

**“A Children’s Book” Game as a Narrative Strategy in Fantasy Series**

The article focuses on narrative games employed in fantasy series. The topicality of the subject is predetermined by the variety of experimental narrative patterns that appear within contemporary fantasy fiction, particularly in so called spin-off books. The latter receive very little critical attention, despite the fact that they blend different genre forms and often reveal postmodernist tendencies.

One of the narrative games that can be traced in spin-off books is the deconstruction of the children’s book format. This game is analysed in the light of the peculiar correlation between the fictional and the real worlds. The role of paratexts as part of the strategy is highlighted with regards to the problematic character of the framing of the fictional world.

The first example of the narrative game is taken from the “Harry Potter” series by J.K.Rowling. The series includes three spin-off books, all of which feature certain elements of intermediality, iconicity and metafictionality. Presented as artifacts belonging to the fantastic world (magic Britain), they are nevertheless addressed to both magic and muggle target audiences. Readers therefore can enter the narrative game and identify themselves as part of either of these groups.

“The Tales of Beedle the Bard”, comprising 5 children’s fairy tales with academic commentary, represent three distinct narrative levels. The intradiegetic level relates to the fictional world’s audience, while the extradiegetic one targets the real world reader. The third level is in between the two creating the environment wherein a narrative metalepsis occurs: agents from both worlds interact. Moreover, the actual author of the book, J.K.Rowling, is presented as an editor: all texts are attributed to fictional authors. As the result, the book appeals to both children and adults who may appreciate the paratextual subversion of the format and its implications.

Another popular fantasy series, Terry Pratchett's "Discworld", encompasses 40 novels and a large quantity of spin-off materials, including science editions, maps, almanacs, folklore studies and even a cookbook. The author, who is renowned for his extensive use of postmodernist pastiches and transformation of the genre's clichés, boldly experiments with narrative techniques when creating the fictional world of Discworld. His deconstruction of the "picture book" format is presented by "Where's My Cow?", which only looks like a children's book.

"Where's My Cow?" is mentioned in the novel "Thud!", whose central character, Sam Vimes, the Commander of the City Watch, makes a point of returning home at six every evening to read a book to his young son. The book itself was published later to reveal the story of being read by Sam Vimes rather than the quest for the lost cow. Sam transforms into the hero of the picture book and substitutes the domestic animals of the original story with the denizens of the metropolis where he and his son live. The narrative metalepsis in this case works through the connection between the novel and the spin-off as the characters turns into the reader who turns into a character.

On the archetypal level, the book highlights the act of Reading and its participants. The child performs the quest of finding their own parent, while the reading parent becomes the co-author and the subcreator of the story. In "Thud!" Sam Vimes recites the story in the critical episode, which helps him to withstand evil and retain his identity.

To sum up, **the** children's book game is established in both texts under consideration through metafictionality and intermediality, disrupting conventional frames and resulting in the authentication of the fantastic world. Rather than disrupting the illusion of reality, this strategy contributes to the creation of further links between the worlds, enabling the reader to participate in the game and develop their own reading game.