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## POETICS ON FANTASTICS AND HISTORICAL FICTION

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This article shall deal with the topic of the world-known fantasy novels the *Lord of the Rings* series in comparison with the one of the first epic poems, *Beowulf*. Since the author of the series, J. R. R. Tolkien, translated the epic poem from the Old-English language, he was apparently strongly influenced by this piece of work. The question to which extent *Beowulf* inspired the author shall be the main theme of this article, discussing particular features of the mentioned literary pieces – tone of the poem and language and style of the novels, form of the poem and genre of the novels, and theme of both the poem and the series.

Tone of the poem contra language and style of the series. *Beowulf* is considerably referred to as a heroic poem, with dramatic storyline and festive accent, present in the descriptions of the situations as well as of the main protagonist and his companions. Since it is originally written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and takes place even earlier – in the 6<sup>th</sup> century – no surprise the language appears to be pretty archaic.

However, the *Lord of the Rings* series are written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thus one might ask, what induced the author to use such an archaic type of English? For example, in several poems, present in the novels, Tolkien does not use any of traditional verse patterns or free verse – or anything that might indicate the way of Modern English spoken in his days.

In some parts, poems from the series are almost unrecognizable from the poetic translation of *Beowulf*

Why would the author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and modern age use the way of speaking of the Old English? The answer might be found in the very fact that Tolkien himself translated *Beowulf* from the Old English and took him many years to even finish the translation – thanks to his perfectionism and his interest in the topic itself. (Carpenther, 1993) He was also inspired by many other classical works, but such research is not the topic of this article.

As we take a look at the epic poem *Beowulf*, we can see different features present in the poem. First of all, remarkable elements of a heroic poem are present – since the poem is often referred to as a heroic one – including strong, fearless hero, great deeds he had done and loyal companions following their leader. Second, there are fantasy features – for example the monster Grendel, his mother living on the bottom of the lake, dragon, magic tools – meant to strengthen the heroic tone of the story. Then we might observe strong features of Christianity and some historical points, referring to real historical events. Since the latter two are not crucial for this work, we shall not discuss them.

The fantasy series *Lord of the Rings* first of all speak to the reader's imagination, pointing out some unrealistic and unknown phenomena – such as hobbits, elves, whole new world of untold stories – and such represent the very meaning of the word 'fantasy'. However, after a closer look the fantastic features are not the only present in the series. As we are trying to find the connection between the heroic poem *Beowulf* and the novels, let us have a look at some elements of heroic poetry – or prose in this case. For example the strong, devoted hero, followed by his loyal ones – be it Frodo, the Ringbearer or Aragorn, the future king or some other characters – connects with some great deeds and wills to sacrifice himself for the greater good.

Though there might be some distinctions between the heroes from *Beowulf* and the ones from the *Lord of the Rings* series, we consider it to be the result of various sources of inspiration present in Tolkien's works – for example, there are some elements of ancient drama present in the series.

*Beowulf* seems to present quite clear theme of the story – hero, struggling to do the best he can to help people and gain glory, makes the world a better place. As it is mentioned several times, he does not look at how much it costs to save the country and eventually he meets his fate in his efforts.

On the other hand, there is a struggling hero who also tries to save his world, do his best and senses the inevitable death in his effort to complete his task. No matter what, he does what has to be done, not making excuses about anyone else more suitable for such task.

Both of the mentioned works could speak to current readers and give them the sense of their own importance, the urgency to make something, to create a better world. Such message, left in the man of today's society, makes the works immortal and supertemporal. After all, if the work, older than one thousand years speaks to the man of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and if the story of imagined, made-up world brings a message, rousing today's people to make something better – it all speaks for itself.

When talking about the *Lord of the Rings* series, it is quite clear that the author took inspiration from various sources – including the great deal of his own imagination and genius mind – and *Beowulf* is definitely one of them. Such work, discussing all categories in which the two mentioned works are similar, would have to be researched and written in much broader extent – and even then it is not for sure to the topic to be covered completely. Anyway, in this article we dealt with some minor features proving the Tolkien's inspiration coming from the epic poem *Beowulf*, the form of the poem and language and style of the series, the tone of the poem and genre of the series and finally the theme of both the poem and the series.

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