we make an attempt to build the genre matrix of an epic fantasy. By way of illustration we choose trilogy «The Lord of the rings» by famous English writer, identified as the «father"» of modern fantasy literature, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. As an example of generic features we use the following: protagonist and antagonist, their social status, type of narration, climax or conflict, motive of event, characters, plot, lovestory line and surrounding background. Thus, we see the genre matrix of an epic fantasy as follows (tab. 1).

Table 1.

The genre matrix of an epic fantasy\*

Protagonist	The protagonist may be represented as a typical, modest, just an ordinary man, unremarkable at first sight, but a very strong person, possessing rare qualities, such as brevity, kindness, self-sacrifice, responsibility, etc. He also can possess some hidden superpower. And, what more he also can be unaware of his abilities.
Social status	As usual, the protagonist belongs to low social status. Very often he may be depicted as an outsider or even loser.
Antagonist	The antagonist may be represented as some evil man or spirit, magician, alien, demon, almighty powerful ruler, and so on, representing a threat for the whole nation, world or even universe.

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Indicated by the author

Social status	Antagonist has higher social status than protagonist, and as a rule he is much more stronger. Very often or maybe even always, protagonist and antagonist could be allegorical, representing the opposition between good and bad.
Narration	Narration is given from the third person and the author is absent.
Climax	Some epic event or global problems (necessity to save the world, to overcome evil etc.).
Motive	Sense of duty, self-sacrifice, responsibility for the whole world.
Characters	The story could be filled with lots of characters, among them ordinary people, mythic beings, vampires, gods, demons, mystic creatures, superheroes, and, what is more common for this genre, diverse races, such as trolls, elves, dwarfs, goblins, orcs and also personification of different inanimate objects, plants and so on.
Plot	Epic fantasy resembles historical adventurous novel. The main event is the fight of the main hero with the powerful enemy, which belongs to the dark side. The motive of quest is very common, it usually describes some long, dangerous trip to the goal through many difficulties, some mission to be fulfilled, difficulties to be overcome, or something to be saved.
Lovestory line	It is secondary, not so important.
Surrounding background	Epic fantasy also could be referred to escapist literature. It seems like the author seeks oblivion, he wants to avoid the reality and creates the new one, and it creates such specific atmosphere or mood while reading the book. There must be at least two parallel worlds, double existence is the most frequently used literature device in fantasy. The author depicts radical break with reality, real and imaginary are mixed up, he shows quite extreme surroundings, time distortion, time travel and etc.

**Protagonist.** The main hero of the trilogy is a hobbit Frodo. He is chosen by his uncle Bilbo to destroy the Ring, which gives the overwhelming power and breeds the evil. Frodo represents the Good in the novel's epic struggle between the Good and the Evil. Being physically weak, timid and shy he proves to be a brave and clever, loving, generous, kind, managing to avoid danger and earn the trust of his new friends. «*But be that as it may, Mr. Frodo is as nice a young hobbit as you could wish to meet. Very much like Mr. Bilbo, and in more than looks. After all his father was a Baggins. A descent respectable hobbit...*» [5, p. 23]. Frodo's greatest strengths are his generosity of spirit and his power of forgiveness. He is always ready to give one more chance, but this strengths is also a weakness – he trusts too much and faces betrayal too often. Frodo inspires great loyalty and comradeship. He puts himself in immense danger so that the Shire and all of middle-earth may rest in peace. In the end Frodo is nearly controlled by the Ring, but still he resists and emerges heroically. He struggles against his own evil side of nature, but he wins.

**Antagonist.** The antagonist in the novel is Sauron. He is a satanic ruler, a fallen wizard who has been corrupted by his own desire for power and fled from the Blessed Realm to settle in Middle-earth. Sauron is the principal agent of evil, commanding the Nazguls and Black riders to wreak havoc in the world. He brings Sarumon under his control and enlists the help of creatures like orcs, trolls, dragons and men to work for him. Sauron is omnipresent with the help of palantris, a special ball which give him insight, and the Eye, with which he is able to see the deeds of the Ring bearer. He is the cause of all the destruction and corruption in Middle-earth. Sauron is the one who originally forged the Ring of Power, in order to control the world. «*A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he fades: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight*

*under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last sooner or later the dark power will devour him» [5, p.38].*

**Narration.** The narration is given from the 3d person and the author is absent. *«When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton» [5, p.2].*

**Conflict.** «The Lord of the Rings» is a classic struggle between Good and Evil. This universal theme is obvious as Frodo seeks to destroy Evil, and Evil seeks to destroy Frodo. So, in the centre of attention is an epic fight. There are many climaxes in the novel, especially since it is broken into three parts, six books, and multiple chapters. The most tense point of the novel comes out when Frodo is ready to toss the Ring into the flames of Mountain Orodruin. Gollum nearly ruins Frodo's objective by biting off the finger that holds the Ring, but he gets too excited and ends up falling into the crack, carrying with him the Ring and thus completing Frodo's mission. *«Gollum on the edge of the abyss was fighting like a mad thing with an unseen foe. 'Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. Precious, precious, precious! Gollum cried. My precious! O my precious! And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, topped, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail Precious, and he was gone» [3, p.184]*

#### **Motives of event.**

– **Racial harmony.** One of Tolkien's themes is the importance of **racial harmony**. Middle –earth is peopled by many creatures of different groups. All these creatures have their own social and moral codes that correspond to their

groups. However different they may be from each other, they understand the value of peace and harmony.

– **Sacrifice and responsibility.** The characters of Tolkien's novel are altruistic. At great personal cost Sam accompanies Frodo making sure that the Ring-bearer is not lacking in anything. Sam himself goes without food and drink to make sure that Frodo has enough; he even goes without sleep so that Frodo may sleep peacefully and safely. Frodo himself makes a great sacrifice. He gives up his comfortable life in the Shire to go on the quest and make life easier for the Shire folk, most of whom are ignorant of his sacrifice and his deeds. «*Sam looked at him and wept in his heart, but no tears came to his dry and stinging eyes. 'I said I'd carry him, if it broke my back,' he muttered, 'and I will!' 'Come, Mr. Frodo dear! Sam will give you a ride. Just tell him where to go, and he'll go*» [4, p. 377].

– **Lust for power.** Throughout the book Tolkien has given instances of the corrupting influence of the Ring, which represents power. It seems that everyone who possesses power is ruined by it. Even Saruman, who was once a good wizard, is corrupted by it. And Frodo, who is the hero, finds himself compelled by the Ring. Not only does it weigh on him so much so that he can hardly walk, he is nearly unable to throw it into the volcano.

Gandalf is afraid of the Ring. He has seen first-hand that good people can be ruined by this evil Ring. He refuses to take it when Frodo asks him. Galadriel is the same way; she does not want to be ruined by the power. There are others who seem resistant to the appeal of the Ring. Sam, for instance, seems so good-hearted and pure that though he feels the Ring, he is able to give it back to Frodo and also recognize that it has exerted some pull on his own actions. And Tom Bombadil, like Sam, seems not to be affected by the Ring.

Boromir is an example of a good man who has lust for the Ring within the action of the novel. He thinks that he can handle the Ring and not be affected by it. But his desperation gives him away. Frodo realizes that he cannot even trust his friends, because the Ring affects even the best of men.

The Ring, which is synonymous with power, holds attraction for many, but none can possess it. The Ring itself cannot be controlled or tamed. The irony of the title is obvious: there can never be a "lord" of the Ring.

**Characters.** There is a great amount of characters in this novel. Among them ordinary people as Aragorn, Boromir and Faramir; hobbits Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pin; dwarfs like Legolas; wizards like Gandalf, Saruman and Sauron; also different creatures, representing the Dark Side, as the Black Riders, Nazguls, Orcs, dragons, Ents and spirits of the Dead. There are many allegorical pairs of characters representing Good and Evil: Saruman and Gandalf, Sauron and Tom Bombadil.

**Plot.** The novel describes a long and dangerous quest to the Morgoth. During the trip the main heroes suffer from lots of difficulties, fight with different dark forces, but in the end they manage to fulfill their mission. Also in the end the main hero possesses higher social status than in the beginning of the novel. Frodo has fulfilled his mission and went to the Blessed Realm.

**Lovestory line.** The novel proposes only one lovestory line. Love between Aragorn and Arwen. Arwen gives up her right to immortality so that she may marry Aragorn. She lets Frodo go to the Blessed Realm instead of herself, and Frodo rightly deserves the honor.

*Elrond: That future is almost gone.*

*Arwen: But it is not lost.*

*Elrond: Nothing is certain.*

*Arwen: Some things are certain. If I leave him now, I will regret it forever.*

[4, p.324].

**Surrounding background:** The story is set in the Middle-Earth, a fictional world created by Tolkien. Mystical creatures such as hobbits, orcs, trolls, ents, elves, wizards, dragons, dwarves and men inhabit middle-earth. Middle-earth is a magical world in which imagination rules, but it exists very much like «real» society, with political, and economic problems and power struggles. Each of the

races that inhabit this world has its own territories and is distinct from one another. Tolkien has invented not only names but also languages for the different races of Middle-earth. The Elves speak a language that sounds soft and pleasant; the orcs, on the other hand, have a language that is just as bad as their behavior. The mood is definitely imaginative, fantastic, and adventurous. Middle-earth is a new world where the rules and norms are vivid and dynamic. There is suspense, danger, and restoration.

To sum up, it is possible to say that in J.R.R. Tolkien's novel we have identified a number of features that link it with the genre of an epic fantasy. These are such features as the desire to create a new world much like a real one, with its own population, language and rules; a large number of characters and the branching of the plot.

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