






REVIEW

The Fantasy Genre and Mythopoetic Aspects in Children's Literature: Based on Foreign and Kazakh Literature

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ABSTRACT

The fantasy genre in children's literature is a distinct subgenre in literature aimed at children, transporting young readers to a world of imagination. A primary characteristic of the fantasy genre is its depiction of worlds and events that are beyond reality while maintaining a logical structure. Originating in Greek philosophy as φαντασία (imagination), today's concept of imagination possesses various meanings and fulfills different functions. The article explains the concepts of fantasy, magic, and second worlds through literary dictionaries and the theoretical frameworks of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, as well as reviews of both foreign and Kazakh researchers' works. The poetic peculiarities of fairy tales

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and stories in children's fantasy literature, both foreign and Kazakh, are analyzed with examples regarding characters and artistic systems. The article also considers anthropocentrism in children's literature, a phenomenon common to all fantastical works. We identified the distinct features of anthropocentric phenomena in fantasy literature, often portrayed through the figure of a woman possessing magical and mystical powers, characterized by their mastery of magic. This phenomenon's representation methods in both Kazakh and English literature are examined. Research methods such as hermeneutical, comparative, and comparative-historical analysis were employed.

Keywords: Children's Literature; Fantasy Genre; Mythopoetics; Mythical Cognition; National Values; Psychoanalytical Analysis; Imagination-Fantasy

1. Introduction

The concept of fantasy in artistic creativity conveys the idea of soaring imagination. Imagination is a concept that has undergone many contextual changes in the history of philosophy, with initial concepts appearing in Ancient Greek philosophy. However, the concept of φαντασία (fantasy), as originated in ancient Greek philosophy, carries meanings and functions different from what we understand as imagination today. Fantasy, derived from the Greek word for "making visible" and the verb phantazein, was a concept used before Plato but first introduced by him into epistemological debate. However, Plato's studies do not provide a precise definition of fantasy. Plato relates the concepts of thinking, perception, and imagination to the emergence of the soul.

In his dialogue "Ion," Plato developed a mystical theory of artistic creativity. He believed that the vivid images depicted in art are created by the will of the Creator. In his response to Ion, who highly regarded the works of Homer following the words of his teacher Socrates, Plato described: "For the poets, like bees gathering honey, bring us songs gathered as if from the various meadows and groves of the Muse, and they bring these to us as if on wings. They also speak truths because the poet's nature is light, winged, and sacred, losing their rational mind when inspired by God; it is only at this time they create. When the mind is normal, a person cannot possess poetic qualities and cannot create or prophesy"^[1], explaining the state of creativity during artistic creation as a divine force of inspiration, unbound by any laws. Plato presented the idea that the world of art, considered the fruit of creative imagination, represents the reality of human life as a divine inspiration, through the views of Socrates and Ion.

Aristotle, on the other hand, attributed imagination to the cognitive act that forms between sensation and thought. He concluded the uncertainty associated with this imagination as follows: "If we consider that there are individual divisions within the soul, it is difficult to distinguish which part aligns with imagination (phantastikon) and which does not"^[2].

Additionally, the work "The Realms of Fantasy: Aristotle on the Phenomenality of Mental Imagery"^[3] discusses the sensory-motor dimensions and experiential nature of imagination in Aristotle's psychology. The author posits two main claims. Firstly, imagination as an experiential (re)action capability activates the power of imagination as circumstances (phenomenally) consisting of patterns of bodily activation outside a (physical) network of sensory experiences. More specifically, the author concludes that these body changes serve as sensory-motor instructions designated for repeating past experiences (e.g., when remembered) or possibly imagined or one-time experiences (e.g., waiting, fantasizing, and dreaming). The second claim is that any distinction between form and content during the interpretation of the fantastic becomes a victim of the problem of transforming content into reality.

In recent decades, the fantasy (imagination) genre has widely developed and become popular in children's literature, largely due to its genre-specific characteristics. Scholars consider the formation and development of the fantasy genre based on mythical narratives. Ancient epics and legends describe heroes defending their lands, one-eyed giants, spirits, travels to other worlds, and animals possessing human traits. There is a notion that the genre formed around the 15th century. The fantasy genre differs from science fiction, which is based on space and certain theoretical foundations, whereas

fantasy in literature presents images and addresses social issues in contemporary society that are only encountered at the pinnacle of human imagination, conveyed in light and simple language.

In the “Kazakh Literary Dictionary,” it states: “Fantasy [from Greek *phantasia*] n. 1. The ideal reconstructive capability associated with human imagination. Despite being used synonymously with imagination, they can be distinctly explained (Cultural-Philos. Encyc.). Fantasy often refers to things that do not occur in concrete reality, purely invented, whereas imagination refers to the process of perfecting and developing an initial real image through thought to create an ideal image (Cultural-Philos. Encyc.). 2. Lit. The artistic imagination of a poet or writer”^[4].

In R. Nurgali’s “Philosophical Dictionary”: Fantasy (Lat. *phantasia*—psychol. image, fruit of imagination)—the particular strength, clarity, and distinctiveness of the concepts and images formed are manifestations of imagination^[5].

M. Zhumabayev in his work “Pedagogy” defines fantasy as “the fundamental basis for life being colorful and beautiful. Fantasy expands the mind... and corrects behavior”^[6]. This assertion seems to open up the core idea and thematic channel of children’s fantasy works.

In the “Encyclopedia of Literary Terms and Concepts,” regarding fantasy, it is described as: “Fantasy (from Greek *phantastike*—the art of imagining, envisioning) is a type of literary art that ranges from depicting unusual, irrational phenomena to creating an extraordinary, invented world that does not conform to reality, a ‘magical world’... The poetics of fantasy is related to the duplication of the world: the artist either models his own wonderful world living by its own laws (in which case a ‘reference point’ outside the text remains implicitly present: ‘Gulliver’s Travels’, 1726, J. Swift; ‘The Dream of a Ridiculous Man’, 1877, F.M. Dostoevsky) or revitalizes two parallel flows—the real being and the magical being”^[7]. This clarifies the depiction of a ‘second world’ or ‘magical world’ and magical forces inherent in the nature of the contemporary fantasy genre.

Russian researcher P.V. Korolkova, in her study distinguishing between imagination and the literary fairy tale genres, points out the main characteristics as they become established as genres. The distinctive features of the fantasy genre are apparent through this comparative approach:

“Imagination is synonymous with ‘heroic’ fantasy or ‘sword and sorcery’ (‘sword and magic’). In other words, fantasy is presented in both imagined and scientific fantasy, but it is distinguished by its method of conditional justification: stories that traditionally involve a supernatural principle as a natural part of the world order and are considered ‘usual’ for the modeled reality are included”^[8].

Literary critic and author of a contemporary literary dictionary, S. Chuprinin believes that “the general characteristic of imaginative literature is that it creates new worlds defined not by the laws of nature and society but by magic”^[9].

2. Materials and Methods

In this study, an extensive review of works by both domestic and foreign scholars was conducted, focusing on the connections and distinctions between fantasy and magic. Theoretical concepts of the fantasy genre were discussed, with detailed examples from Kazakh and English literature. The analysis applied hermeneutic, comparative, and historical-comparative research methods. Hermeneutic research involved interpreting events, various phenomena in texts, and mystical concepts and images related to secondary worlds and magical events in the literature of Kazakh and English writers, highlighting the distinctive cultural codes and perceptions of these two peoples. Comparative analysis examined events and characters in the literature of both Kazakh and English writers, while the historical-comparative method was applied to explore the poetic peculiarities, artistic ideas, and to identify mythical motifs historically.

3. Results and Discussion

In Kazakh children’s literature, the fantasy genre originates from fairy tales filled with wonder and enchantment. The depiction of the serpent Bapy Khan’s realm in the underground world in the tale “Er Tostik” exemplifies an alternate ‘silent world’ contrasting with life on the surface. Similarly, the tale “The Serpent-Shelled Boy” highlights unique mystical phenomena and fantastical beings through the birth of a snake-shelled boy, his transformation into a falcon, and subsequent flight with his beloved Nursulu, as well as his rescue of Marzhan, the daughter of the King of Gulistan, from Kara

Daū. This narrative approach, characterized by extraordinary existence and mystical events, is indicative of contemporary fantasy genres. One of the artistic achievements in current Kazakh children's literature is the continuation of traditional oral literature forms such as riddles, puzzles, proverbs, fairy tales, legends, and stories. Fantasy represents a genre of exploration within today's children's literature, demonstrating both continuity with established traditions and innovation. Authors contribute to shaping generations that cherish family, homeland, and nature through their works dedicated to children.

According to the renowned English writer and philologist J.R.R. Tolkien in his work "On Fairy-Stories"^[10], the fantasy genre is essential for enriching the poetic world through the creative imagination of enchanting realms that do not exist in reality. Tolkien articulates that human consciousness can create mental images of non-existent objects, a natural ability known as imagination (or so it has been termed). Recently, in scientific and technical language (not colloquial), higher functions have been attributed to imagination, considering it an indicator of a person's aptitude for artistic creation (referred to as "play of the mind" or the ancient concept of imagination). Therefore, Tolkien argues that restricting the meaning of 'fantasy' is an unjust act, suggesting that it enables "giving the semblance of truth to the non-existent," thereby depicting a "special being," a "mystical world," or a "second reality," and ultimately clarifying the truth about human life.

In "The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction," the emergence and development of the fantasy genre within English literature are comprehensively discussed, highlighting its genre-specific features. Researchers of the genre note its significance and purpose: "Fantasy has been a widely recognized genre in English-American literary studies of the 20th century, often associated with romance. Like romance, fantasy entered English literature through the allegorical tradition (John Bunyan's 'The Pilgrim's Progress' in 1678). American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne described romance as a romantic novel opposed to realistic portrayal. According to a prominent scholar of the genre, fantasy is distinguished by its depiction of a 'secondary world' that can evoke 'secondary belief' (J.R.R. Tolkien). The characters of fantasy are 'visible spirits,' whose inner world is external, for their soul is stronger and braver compared to their frail and vulnerable

bodies. The development of fantasy is often associated with quests, i.e., searches or missions, driven not by external circumstances but by the inner motivation of the character. The aim of fantasy is to explore the world hidden behind everyday life"^[11]. As seen, fantasy in English literature reveals the life hidden behind real life, exposing the trickery, malice, and cruelty of the real world. The essay discusses how fantasy in English literature of the Middle Ages started with Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" (1590), portraying the lives of King Arthur and the knights allegorically, linking to George MacDonald's Celtic-themed novel "Phantastes," which describes a young man's journey to and return from fairyland, thus connecting to the flourishing period of fantasy in the 1930s and 40s as described by theologians and philologists such as C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien. The current structure of English fantasy is defined by adherence to specific mythological canons, upon which it creates its own myths.

In recent times, J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" book series has become the most widely read among young audiences. The popularity of these books is evidenced by the emergence of fan clubs, parodies of the books, high rankings in popular book ratings, and discussions in periodicals, as well as interdisciplinary scholarly studies focusing on works in the fantasy genre.

The atmosphere of magic and fantasy is a hallmark of literature from the 20th and 21st centuries. As noted in «The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century», "fantasy harnesses the cultural power of magic, medievalism, and childhood to re-enchant the modern world"^[12].

This feature distances readers from the real world, allowing them to imagine new creations and characters and to learn about their thrilling adventures. Importantly, these magical worlds appear either parallel to our current times or hidden among ordinary objects.

One of the key functions of popular literature is its role in escapism. A distinctive feature of the genre is the condition of a secondary world, which is related to the genre characteristics of the texts. The need to escape to a fictional world often relates to the age-specific traits of readers. As noted by T. Mastrorilli, "Child readers may be especially drawn to the idea of escapism in literature because they are intrigued and fascinated by the independence of each of the

child protagonists in their desire to escape, as well as by their imaginations”^[13].

In John Aiken’s stories such as “The Pie and the Sky Scrapings,” “Bridget’s Boots,” and “The Raindrop Necklace,” the main characters travel through the sky with magical powers and change their location through the forces of nature and magical words.

In “The Pie in the Sky Scrapings,” a single drop from the sky falling into the pie dough grants it extraordinary magical powers. The pie becomes so light that it can fly.

“The lightness of the pie, due to a sky flake having fallen into it, was such that it flew off the stove and floated around the kitchen. When the old woman tried to catch the pie, the door opened, and the pie flew out into the garden. Follow it!— yelled the old man to his wife. He jumped after the pie, and the grandmother followed him. However, the pie, lightened by consumption, began to rise But the pie began to rise easier and easier”^[14]. Thus, the old woman, her husband, a duck, a cat, and a mountain goat traveled through various locations with the hot pie, eventually settling down on the sea as it cooled. This narrative is one of those that illustrate the enchantment of natural phenomena.

In the story “Bridget’s Boots,” a young seamstress named Bridget was eating her barley porridge behind her house when a large locust fell into it. Bridget removed the locust with her spoon. Grateful for being saved, the locust gifted the seamstress a pair of magical boots embedded with a diamond. “The gemstone on the right boot was very ancient and valuable. It was called the Eye of the Desert and could transport you to any desired location. You need to stamp your right foot and make a wish immediately. Do you understand?”^[15].

In the story “Bridget’s Boots,” a magical twist is added by the gemstone in the left boot. Bridget was warned not to stamp her left foot, as the stone’s origin and powers were uncertain, thus adding a layer of mystery and caution to her magical abilities. Bridget, navigating through the city effortlessly with the aid of her enchanted boots, finally managed to catch her breath in front of a palace. She was there to fulfill a request from the princess, who was in distress over her lost cat, kidnapped by a dragon. With the help of her magical boots, Bridget successfully retrieved the cat, thereby assisting the princess.

Besides the magical boots that allow instant travel, the narrative also introduces a giant dragon, a character typical of fairy tale antagonists. Bridget’s lazy brother, Suleiman, curious about the origin of the magical boots, follows the coins stuck to the boots from the dragon’s lair, hoping for easy loot, only to find himself stranded near the dragon.

Through these magical and fantastical representations, the author illuminates truths about human life. The story touches on the plight of orphaned children separated from their parents. Bridget, kind-hearted, hardworking, and charitable, lives in poverty despite sewing day and night, even lacking boots of her own. Yet, she cares for and dresses her brother, who prefers to live in comfort without working. Even when her brother absconds with the magical boots, her primary concern is for his safety rather than the loss of the boots. Fate, thus, rewards her generosity with her own encounter with happiness. Bridget’s character undoubtedly inspires compassion and warmth in the hearts of young readers.

In “The Raindrop Necklace”^[16] another narrative by John Aiken, a magical necklace allows Laura, a young girl, to travel to another world. During her journey, Laura communicates with various animals and creatures, a common theme in children’s literature where animals possess human-like qualities. This is an effective method for teaching children about the sanctity of all living beings. Even though the stories are based on imagination, they foster respect and affection for animals among readers.

One notable work in English literature that features domestic animals is “The Diary of a Killer Cat”^[17] by Anne Fine. The story is narrated from the perspective of Taffy the cat and recounts the adventures experienced by Ellie’s pet cat over a week. Taffy proves his innocence in the death of a neighbor’s old rabbit, demonstrating his intelligence and awareness of the other pets in the neighborhood. Taffy narrates his experiences with a mix of emotions unique to his feline perspective. The narrative humorously exposes human actions and characters through the eyes of the cat, often highlighting the absurdities and idiosyncrasies of human life as seen through an animal’s viewpoint. Thus, the essence of human nature and actions is revealed through the thoughts of a cat.

In Kazakh literature, fantasy works aimed at children

started gaining recognition only after the independence years.

In Yuri Serebryany's novella "Chornaya Zvezda" ("Black Star"), whose very title alludes to the protagonist's congenital, star-shaped birthmark, the primary magical device is a serpent staff endowed with the power to carry the character across liminal spaces and open pathways into the realm of mythical beings. Much like in John Aiken's stories, where travel is triggered by specific conditions or natural forces, the staff's potency becomes active during particular anomalous phenomena and is closely intertwined with the natural rhythm of the steppe. A similar motif—typical of children's fantasy—emerges in the protagonist's ability to comprehend the language of animals and interact with folkloric figures. Marked by the "black star," he discovers his capacity to converse with spiritual entities inhabiting these borderlands. As in Aiken's "The Raindrop Necklace," in which the heroine communicates with animals, Serebryany's text underscores the indivisible bond between human beings and their surroundings, while also highlighting the ethical repercussions of possessing a wondrous gift. Although the "black star" does not function as a typical magical artifact, its role as an inborn mark that determines the hero's destiny is inseparable from the serpent staff's mysterious power, whose energy can both expand the horizons of imagined worlds and confront the protagonist with significant moral trials^[18].

Bayan Bolatkhanova's story "Mangilik El" describes a celestial being, a star, transforming into a human form. "Our house's window was open. I was standing on the balcony, looking out when suddenly the sky lit up brightly. Two stars entered through the balcony window and gracefully landed. Beautiful music played next to me. Traditional Kazakh tunes like 'Balbyrauyn' and 'Ata Tolygau' played one after the other. The stars transformed into a beautiful girl and a handsome boy, both dressed in national Kazakh attire, their appearance and clothes shimmering like silver"^[19].

Kadyr Myrzaliev's fairy tale "Balshyquly Balshyqbai"^[20] brings to life a puppet made of clay, imbued with life by Aybala. Balshyqbai embodies the naivety and mischievousness typical of a child. Only at the end does Balshyqbai advocate for discipline and direct children towards goodness. The act of imbuing a puppet with life should be understood mythologically. Ancient discoveries of puppets remind us of humanity's attempts not only to animate them

with mobility but also to impart a semblance of sentient life.

Another illustrative example of Kazakh children's fantasy literature is found in "The Adventures of Batu and His Friends"^[21] by Zira Naubayeva, where Batu embarks on a mystical journey to recover the Golden Chalice, a symbol of unity and balance. Although it follows the familiar structure of a heroic quest, the narrative enriches this formula with subtle references to Kazakh traditions, situating Batu's challenges within a culturally resonant landscape. As he traverses unfamiliar terrain and encounters uncanny events, the young hero gradually learns the importance of solidarity, reciprocity, and shared values—ideas that quietly echo throughout Kazakh folklore. Ultimately, his pursuit of the Golden Chalice transcends an ordinary adventure, culminating in a reaffirmation of collective harmony and a renewed appreciation for the unspoken bonds binding individuals to each other and to their communal heritage.

The typological convergences between Kazakh and English-language fantasy literature are most evident in their shared mechanism of neomythologization. Both literary traditions engage with myth not as a static, sacralized narrative but as a dynamic and transformative structure, integrating archaic mythopoetic models into new cultural and historical contexts. This process enables fantasy literature to function as a hybrid space where traditional mythological elements undergo reinterpretation, producing complex intertextual engagements with the past.

To better understand how traditional myth informs modern fantasy, this section outlines key mechanisms of neomythologization. Contemporary fantasy literature does not merely reflect mythopoetic traditions; it also operates as an elaborate system of myth reinterpretation, weaving archaic mythological models into new cultural and historical settings. Three main mechanisms help illustrate this:

1. Hermeneutic Reconstruction of Myth. Instead of preserving myth in its sacred form, authors adapt and reinterpret mythological structures and themes to align with present-day cultural contexts.
2. Subversive Dynamics of Mythologemes. Traditional binaries (sacred/profane, hero/monster, magical/real) are often deconstructed to include hybrid identities and ambiguous characters, adding psychological and moral depth to children's fantasy.

3. Chronotopic Modifications. Myth typically exists in cyclical, sacred time, distinct from historical linearity. Fantasy often merges these temporalities, creating layered timelines where the past, present, and mythical realm coexist.

The fantasy discourse in contemporary literature thus does not merely reflect mythopoetic traditions but operates as a sophisticated system of myth reinterpretation. Rather than mechanically reproducing mythological structures, it consciously transforms them, positioning fantasy as one of the most significant literary forms for negotiating the intersections between archaic narratives and modern storytelling.

Within this framework, three key mechanisms through which neomythologization manifests in fantasy texts can be distinguished.

Fantasy rarely preserves myth in its traditional, sacred form, yet it actively invokes its structures. Unlike myth, which retains an ontological authority, the fantasy text engages in an aesthetic and conceptual reinterpretation of mythological elements. This transformation occurs within a hermeneutic strategy, wherein the text does not simply reproduce myth but transposes it into a new socio-cultural and philosophical context.

Such reconstruction extends beyond a mere adaptation of mythological motifs. Instead, it involves a discursive displacement of myth, which becomes particularly apparent in the intersection of myth with scientific and philosophical paradigms. For example, cosmogonic myths may serve as the foundation for the exploration of ontological categories, while eschatological structures may be reformulated within dystopian narratives. This approach is evident in both Kazakh and English-language fantasy, where foundational myths are subjected to reinterpretation in response to national, historical, and ideological discourses.

Another defining feature of neomythological fantasy is the subversion of classical mythological models. In traditional myth, the sacred narrative adheres to a rigid binary opposition: sacred/profane, hero/antihero, magical/real. However, in neomythological fantasy, these binaries undergo deconstruction and hybridization.

For instance, hybrid identities disrupt the established clarity of mythological categories. In archaic myth, the hero is sharply distinguished from the monstrous, yet in neomythological fantasy, the boundary between these entities becomes

ambiguous, reflecting more nuanced cultural and philosophical models of subjectivity. As noted by Harris S., “hybrid identities and multicultural groups are defined as better able to adapt to new environments, connecting the idea of hybridity to the survival of the human race”^[22].

Additionally, subversiveness manifests in the inversion of mythologemes: what was traditionally perceived as sacred may, in a fantasy context, be rendered ironic or even parodic. Thus, fantasy operates not only as a continuation of mythological tradition but also as a critical revision of its foundational structures, questioning absolute truths and reshaping inherited narratives in accordance with contemporary concerns.

A fundamental feature of the mythological narrative is its sacred time, which follows a cyclical rather than linear structure. In archaic cultures, myth functions outside of historical temporality, in a timeless model where events unfold in *illo tempore* (Lat. “in those times”), detached from specific historical reality. M. Eliade, in *The Sacred and the Profane*, explains the cyclical and sacred nature of mythological time: “Sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. From one perspective, it could be said that it does not ‘pass,’ that it does not constitute an irreversible duration. It is an ontological time, *par excellence*”^[23].

This concept is particularly relevant to Kazakh fantasy literature, where the portrayal of mythic events often echoes Eliade’s notion of the “eternal return.” In contrast to Western fantasy, which frequently employs linear temporality in structuring its heroic narratives, Kazakh fantasy literature interweaves mythological pasts, ancestral neowisdom, and contemporary realities into a unified framework of continuous recurrence. The magical transformations in Kazakh fantasy are not one-time occurrences but are linked to ancestral memory and the cosmic cycles of Tengrist cosmology. For example, in Bayan Bolatkhonova’s *Mangilik El*, the celestial transformation of the protagonist does not signify a rupture in time but a reconnection with the primordial order of existence, aligning with Eliade’s view that sacred events exist beyond temporal constraints.

Similarly, Western fantasy narratives often depict magic as a force to be learned and mastered, establishing clear progressions of power and skill over time. In Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, Gandalf transitions from Gandalf the Grey to Gandalf the White, marking a distinct

evolution of his magical abilities within a structured temporality. However, in Kazakh fantasy, magic is more commonly depicted as an intrinsic, immutable connection to the sacred, existing beyond the constraints of time and human agency. This resonates with Eliade's perspective that mythic structures persist outside of linear chronology, reaffirming the ontological presence of the mythic past in the present.

W. Burkert discusses the connection between sacred time and ritual reenactment in myths: "Ritual serves to connect the profane world of human beings with the sacred time of the gods, allowing a return to the primordial moment of mythic origins"^[24].

Fantasy literature, however, modifies this mythological chronotope, producing hybrid temporal structures that blend historical and mythical dimensions. Several key temporal strategies emerge in this process:

- Contamination of mythological and historical time: the mythological past becomes interwoven with historical events, generating multi-layered narrative frameworks that resist conventional temporality.
- Localization of sacred time: unlike traditional myth, which posits an originary "time of beginnings," fantasy often anchors mythic time to specific historical moments, thereby producing alternative historiographies.
- Nonlinear temporality: in contrast to the cyclical time of myth and the linear progression of historical narratives, fantasy employs fragmented, recursive, and multi-level time, where past, present, and future interpenetrate and influence one another.

Thus, the neomythologization of fantasy literature extends beyond the mere preservation of mythological elements. It represents a post-mythological strategy, in which myth functions not only as a narrative foundation but also as a conceptual framework for engaging with contemporary philosophical, political, and cultural discourses.

By employing mythological structures in a dynamic and transformative manner, fantasy literature redefines the mythic paradigm, constructing a hybrid mythopoetics that characterizes both Kazakh and English-language fantasy traditions in the 21st century. This fusion of myth and modern storytelling not only enriches the literary landscape but also shapes the way readers engage with fantasy narratives, particularly in children's literature.

Within this framework, magic becomes more than just an aesthetic or narrative tool; it functions as a compelling strategy employed by the author to captivate young readers, immersing them in a world of wonder and providing them with a temporary escape from reality, where their imagination can roam freely. However, beyond the magical allure, the protagonist serves a crucial purpose for child readers. They are not only figures of adventure but also contemporary heroes who guide young audiences through moral and existential dilemmas, offering a model for personal growth and self-discovery.

As a result, young readers evaluate and compare themselves to the protagonist, using these literary figures as reference points for their own identities^[25]. If the protagonist's actions resonate with the reader's sense of right and wrong, they become more than just engaging characters—they become emulatable and educative figures, shaping the reader's perception of values, aspirations, and the complexities of the world they are growing into. For Kazakh children, this process acquires an additional postcolonial dimension: the ability to see themselves in protagonists who embody local cultural values and historical experiences affirms their collective identity. By fostering identification with heroes who reflect distinctly Kazakh traditions, authors counteract a legacy of external hegemonies, enabling young readers to reclaim narratives of self-worth and cultural authenticity that might otherwise be overshadowed in a globalized literary landscape.

However, magic in these stories is an appealing strategy employed by the author to engage children, pulling them into a unique atmosphere of wonder and allowing them a momentary escape from reality to unleash their imagination. Beyond the magical allure, the protagonist plays a vital role for child readers. They serve as a contemporary hero, a guide on how to navigate life, presenting a model for what children and adolescents might aspire to become. Young readers evaluate and compare themselves to the protagonist. If the protagonist's actions align with the reader's sense of right, they become engaging, emulatable, and educative.

Furthermore, characters that are straightforward and relatable are successful, especially if they align with the reader's age, explaining why today's young readers might prefer Harry Potter. Starting from his school-age years, the protagonist grows with his readers.

Mythical characters from magical worlds (from the reader's perspective) assume positive, heroic roles. They are capable of combating evil. Fans of such books today not only read works in the fantasy genre but also emulate their favorite characters and aspire to resemble them. Children and adolescents test their identities and create texts based on published books, actively participating in the narrative worlds they adore.

Despite sharing common mechanisms of neomythologization, such as hermeneutic reconstruction of myth, subversive dynamics of mythologemes, and chronotopic modification, Kazakh and international children's fantasy literature exhibit significant typological divergences in their approaches to mythopoetics (See **Table 1**). These differences stem from distinct mythological traditions, the degree of desacralization of myth, narrative strategies, and the structure of imagery, all of which are especially crucial in shaping fantasy texts for young readers.

Children's fantasy literature is designed not only to entertain but also to introduce young readers to fundamental cultural and philosophical concepts. While Western children's fantasy often emphasizes individual identity, personal growth, and moral dilemmas, Kazakh children's fantasy tends to focus on collective values, continuity of tradition, and the interconnection between humanity and nature.

In Western children's fantasy, world-building is often based on the model of subcreation, where the author constructs a secondary reality with its own autonomous system of laws. These fantasy worlds, though they borrow from mythology (e.g., Arthurian legends, Norse myths), are not directly tied to historical or ethnocultural identity, allowing them to be more universal and adaptable.

For instance, in J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, the magical world operates independently from British folklore, structured instead as an educational and social system that young readers can explore. Similarly, C.S. Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia" draws on a mix of Christian allegory and European mythology but presents it in a detached, fictionalized setting.

Kazakh children's fantasy, on the other hand, follows a model of mythopoetic reproduction, where the fantasy world is not artificially created but emerges from an already established mythological system. The historical and cultural

continuity of Kazakh folklore remains integral, making it difficult to separate the fantasy setting from national traditions.

For example, Kazakh children's fantasy often incorporates Tengrist cosmology, ancestral spirits, and the sacred geography of the steppe as inseparable from the protagonist's journey. Rather than entering an invented world, the child hero uncovers hidden layers of their own reality, where myths and history coexist.

In Western children's fantasy, sacred elements are often secularized—they become part of the magical system rather than retaining a strictly religious or ritualistic function. The sacred, when present, is frequently used as a narrative tool to drive character development rather than as an element that preserves cultural identity.

For example, in Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials" angels, spirits, and metaphysical entities exist within a framework that questions traditional religious interpretations. Magic in many Western children's fantasy works follows a set of rationalized rules, akin to a system that can be studied and mastered.

In contrast, Kazakh children's fantasy preserves the spiritual and metaphysical essence of myth. The supernatural is not simply a tool for adventure—it is part of the character's cultural and moral inheritance. Spirits of ancestors, magical animals, and shamanic figures are not abstract magical beings but essential guides who reinforce ethical and philosophical lessons.

For example, in contemporary Kazakh children's fantasy, the young protagonist often embarks on a journey not to "gain power" over magic but to restore balance between human and natural forces, echoing traditional Tengrist beliefs.

Western children's fantasy frequently follows the hero's journey structure, where the young protagonist undergoes personal development, discovers their own strengths, and ultimately achieves independence. The central conflict is often internal, focusing on self-identity, moral dilemmas, and personal choice. The narrator imparts specific values to the reader through this affirmative "structural completeness," so that the reader identifies with the protagonist and gains these values that enable the hero to succeed in the process of adventuring with him. In doing so, the reader, like the hero, can become a better social entity, better integrate into

society, and better play his social role when he returns from the adventure. It is through this model that fantasy literature implicitly instills socially accepted values and worldviews in readers as they read, allowing them to follow the adventures and grow with the protagonist.

For instance, in “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” Alice’s journey is largely psychological—her adventures in Wonderland force her to navigate a world of nonsensical rules, teaching her how to think independently. Similarly, in “Harry Potter” the protagonist undergoes a transformation from an ordinary boy into a hero who must define his own destiny.

Kazakh children’s fantasy, however, portrays the young protagonist not as an isolated individual but as part of a larger cosmic and communal order. The hero’s primary goal is not self-discovery but the restoration of balance—be it in nature, in their family, or within society.

For example, in Kazakh myth-inspired children’s stories, the protagonist’s trials are often linked to ancestral knowledge and ethical responsibilities rather than individual ambition. Unlike Western fantasy, where the child hero might “save the world” through their own choices, Kazakh fantasy often emphasizes the hero’s role as a mediator, reinforcing traditional values and the continuity between generations.

In Western children’s fantasy, magic is often portrayed as an external system that can be learned, studied, and mastered—similar to science or language. This rationalization of magic allows for structured world-building, where characters engage with spells, potions, and magical artifacts as if they were academic disciplines.

For example, in “Percy Jackson & The Olympians” magic is based on Greek mythology but functions independently of its religious roots, acting as a skill set that young heroes can wield. Similarly, in “The Hobbit” the presence of wizards and enchanted objects follows a logical structure within the fantasy world’s mythology.

This reflects the traditional Kazakh belief that spiritual insight and wisdom are gifts granted by nature or ancestors, rather than something one can “study” or “control” through effort alone.

Western children’s fantasy often relies on the portal fantasy model—a closed, self-contained magical world that the

protagonist must enter and navigate. Examples include Narnia, Wonderland, and Neverland. These separate dimensions provide a contrast between the real world and the magical, reinforcing the idea of adventure as an escape.

Kazakh children’s fantasy, however, follows a nomadic cosmology, where the supernatural is not confined to a separate world but flows through and intertwines with everyday reality. The landscape itself—mountains, steppes, sacred rivers—is not just a setting but an active participant in the story, reflecting the Kazakh mythopoetic tradition in which space is fluid rather than fixed. In the book “Kazakh Culture” edited by Tursun Gabitov, it is noted that “in the Kazakh tradition, mythological images and reality coexist, creating a unique perception of the world where the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are blurred”^[26].

Instead of traveling to a separate land, the child hero uncovers the hidden magical dimensions of their own world, revealing layers of existence previously unknown to them. This reflects the belief that the supernatural is not “out there” but embedded in the fabric of reality, accessible only to those with the insight to perceive it.

Kazakh and international children’s fantasy, despite their shared use of mythopoetic structures, differ fundamentally in how they integrate mythology into their narratives. Western fantasy constructs independent, rule-based magical worlds, while Kazakh fantasy reproduces existing mythological and spiritual traditions as a natural extension of reality. “For about ten years, Kazakhstani children’s book authors have been trying to strengthen a sense of civic identity in Kazakhstan through their writing”^[27].

These differences shape the role of the child hero—whether as a self-actualizing individual in Western tradition or as a guardian of balance and continuity in Kazakh tradition. Likewise, while Western fantasy emphasizes mastery of magic and personal growth, Kazakh fantasy highlights the interconnectedness of past, present, and future, reinforcing ethical and communal responsibilities.

Thus, Kazakh children’s fantasy functions not as an alternative reality, but as a re-encoding of ancestral wisdom, where myth is not merely a narrative device but an active, living presence that continues to shape the world of the young protagonists.

Table 1. Comparative table of Kazakh and English fantasy.

| Aspect | Kazakh Fantasy | English Fantasy |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Mythological Foundations | Deeply rooted in Kazakh mythology, Tengrist cosmology, and folklore | Draws from a mix of European mythology (Arthurian legends, Norse myths, Christian allegory) |
| World-Building | Not artificially created; emerges from existing mythological systems | Secondary worlds are constructed with unique rules and systems |
| Magic and Supernatural | Magic is a spiritual force tied to ancestral spirits and nature | Magic is rationalized as a system that can be learned and mastered |
| Protagonist's Role | Protagonist serves as a mediator, restoring balance between humans and nature | Protagonist embarks on a personal journey of self-discovery and independence |
| Narrative Structure | Emphasizes communal values, intergenerational ties, and harmony with nature | Focuses on individual growth, heroism, and personal choice |
| Cultural Values | Focuses on collective well-being, tradition, and ethical responsibilities | Highlights individualism, moral dilemmas, and personal achievements |
| Connection to Reality | Supernatural elements exist within the real world, often hidden from ordinary perception | Often features portal fantasy—separate magical worlds distinct from reality |
| Hero's Journey | Hero's quest is about restoring balance rather than individual self-discovery | Hero's journey is a coming-of-age story, emphasizing personal transformation |
| Nature and Environment | Landscape and nature are active participants in the story | Nature is often an aesthetic backdrop rather than an active force |
| Sacred and Profane | Maintains a strong connection between sacred myths and everyday life | Sacred elements are often secularized and used for narrative purposes |
| Role of Ancestral Wisdom | Ancestral knowledge and wisdom guide the hero's journey | Mythology is reinterpreted but detached from religious or ancestral traditions |

4. Conclusions

The study highlights the unique poetic features of Kazakh children's fantasy literature, its reliance on mythopoetic structures, and its deep integration of Tengrist cosmology and ancestral wisdom. Through comparative analysis, it becomes evident that while Kazakh fantasy literature shares common mechanisms of neomythologization with Western fantasy, it differs significantly in its approach to world-building, narrative structure, and the role of the protagonist.

A critical evaluation of these findings suggests that Kazakh fantasy literature, while rooted in national traditions, has significant potential for further development within the framework of global literary trends. The increasing accessibility of Kazakh literature through translations and digital platforms presents an opportunity for its integration into the broader discourse of contemporary fantasy fiction. However, to gain wider international recognition, Kazakh fantasy literature may need to explore hybrid narrative strategies that balance traditional mythological elements with innovative storytelling techniques.

One potential avenue for development lies in the incorporation of contemporary themes, such as ecological

consciousness, technological advancements, and postcolonial reinterpretations, which enhance the global relevance of Kazakh fantasy literature while preserving its distinct cultural identity. Additionally, a more dynamic engagement with intertextuality and transmedia storytelling could expand its reach among younger audiences accustomed to interactive and multimedia narratives.

Thus, the future trajectory of Kazakh fantasy literature may depend on its ability to evolve while maintaining its mythopoetic roots. By engaging in dialogue with global literary trends and adapting to changing reader expectations of national identity. These aspects, when integrated with traditional mythological structures, could, allow Kazakh fantasy literature to establish itself as a vital and influential genre in both national and international literary contexts.

Future research directions could involve:

1. Close textual readings that delve into specific narrative devices, strengthening the link between theory and textual evidence.
2. Comparative studies on how children in different cultural contexts interpret and engage with magic in fantasy, illuminating shared developmental themes alongside distinct cultural markers.
3. Examinations of transmedia narratives, such as film adap-

tations or interactive digital media, which could broaden the global reach of Kazakh fantasy literature.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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