

The aim of the project is to analyze the course and the consequences of the phenomenon identified as the urban turn in fantasy. This turn consisted of the increase in the importance of urbanity: earlier fantasy was associated primarily with quasi-medieval scenery, in which the main role as the arena for the adventures of the characters was played by uninhabited spaces, but from the 1980s more and more texts began to appear whose action was focused in metropolitan areas – and also for which urbanity was a subject of interest. From the contemporary perspective this change can be identified as a noticeable and important shift, which gave beginning to the now extensive convention of fantasy set in cities. Its thorough analysis is particularly important due to the prominent role of speculative fiction in general, including fantasy, in the current popular culture (as well as the importance of worldbuilding within the latter and the role of the city as a space for analyzing vital contemporary issues).

The project is based on a hypothesis that this worldbuilding change is not only a matter of aesthetic, but also has consequences for the meanings and worldviews inscribed in the fantasy texts, and that urban fantasy might offer new, specific means of expression (especially of urban experience). The subject of research in the project will be fantasy texts in which the city is the main or only place of action, belonging to various media – literature, TV series, film, games – because in all of them examples of the works crucial for the turn can be found. The first research stage will focus on developing the history of the turn: verifying if some inspirations for it can be found within the creations of cities from earlier fantasy; identifying the most important texts initiating the turn and indicating the main differences between them and the storyworlds previously dominant; describing the development of particular conventions and key motifs of fantasy set in cities. Next, the methods of constructing space in the texts belonging to the turn will be analyzed and interpreted, with particular attention given to the questions about the extent to which urbanity is the theme in them, the possible consequences of using the images of specific real world cities (in the cases when it occurs) and their correspondence to the wholly fantastic locations, as well as about the role of the fantastic ways of interacting with space. Another issue will be the social space constructed within the turn: matters of protagonists' (gender, ethnic, class) identities, positions of fantastic beings (especially in the context of various types of coding minority groups through them), the presence of the excluded, and social structures. Finally, the specific relationships of fantasy in urban setting's protagonists with the places they inhabit will be analyzed, with particular emphasis on questions of the involvement of individuals in the city life and their personal responsibility for the metropolis, the unique positions versus the mediocrity of the characters, and issues of power over the city and the right to it.

The expected result of the project will be the creation of a comprehensive overview of the turn. An extensive body of texts belonging to phenomenon will be analyzed, which in itself will fill an existing gap in the fantasy scholarship, but primarily will allow to formulate conclusions about the whole of fantasy set in cities, the change brought by it to the genre, and finally its own specific properties.