



Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim Dergisi Sayı: 14/2 2025 s. 541-552, TÜRKİYE

Araştırma Makalesi

**THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF THE FANTASTIC GENRE AND ITS
STRUCTURE FROM TZVETAN TODOROV'S PERSPECTIVE**

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Geliş Tarihi: 19 Nisan 2025

Kabul Tarihi: 24 Nisan 2025

Abstract

This study explores the fantastic genre, emphasizing its role in shaping collective cultural narratives and engaging with supernatural and extraordinary elements throughout human history. Through an analysis of its structural and functional dimensions, the study investigates the mechanisms behind the fantastic genre, which constructs alternative realities distinct from the known world. The work of Tzvetan Todorov, in particular, provides a foundational framework for understanding the fantastic, where the tension between the uncanny and the marvellous creates a sense of hesitation for both the characters and the reader. Todorov's analysis addresses the social function of the fantastic genre, highlighting its ability to transgress societal norms and express repressed emotions through supernatural occurrences. By classifying fantastic works such as pure uncanny, fantastic-uncanny, fantastic-marvellous, and pure marvellous, Todorov provides a nuanced understanding of how the genre challenges conventional reality. In this sense, this paper situates the fantastic genre within a broader literary and cultural context, revealing its evolving nature and ongoing theoretical exploration.

Keywords: Fantasy, Todorov, literary genre, uncanny, marvellous.

**FANTASTİK TÜRÜN TARİHSEL OLUŞUMU VE TZVETAN
TODOROV'UN PERSPEKTİFİNDEN YAPISI**

Öz

Bu çalışma, fantastik türü inceleyerek, onun kolektif kültürel anlatıları şekillendirmedeki rolünü ve insanlık tarihi boyunca doğaüstü ve olağanüstü öğelerle etkileşimini vurgulamaktadır. Yapısal ve işlevsel boyutlarının analizi aracılığıyla, bu çalışma, tanıdık dünyadan farklı alternatif gerçeklikler inşa eden fantastik türün arkasındaki mekanizmaları incelemektedir. Özellikle Tzvetan Todorov'un eseri; tekinsiz ile olağanüstü arasındaki gerilimin hem karakterlerde hem de okuyucuda bir tereddüt duygusu yarattığı yerde fantastik türü anlamak için temel bir çerçeve sunar. Todorov'un analizinde fantastik türün sosyal işlevi ele alınmakta, toplumsal normları aşma ve doğaüstü olaylar aracılığıyla bastırılmış duyguları ifade etme yeteneği vurgulanmaktadır. Fantastik eserleri "saf tekinsiz", fantastik- tekinsiz, fantastik-olağanüstü ve saf olağanüstü gibi kategorilere ayıran Todorov, türün geleneksel gerçekliği nasıl sorguladığına dair daha incelikli bir anlayış

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sunmaktadır. Bu anlamda, bu çalışma fantastik türü daha geniş bir edebî ve kültürel bağlamda konumlandırarak, onun evrilen doğasını ve süregelen teorik keşfini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Fantastik, Todorov, edebî tür, tekinsizlik, olağanüstülük.

Introduction

Since the dawn of human existence, individuals have exhibited a profound and enduring fascination with the unknown and the extraordinary. This curiosity has consistently fuelled human imagination and creativity, playing a crucial role in shaping the collective body of knowledge passed down through generations. The extraordinary and the unknown—often products of human imagination, and at times attributed to supernatural forces—have not only inspired scientific discoveries but have also been prominently reflected in both oral and written literary traditions. Such elements of the extraordinary can be found in the simplest of children's tales, passed down over centuries, in travel narratives documenting and promoting distant lands, and even in religious doctrines recorded millennia ago. Given these considerations, one might assume that the reality of the known world and the complexities of human experience would suffice for humankind. However, it becomes essential to question the source of the human inclination to create or believe in supernatural, extraordinary, miraculous, or unseen phenomena. Is this inclination merely an instinctual curiosity embedded within human nature, or does it stem from a deeper yearning for alternative worlds and realities—an attempt to transcend the limitations of the tangible world through the power of imagination?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine the literary texts that have frequently incorporated such elements. Some of these works are entirely constructed upon the foundation of an unknown or extraordinary reality. The widespread reception of these alternative realities by diverse readerships further necessitates the classification of such texts within a distinct literary framework. Therefore, exploring the roots of this literary framework becomes essential for understanding the formation and structure of the literary genre known as the *fantastic* in contemporary scholarship, particularly with reference to the literary works that encompass extraordinary elements. However, the analysis and interpretation of these texts often diverge from those of other literary genres, particularly in relation to their descriptive techniques, character construction, and the conceptual frameworks they employ.

Although the origins and precise definition of the fantastic as a literary genre remain somewhat elusive, the subject has been extensively explored by both literary critics and psychologists. In light of the fact that the second half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of some of the most significant works of fantastic literature amidst the backdrop of devastating wars, shifting global dynamics, unconventional political regimes, and technological advancements, it is crucial to recognize that some narratives unfold within settings that distinctly diverge from the real world. Unlike many other literary genres, fantastic literature cannot always be meaningfully interpreted solely through the lens of the sociocultural or political conditions of the period in which it was written, nor simply as a reflection of the author's personal experiences.

1. A Brief History of Fantasy as a Literary Genre

One of the defining characteristics of contemporary culture is the renewed interest in fantasy across multiple dimensions: as a fundamental aspect of human cognition, as a persistent influence within social and intellectual spheres, and as a driving force in the creation of artistic and literary forms. This growing scholarly focus on fantasy as a subject of inquiry has the potential to bring about significant revisions in established critical frameworks and may even prompt a reassessment of the function and significance of expression itself. In the 21st century, literary critics have undertaken a rigorous examination of the frameworks and boundaries that define literary and textual genres, while also critically assessing the paradoxes and instabilities inherent in their classification. Among these, Jacques Derrida's essay *The Law of Genre* (1979), originally presented as a lecture and later published in Glyph (1980), interrogates the instability and paradoxes in the categorization of literary genres. In his approach, he deconstructs the notion that genres have clear, rigid boundaries and instead suggests that the very concept of genre involves a self-contradictory logic by criticizing that *"As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind."* (Derrida, 1980, p. 56). However, he suggests that this limit is paradoxical, as it necessitates that a work adhere to genre conventions to be recognized within a genre while simultaneously requiring it to be unique to exist as a distinct work, thereby destabilizing rigid genre classifications.

And, when the genre is fantasy, it emerges as a vast and intellectually compelling subject, both within literature and in broader cultural contexts. Its intrinsic connection to imagination and desire has rendered it challenging to articulate or define. Indeed, the very essence of fantasy appears to lie in its resistance to strict categorization, as well as in its perceived freedom and escapist nature. Moran (1994, p. 60) explains this as *"the name given to narratives that do not recognize the concepts of time, space, and character in realism, blur the distinction between animate and inanimate, and incorporate an alternative world beyond our familiar world."* Thus, unlike more realistic texts, literary fantasies often transcend conventional constraints, disregarding traditional unities of time, space, and character. They frequently subvert chronological order, defy three-dimensionality, and blur rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, as well as life and death. Regarding fantasy's inherent elusiveness and its defiance of rigid classification, the endeavour to critically analyse, theorize, or systematize it may seem paradoxical, potentially undermining its escapist qualities and its association with pure imaginative pleasure.

Similarly, although fantastic elements are present within the text, not all literary works that incorporate such features are strictly classified within this genre. Although literary texts of fantasy find their origins in ancient mythology, mysticism, fairy tales, folklore, and the tradition of romance, many works intersect with science fiction, historical romance, or children's literature, demonstrating the fluidity of genre boundaries. Traditional fantastic literature is often set in an indeterminate past, frequently framed as occurring *'a long time ago'* or *'once upon a time'*, and commonly features unnamed protagonists whose narratives, infused with didactic themes and local folkloric elements, unfold in imaginary or uncharted realms. Furthermore, a historical analysis of the fantastic genre reveals its presence across diverse cultural traditions, both oral and written, underscoring its widespread and enduring influence. However, like every phenomenon, fantasy is inherently subject to change, about which Jackson (1981, p. 2) posits

that “as a literature of ‘unreality’, fantasy has altered in character over the years in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes ‘reality’.”

Chronologically, until the Renaissance, the Western literary canon was predominantly shaped by narratives infused with supernatural, extraordinary, and seemingly impossible events, often resembling ancient myths and legends. However, with the rise of the seventeenth century and the increasing emphasis on rational thought and scientific inquiry, the popularity of narratives that reinforced primitive superstitions and the supernatural gradually declined. Despite this shift, the Renaissance, while accelerating the transition toward scientific realism and empirical thought, did not diminish the fundamental role of imagination as a crucial means through which humanity interprets the world. This enduring significance of imagination ultimately facilitated the later emergence of the science fiction genre and the intersection of fantastical and speculative fiction in certain literary works.

About this phenomenon, Steinmetz (2006, p. 52) points out that while the 17th century exhibited an awareness of the extraordinary, particularly as represented in fairy tales, the 18th century marked a shift in intellectual perspectives, fostering the conditions necessary for the emergence of the modern conception of the fantastic. Bloom (1982, p. 2) also suggests that the decline of the Enlightenment in the 18th century created an anxiety about being belated, which was later absorbed by Romanticism and Freud; thus, suppressed anxiety became a key source of modern literary fantasy, as fantasy provides an escape from the feeling of being behind or out of place in time. This highlights how the Age of Enlightenment unexpectedly contributed to the development and dissemination of this genre, also supporting Tolkien’s definition of fantasy as ‘a natural human activity’, proposing that fantasy neither undermines reason nor opposes the pursuit of scientific truth or the accurate perception of reality. In fact, the more precise and refined one’s rational faculties, the more effectively fantasy can be developed. Conversely, if individuals lose interest in truth or become incapable of perceiving reality, even temporarily, their capacity for meaningful fantasy significantly diminishes. (Tolkien, 1999, p. 51). So, with the advancement of scientific progress in an increasingly modernized society, fantasy texts emerged within a capitalist economy, reflecting the profound psychological consequences of materialistic culture and frequently exhibiting themes of violence and horror as a response to the anxieties and discontents of the early 19th century as Gunn (2005, p.11) also states as “[t]he basis of fantasy is psychological truth; nothing else matters. The basis of science fiction is the real world.”

As the genre’s evidence of existence captured in the oral and written utterances throughout history, it is seen that back in earlier years, the first serious attempt to define the fantastic genre and its origins was made by Pierre-Georges Castex who suggests throughout his work *The Fantastic Tale in France from Nodier to Maupassant* (1951) that the emergence of the fantastic genre was influenced by practices such as pathognomy, mesmerism, phrenology, and magnetism, which highly became widespread in the 1770s, as well as a kind of occult belief systems which can be considered as a result of the desire to escape from the problems of the age and find solace in a different universe led to an increase in fantastic narratives. From this perspective, the fantastic, in Castex’s perspective, differs from classical epic or mythological narratives, and at its core, the fantastic involves the deliberate inclusion of an imaginary mystery into the real world. However, although his work is considered the first serious try to define the existence of the fantastic as a literary genre, the recognition and naming of the fantastic as a

literary genre largely came about through the efforts of the Bulgarian-born French thinker Tzvetan Todorov, who was the first to undertake a detailed study of this genre.

Moreover, the genre, referred to as the '*modern fairy tale* or *product of modern romanticism*' by some scholars as Kane (2019, p. 142), was the one on which critique and analysis within the framework of existing critical theories and logical boundaries were insufficient. Hence, the fantastic literature genre was often equated with the rapidly popularizing science fiction genre of the 19th century initially. However, considering the explicability of the phenomena within the framework of logic and natural laws, it was argued that while these two genres could sometimes overlap, they should be treated as separate genres based on their structural elements. In tracing the historical roots of the fantasy genre, on the other hand, the authors of *Fantastic*, Hines & Furby (2014, p. 17) argue that *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, composed around 2000 BCE and regarded as the earliest written example of Sumerian fantastic literature, originated as a collective expression of earlier oral folk narratives, legends, and belief systems. Consequently, the foundations of the fantastic literary tradition, found across nearly all cultures, can be linked to epic and lyric poetry, mythology, religious narratives, fairy tales, and oral traditions. Similarly, Homer's *Odyssey*, widely recognized as an early exemplar of the genre, drew heavily on mythological sources and significantly influenced subsequent literary works. In Eastern traditions, *One Thousand and One Nights*, noted for its rich incorporation of fantastical elements, has left a lasting legacy on global literature, inspiring texts such as *The Canterbury Tales*. In the European context, the *Tales of Grimm and Andersen*, initially shared to convey moral lessons to children, gained international recognition and became seminal contributions to the genre, often evolving through adaptation across cultures.

It is significant to note that many of the earliest serious literary works in English, as well as in other national literary traditions, contain elements of the fantastic. In English literature, *Beowulf* stands out as a foundational example, characterized by its epic structure, the presence of supernatural beings, and complex character portrayals. J.R.R. Tolkien explicitly acknowledged *Beowulf* as a key influence in his creation of Middle-earth, highlighting the text's formative role in the development of modern fantasy literature. Furthermore, fantastical elements are not limited to epic narratives; they also appear in early dramatic works, notably in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Despite the long-standing presence of fantastical motifs, fantasy did not emerge as a clearly defined literary genre until the modern period, shaped by the philosophical and aesthetic shifts of Romanticism and the experimental impulses of Modernism. Within this trajectory, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* introduced a radical reinterpretation of the fantastic by dispensing with narrative ambiguity and presenting the extraordinary as an immediate and unquestioned reality, on which Jackson (1981, p. 93) points the fact that "*Kafka's tales and unfinished novels are 'fantastic' at a level beyond the marvellous or the uncanny. Their extraordinary actuality cannot be located as supernatural or as generated by a misapprehending subject.*"

As Kafka and other modernist writers developed new literary modes, the pursuit of traditional fantasy elements diminished. From the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, literary fantasy underwent a range of semantic changes that have been linked to evolving ideas and belief systems. As capitalism fostered a more secular mindset, older notions of the supernatural and magical gradually lost their influence. This shift brought about significant transformations in how fantasy represented and interpreted the concept of otherness, a theme

central to the genre. Nevertheless, in subsequent decades, similar narrative strategies and thematic concerns reemerged within the framework of modern fantasy literature, demonstrating the genre's capacity for adaptation and reinvention.

Although the fantastic genre gained widespread recognition only within the past century, several seminal works have been instrumental in its classification and development. Notable among these are George MacDonald's *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858), often considered the first novel of the fantastic genre, along with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950), and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series (1954), all of which have significantly shaped the genre's foundations. Furthermore, the contributions of contemporary authors such as Roald Dahl, Terry Pratchett, Neil Gaiman, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stephen King, Robert Jordan, J. K. Rowling, Diana Wynne Jones, Susanna Clarke, and George R. R. Martin, among others, have further solidified the genre's prominence and prestige within global literary traditions. When these various works and perspectives are analysed, and fantastic literature is recognized as one of the literary genres that most effectively unveils the author's subconscious and imaginative faculties, defining its boundaries, structural framework, and the criteria by which a work is classified within this genre remains a subject of debate.

However, an etymological examination of the term *fantastic* may provide further insight into the conceptual foundations and structural characteristics of fantastic literature. The term '*fantastic*' derives from the Greek verb '*phantasein*', meaning '*to make visible*', '*to appear*', or '*to show*', and from the Latin adjective '*phantasticus*'. And this word refers to '*manifesting*', '*appearing*' or '*emerging*' when extraordinary situations occur. As Steinmetz (2006, p. 8) similarly emphasises that "*Phantasia is an illusion, like phantasma, which means ghost or specter. The adjective phantastikon (pertaining to imagination) gives way to the noun phantastiké, meaning 'the ability to imagine baseless things.'*" Similarly, in Nouveau Larousse Illustré (1898: 441), it is stated that the word '*fantastic*' comes from the Latin '*fantasticus*', meaning '*unreal, related to delusions, imaginary*'. Considering all these explanations, the etymology of the word '*fantastic*', like the content of its literary products, carries ambiguity and uncertainty; caught between absence and presence, on the one hand shows what is not, and on the other, destroys what is and overturns reality. Thus, it can be proposed that critics frequently use concepts such as '*the unknowability of the extraordinary*' or '*the balance between reality and imagination*' when defining the fantastic.

Similarly, Wolfe (2011, p. 61) argues that fantastic literature is a genre that thrives on the tension between reality and imagination, with subgenres such as horror, science fiction, and fantasy, and that the elements that make the fantastic remarkable are magical and alternative worlds. In *Dictionnaire des Genres et Notions Littéraires* (2001, p. 290), it is highlighted that "*The supernatural is not frightening or even surprising because it constitutes the essence, the law, the atmosphere of this universe. In contrast, in the fantastic, the supernatural emerges as a rupture of universal coherence.*" Synthesizing these various explanations, the core elements of the fantasy genre highly coalesce around themes of human existence and imagination, as Sartre (1947, p. 58) also asserts that fantasy "*manifested our human power to transcend the human. Men strove to create a world that was not of this world,*" while the primary sources of inspiration that facilitate this act of transcendence are generally recognized as fairy tales, myths, folk narratives, and religious miracles. Soon after the identification of the main characteristics

of fantastic narratives, the need arises to analyze and interpret these texts through specific theoretical approaches, among which Tzvetan Todorov's framework has gained particular prominence in recent decades, especially with the rise of popular fantasy authors.

2. Fantastic Genre's Structure from Tzvetan Todorov's Perspective

When considering the transformation of the fantastic into a literary genre and how genres emerge, Tzvetan Todorov (1976, p. 161), in the section titled "*The Origin of Genres*" in his work *The Concept of Literature*, explains it as "*Directly from other genres. A new genre is always a transformation of one or several old genres, through inversion, displacement, or combination.*" On the other hand, Todorov, in his work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, first published in French in 1970, also made a detailed attempt to define and explain the fantastic genre by proposing that the uncanny and the marvellous are neighbouring genres of the fantastic. He argues that what makes a work belong to the fantastic genre is the hesitation in believing in the supernatural, and the fantastic lies in the uncertainty between the *uncanny* and the *marvellous*. This tension between real and imaginary worlds is experienced by both the reader and the novel's characters. In addition, this uncertainty must result in a choice, and in this dilemma, the atmosphere created by the fantastic and the mood should evoke in the reader. Additionally, the strange events narrated in a fantastic work can only be explained by the laws of the world created in that work, and the criteria of the real world cannot be applied to such works.

Todorov, while acknowledging that he was inspired by Frye, who had previously addressed this topic, does not refrain from criticizing his theory regarding his classification of the forms of fiction in the fantastic genre into six main categories and identifying superiority in various ways. In Frye's (1957) first type of classification, the hero of the literary text is superior to real-world individuals and natural laws, and such a work can be classified as a '*myth*'. Also, the hero's superiority in the text can be a graded superiority, which places the work in the category of '*legend*', '*myth*' or '*fairy tale*'. On the other hand, if the hero's superiority is not against natural laws but only against the reader, Frye defines this as '*high mimetic mode*'. However, if the hero of the work has no superiority over the reader or nature, the fiction is '*low mimetic*', and if the main character is positioned below both the reader and the existing natural laws, then the work's fiction is '*irony*'. In the second type of fiction defined by Frye, there is verisimilitude, and in this type of narrative, which forms the two fundamental poles of literature, any kind of fiction can be created provided it adheres to verisimilitude. In the third type of fiction, Frye emphasizes the two fundamental orientations of literature in which the literary work can be a '*comedy*' that brings the hero and society together or a '*tragedy*' that isolates the hero from society. Frye, who also expressed views on archetypes, considers the classification in this area the most essential by proposing four main categories in the classification of these archetypes (*four mythoi*) which are the "*romance: within the ideal*", "*irony: within reality*", "*comedy: transition from reality to the ideal*", and "*tragedy: transition from the ideal to reality*". Frye's fifth classification is a true genre classification and offers a way to classify fantastic works as *drama*, *lyric poetry*, *epic poetry*, and *prose*. Finally, with his classification of "*confession*" (intellectual and introverted), "*romance*" (personal and introverted), "*anatomy*" (extroverted and intellectual), and "*novel*" (personal and extroverted), he also highlights an alternative fiction classification. (Frye, 1957, p. 158-239).

Todorov, however, critiques Frye for his ambiguity by proposing two fundamental approaches to explaining a strange phenomenon. In a fantastic literary text, an event can be interpreted as arising either from natural causes or from supernatural causes. The reader's hesitation and uncertainty between these two possibilities generate the fantastic effect. In this framework, the fantastic is defined as the hesitation experienced by a subject who acknowledges no laws beyond those of the natural world when confronted with an ostensibly supernatural event. In such instances, two principal resolutions emerge: either the natural laws governing the events and characters within the narrative remain intact, implying that the perceived supernatural occurrence is a product of illusion or imagination, or an alternative set of unknown laws operates, signifying that the extraordinary events within the text have genuinely transpired. It is precisely in this state of indecision and ambiguity that the fantastic effect manifests, ultimately positioning the work within a distinct literary genre. From this perspective, Todorov proposes two primary dimensions of the fantastic as the *structure and function* of the text. Regarding structure, he identifies three essential elements that require analysis as *the verbal, syntactic, and semantic* dimensions of the text. The verbal dimension necessitates that the reader experiences a sense of hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations for the events depicted. In this context, Todorov's first condition aligns with the notion of perspective and, consequently, with the verbal dimension of the text, as hesitation stems from the reader's inability to definitively determine whether the narrated events are real or illusory. The fantastic, therefore, emerges in the liminal space between these two interpretations, deriving its defining characteristics from the uncertainty it engenders.

Todorov's second condition stipulates that the reader must identify with the protagonist's hesitation, engaging with the narrative exclusively on a literal level. Crucially, what distinguishes Todorov's conceptualization from classical definitions of the fantastic is his insistence that the text should not lend itself to allegorical or poetic interpretation. This criterion underscores his effort to establish a specific readerly stance toward the literary text, one that resists symbolic or metaphorical readings in favour of a direct engagement with the narrative's fantastic elements. Referring that "*the fantastic can subsist only within fiction; poetry cannot be fantastic (though there may be anthologies of 'fantastic poetry')*". In short, *the fantastic implies fiction*", Todorov (1975, p. 60) conceptualizes poetry as a mere combination of words rather than a representation of objects, arguing that, as a result, it lacks a functional dimension. He contends that a poetic mode of reading poses a threat to the integrity of the fantastic genre, as the exclusion of representation and the treatment of each sentence as an independent semantic unit prevent the emergence of the fantastic. Crucially, for the fantastic to manifest, it must evoke a response to how events are presented within the narrative world.

Todorov's framework posits that an analysis of a text's syntactic structure provides critical insights into the style it employs, which he categorizes into three key aspects as *utterance, enunciation, and syntax*. According to the criterion of utterance, a fantastic text must employ a distinctive language and stylistic approach. To reinforce the uncertainty and hesitation inherent in the fantastic, the text should incorporate words that convey ambiguity and possibility, such as *perhaps, as if, seemed, could be said, and might have been*. Furthermore, when supernatural elements are introduced, the use of metaphorical expressions becomes essential, with rhetorical devices closely intertwined with the fantastic. The enunciation criterion, however, pertains directly to the narrative voice. Todorov argues that the narrator should adopt a first-person perspective, as this enhances the reader's immersion in the story and

heightens the effect of uncertainty. Finally, regarding syntax, he contends that a fantastic text should maintain a strictly linear narrative structure, avoiding flashbacks and ensuring that the story is intended to be read only once. This narrative progression is crucial for sustaining the reader's moment of hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations, a defining characteristic of the fantastic, which Todorov positions between the *uncanny* (*étrange*) and the *marvellous* (*merveilleux*). Deviation from these structural principles, he suggests, weakens the fantastic effect and disrupts the reader's engagement with the text.

In the semantic dimension of the text, Todorov gives the reader clues about the type of content the work should include. According to him, the semantic dimension of the text includes 'self-themes', which question the individual's relationship with the external world, the way of perception, and the functioning of consciousness, and related to this, 'other themes', which question the individual's relationship with their subconscious and unconscious. He also states that these themes serve a kind of censorship function in the fantastic literature genre, and the fantastic genre is a pretext used by many authors to express things they would never dare to express in a realistic language through the supernatural. In this context, the fantastic applies two types of censorship: the self-themes and other themes that run between the lines.

Hence, in summary, 'other themes' express all kinds of prohibitions, taboos, and repressed emotions and thoughts imposed by society, while 'self-themes' consist of the repressed complexes lying in the author's subconscious that they cannot express in their writings. At this very point where the concept of the subconscious comes into play, Todorov tries to exclude psychoanalysis from literature by ignoring Freud's teachings and the observations in Freud's work *The Uncanny* (1919), despite his identification of a specific manifestation of the illusion of centrality for the exploration of the underlying need for fantasy, "the omnipotence of thought," the belief that merely thinking about something can bring it into reality (Rabkin, 1939, p.30). Since, Todorov accepts that psychoanalysis has two facets: "the science of structures" and "the technique of interpretation" and interprets Freud's approach as providing information not so much about the language of imagination as about its mechanism and its internal functioning, acknowledging that psychoanalysis can be useful in interpreting literature, but delving into the structure of the psyche is not very necessary for literature. (Todorov, 1975, p. 149).

While the essence of most fantastic literary works is based on mythology, religions, and folk tales, according to Todorov, modern fantastic legitimizes the illegitimate and normalizes the abnormal, granting the author a certain degree of freedom by overturning existing reality. In this context, his work is considered the first significant study that goes beyond critiques defining fantasy in the traditional sense in terms of its relationship with reality and argues that the fantastic genre should be understood in terms of its relationship with reality, questioning the logical classification of the fantastic genre and offering a systematic formula for it. When considering the functional dimension of the text, Todorov identifies two primary functions for literary criticism: *literary and social*. The criterion for evaluating the literary function of a fantastic text is the balance of its narrative structure. From the beginning to the end of a work, a realistic structure and balance must be maintained, and during moments of imbalance, the author is responsible for evoking the uncertain, indecisive, unsettling, and exciting nature of the fantastic. Regarding these, equilibrium should be established at the beginning of the narrative,

followed by a structured imbalance in the progression of events, ultimately culminating in a restored absolute balance at the conclusion.

On the other hand, considering the social function of fantastic texts, Todorov asserts that their primary role is to transgress established societal norms and laws when an individual moves beyond the constraints and limitations of everyday reality. Thus, every suppressed sentiment that is forbidden or denied within the collective subconscious finds an opportunity for expression in an alternative world through fantastic literature. This function not only allows the fantasy author to articulate the unspeakable within a defined framework but also serves as a form of social reflection. In light of this information, it is evident that Todorov, who originates from a structuralist background, approaches the fantastic genre through a structuralist lens. Thus, the primary concern is not the mere inclusion of supernatural or extraordinary elements but rather the reader's perception of these occurrences and the sustained sense of uncertainty and ambiguity they evoke.

Furthermore, Todorov utilizes a classification scheme in his work to conceptualize the fantastic and its adjacent genres. According to this scheme, he identifies four main categories as "*pure uncanny, fantastic-uncanny, fantastic-marvellous, and pure marvellous*" and suggests that these subcategories encompass works in which "*fantastic hesitation is sustained and ultimately resolved either in the uncanny or the marvellous*". (Todorov, 1975, p. 44). Thus, he defines narratives in which supernatural occurrences are ultimately explained rationally as uncanny-fantastic. Conversely, in *marvellous-fantastic* narratives, supernatural or extraordinary elements are eventually accepted as normal and integrated into reality. Among these categories, Todorov considers the *marvellous-fantastic* to be the closest to *pure fantasy*, as it demands the greatest degree of inexplicability and irrationality. So, in the concept of *pure uncanny fantasy*, the events depicted in a literary work may initially be explainable through reason and logic; however, they suddenly take on an unusual and bizarre quality, which Todorov emphasizes that this type of fantastic narrative has a broad spectrum, incorporating many works within the horror, detective, and thriller genres. In this regard, he cites Dostoevsky and Edgar Allan Poe as notable examples of authors whose works fit within the uncanny category. (Todorov, 1975, pp. 46-47).

Finally, in *pure marvellous* fantasy, boundaries remain indeterminate, much like in the uncanny genre, in which Todorov includes fairy tales and collections such as *One Thousand and One Nights* within. However, unlike *pure uncanny* fantasy, the events in this category do not challenge the limits of reason and logic to the same extent. And, despite criticisms directed at Todorov, such as his disregard for Freud's psychoanalytic approach to the fantastic in *The Uncanny* (1919), his failure to precisely determine the duration of the reader's experience of hesitation and uncertainty, his restrictive definition of fantasy, his marginalization of traditional fantasy, and his tendency to trivialize it, he nonetheless proposed the first serious structuralist classification and analysis of the fantastic as a literary genre as Wicher (2014, pp. 3-4) points that his theory reflects the enduring influence of the Aristotelian dilemma concerning how to justify the reader's enjoyment of narratives that appear to challenge rational understanding, resulting that his framework tends to favour fantastic representations that maintain some degree of coherence with a rational worldview as a foundational reference for critics analysing and interpreting fantastic literature.

3. Conclusion

The human preoccupation with the unknown and the extraordinary has long shaped literary traditions, contributing to the emergence of the fantastic as a distinct genre. This study has explored the underlying motivations for engaging with fantastical narratives, delving into both psychological impulses and the imaginative transcendence of reality. The fantastic genre operates as a literary mode that exists at the intersection of fiction and belief, allowing for the suspension of natural laws while maintaining internal coherence within its fictional worlds. Thus, analyzing the fantastic requires a departure from conventional literary criticism, as its narrative structures, character construction, and world-building processes differ from those found in realist or allegorical literature. While the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which fantastic works emerge provide valuable insights, they do not solely determine their interpretative significance. Instead, the fantastic functions as a dynamic space where alternative realities challenge conventional perceptions, positioning it as a crucial subject in literary scholarship. Understanding the mechanisms of the fantastic not only deepens the comprehension of literary history but also highlights the broader cognitive and cultural functions of storytelling in human societies.

On this issue, a central contribution to the theorization of the fantastic genre is Tzvetan Todorov's work, which offers a structuralist approach to defining and classifying the fantastic. Todorov's conceptualization of the fantastic, as the hesitation between natural and supernatural interpretations, represents a significant departure from earlier genre theories by foregrounding reader perception and narrative structure. His dual focus on the structural and functional dimensions of the fantastic enables a comprehensive understanding of the genre, distinguishing it from adjacent genres such as the uncanny and the marvellous.

In comparison to Northrop Frye's archetypal and mimetic classifications, Todorov's framework introduces a more precise methodology rooted in linguistic and narratological criteria. While he acknowledges Frye's contributions, Todorov critiques the lack of clarity in Frye's genre hierarchies and instead proposes a dynamic model in which genre emerges through transformation and ambiguity. For Todorov, the fantastic is not defined merely by the presence of supernatural elements, but by the sustained narrative tension and the reader's interpretive hesitation regarding the events within the text.

Todorov also distinguishes the fantastic from allegorical or poetic modes, asserting that it must operate strictly within the realm of fiction to preserve its unique effect. He argues that the fantastic genre relies on specific verbal, syntactic, and semantic structures to convey the uncertainty essential to its nature. His classification of sub-genres, such as the *fantastic-uncanny* and *fantastic-marvellous*, further refines the understanding of the fantastic by accounting for how supernatural ambiguity is resolved within the narrative.

Despite criticisms of his theory, such as his exclusion of psychoanalytic readings, the narrow scope of his genre definition, and his marginalization of traditional fantasy, Todorov's contributions remain foundational in the study of fantastic literature. His framework not only systematizes the genre's key features but also articulates its literary and social functions, such as destabilizing reality, challenging normative structures, and providing a space for the expression of repressed or censored content. Todorov's work continues to shape contemporary discussions

on genre theory and the role of the fantastic in literature, underscoring its enduring importance in the broader landscape of literary studies.

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