

Trail of *The Hobbit* and *The Witcher*¹

Travel in fantasy literature

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*A droga wiedzie w przód i w przód,
Skąd się zaczęła, tuż za progim —
I w dal przede mną mknie na wschód,
A ja wciąż za nią — tak, jak moge...
Skorymi stopy za nią w ślad —
Aż w szerszą się rozplynie drogę.
Gdzie strumień licznych dróg już wpadł...
A potem dokąd? — rzecz nie moge.²*

This is the song which Bilbo Baggins sings, when after many years of peaceful and prosperous life he announces that he decided to embark on a journey again. These words declare to the reader that adventure, which began in the Professor Tolkien's book *Hobbit or there and back*³ will be continued in future volumes⁴. This is the way where the literature referred to as 'fantasy' and often referred to as the more familiar as the 'literature of sword and sorcery' begins. Of course it is not the end as the term can be considered accurate and correct, but this issue is beyond the scope of this article⁵. Even in the title of the book *The Hobbit, or there and back* we can find a hint that it will tell us about the trip. In fact, the whole story is based on the expedition, which took the hobbit from the title – Bilbo Baggins in the company of a group of dwarves and the wizard Gandalf. As a result they gained a huge treasure then the

1 First edition of the article: Mateusz Poradecki, *Szlakiem hobbitów i Wiedźmina. Podróż w literaturze fantasy* [in:] *Metamorfozy podróży. Kultura i tożsamość*, ed. Sztachelska Jolanta, Białystok University Press, Białystok 2012.

2 Tolkien J.R.R., *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1937. After: Carpenter H., J.R.R. Tolkien. *Wizjoner i marzytel*, Alfa Publishing, Warsaw 1997, p. 249.

3 Tolkien J.R.R., *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1937. After: Carpenter H., J.R.R. Tolkien. *Wizjoner i marzytel*, Alfa Publishing, Warsaw 1997, p. 249.

4 Tolkien J.R.R., *The Fellowship of the Ring: being the first part of "The Lord of the Rings"* (*Drużyna Pierścienia*, pierwszy tom *Władcy Pierścieni*), George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1954, *The Two Towers: being the second part of "The Lord of the Rings"* (*Dwie wieże*, drugi tom *Władcy Pierścieni*), George Allen&Unwin Ltd, London 1954, *The Return of the King: being the third part of "The Lord of the Rings"* (*Powrót króla*, trzeci tom *Władcy Pierścieni*), George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1955. After: Carpenter H., op. cit.

5 Those who are interested please check: *Fantasy. Ilustrowany przewodnik*, ed. Pringle D., Arkady Publishing, Warsaw 2003 and: Sapkowski A., *Rękopis znaleziony w smoczjej jaskini. Kompendium wiedzy o literaturze fantasy*, Super NOWA, Warsaw 2001.

hobbit happily returned home. So we can assume that travel motifs are associated with the literature of fantasy from the beginning.

Looking through a book shelf labeled ‘fantasy’ we cannot help feeling that the story of most of them is about the heroes who travel to unknown and mysterious areas to seek for adventures, mythical treasure or fulfill the mission on which often depends their lives or even the fate of the entire world. The Hobbit was the quest for the treasure. In the story of the second “father” of fantasy, Robert E. Howard, the main character⁶ — Conan and his companions roam through the ‘nowhere and Grey Mountain Neverland’⁷ and punish ‘evil with mighty blows of their great sword’⁸ and almost on every page prove that thanks to their vigour and efficiency in the fight (less thanks to mental predisposition) are able to overcome all obstacles and every enemy. Andrzej Sapkowski very aptly compares Conan to the renowned comic books and movies heroes as Superman or sheriffs who struggle heroically against Evil and Indians in film westerns⁹. The famous warrior is not guided in his journeys by a specific purpose in life. Once he wants to get the treasure, sometimes he desires a woman or wants to do something that seems impossible. He is also often forced to simply earn for a good beverage, food, accommodation and clothing. Conan does not care about the future, has no plans to start a family or settle somewhere permanently. As long as he will be able to hold a sword in his hand he will travel, still looking for new challenges and proving that he is a super-hero. In the literature of fantasy we find more wanderers similar to him, but not necessarily a supermen but also super-women. This is the motif followed by many authors. Motifs of wandering heroes in their masterpieces include: the search for revenge or justice, travel related to a career in the army, the quest for the treasure, escape, or aimless wandering, the struggle for power. The most important is the fact that they leave their homes, which becomes an excuse to describe their adventures. Indeed, nothing interesting at home is likely to happen. For adventure to begin, we must first go through the

6 Robert Ervin Howard (1906–1936) — American writer considered alongside Tolkien as one of the ‘fathers’ of the genre. The most famous of his works tell of a great warrior — Conan from Cimmeria. The first story of Conan — Phoenix on the Sword was published in 1932, the cycle of Conan had many followers — these included: L. Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter, Andrew J. Offut and Leonard Carpenter. After: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_E._Howard; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_E._Howard; Sapkowski A., *Rękopis znaleziony w smoczey jaskini*, SuperNOWA, Warsaw 2001.

7 Sapkowski A., *Rękopis...*, op. cit., p. 154.

8 Ibidem, spp. 154–155.

9 See Ibidem, pp. 154–155.

door and go on a journey, as Tolkien says in *The Hobbit* putting the narrator's mouth these words:

Może to dziwne, ale przyjemne doświadczenia i spokojne przyjazne dni nie są zbyt dobrą materia do opowieści, podczas gdy przeżycia niepokojące, nieprzyjemne, a nawet groźne tworzą kanwę wspaniałych historii i długo o nich można opowiadać. Wędrowcy zatrzymali się w tym domu dłużej, co najmniej dwa tygodnie, i trudno im było odejść. Bilbo z chęcią zostałby tu na zawsze, nawet gdyby mógł w jednej chwili przenieść się z powrotem do swej hobbicznej norki. A przecież nie da się zbyt wiele rzec o ich pobycie¹⁰.

The Hobbit quoted above, however, is only an introduction to entirely serious, addressed to adult readers *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The travel of Bilbo's heir — Frodo and his friends is not just an adventure. This is an important and difficult mission to save the world from overwhelming evil in the form of Sauron and Mordor. The aim of the expedition undertaken by the Fellowship of the Ring is to cast into the interior of Mount Doom a magic Ring, which if had fallen into the hands of the Dark Lord, would allow for a quick and easy conquest of all Middle-earth.

The reader, following the fate of the main characters, travels with them through many lands, meets creatures from fairytales such as ents and goblins, has extraordinary adventures only to return home with the hobbits in the final chapters. However, this journey is not only a source of entertainment for readers. If we look closely at certain aspects of the journey of Frodo and his friends, we will see the multidimensionality and traditions in which it is rooted. As noted by Władysław Kopaliński 'Journey symbolizes [...] decisive, independent step in the life of [...] learning experience'¹¹. So we can say that it is that 'growing up'. Travel means growing up primarily for young heroes, to which we shall return.

The country of hobbits, the Shire is an idyllic land, which is not touched by the evil of the outside world. The natives deliberately isolate themselves in their backwater. With few exceptions, they are not interested in foreign miracles, or foreigners visiting their country.

„Elfy i smoki! — powiadam mojemu synowi. — Dla ciebie i dla mnie ważniejsze są ziemniaki i kapusta.” [...] Tak powiedziałem mojemu chłopcu i to samo mógłbym każdemu powtórzyć — dodał patrząc znacząco na obcego i na młynarza¹².

10 Tolkien J. R. R., *Hobbit, albo tam i z powrotem*, transl. Braiter Paulina, Atlantis-Rubicon, Warsaw 1997, p. 41.

11 Kopaliński W., *Słownik symboli*, HPS, Warsaw 2007, p. 331.

12 Tolkien J. R. R., *Władca Pierścieni*, transl. Skibniewska Maria, Atlantis S. C. Publishing, Warsaw 1992, p. 27.

Such attitude is characteristic of the Shire citizens. The hobbits live in a blissful ignorance of the dangers of the outside. Their area of interest is confined within the borders of their kingdoms.

In this view of the world, we can find an analogy to the deep-rooted opposition of known-unknown in human consciousness. As Adrian Miancki states it is 'like home, church, village'¹³ — we may also add here the nearby fields and meadows, neighbors, an inn, a nearby town. 'This area is *orbis interior* «our» world known and familiar. The other is *orbis exterior* a sphere, which is characterized by wildness, ugliness, danger, and — no less important [...] — easy going astray.' „Ta sfera to *orbis interior*, świat «nasz»¹⁴. Unknown is all what lies beyond a magical, never to exceed limit, which may be a road or a river. In *The Lord of the Rings* one of these borders is a huge hedge separating Buckland from the Old Forest, which, as we learn from the lips of the characters revolve strange stories. The road on the other side of the hedge does not simply go through the gate. To take an independent decision on entry into the area where the risk of unknown danger Frodo before taking this step hences the long hesitation. The start of hobbits' travel has its source in the escape from the Nazguls — the ghosts of the Ring. Frodo's motivation is the desire to export the Ring from the Shire in order prevent approaching evil from the east from bursting into his beloved homeland. Once aware of the consequences he chooses exile, though his knowledge of the subject is still very poor and on this stage we can talk more about his own feeling, than a sacrifice for the good of his fellows. The whole expedition is treated totally different by his companions — Merry and Pippin. For them, despite having partial knowledge about the Ring, is an adventure similar to that which Bilbo Baggins experienced on the pages of *The Hobbit, or There and back again*. Journey to Rivendell is the possibility of freeing themselves from the backwater, the possibility of doing something exciting which was not achieved by any hobbit except from Bilbo. They belong to a generation partially raised on the stories about dragons, trolls and gaining treasures. There are also a lot younger than Frodo and full of enthusiasm for this new adventure.

The very first step of the journey reveals their lack of experience, and shows how serious challenge they to dare to take. If it was not for Tom Bombadil's and Aragorn's help they would not be able to get to Rivendell, home to the master of knowledge Elrond the Elf. The rest of the journey is

13 Miancki A., *Droga jako element świata podań ludowych*, [in:] *Człowiek w drodze*, v. I — *Droga w świecie literackim*, Wydawnictwo Uczelniane Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2000, p. 96.

14 Miancki A., *Droga jako element świata podań ludowych*, op. cit., p. 96.

no longer an escape. It is a major task success of which depends on the fate of all Middle-earth. This part of *The Lord of the Rings* has many analogies to the literary tradition of the quest for the Holy Grail. As we know, the beginning of the search was preceded by a supper, on which all the knights of the Round Table showed up¹⁵. Similarly, here on the council of Elrond representatives of all the free races of Middle-earth turned up even though they were not invited and that's what they decided, to undertake a mission and the creation of the Fellowship. The purpose of their journey was the Mount Doom.

Ludzkie wspólnoty zafascynowane były także generalnie możliwym podobieństwem sugestywnych miejsc do ich wyobrażenia o Olimpie, albo o Górze Kalwaryjskiej. Przekształcano też znajome górskie wzgórza w pozór, w symbol wzgórza idealnego, odległego w czasie i przestrzeni, wyidealizowanego i upragnionego¹⁶.

Thus, the goal of many wanderings, beginning from Greek myths to the Judeo-Christian tradition was the mountain. A border place where the sphere of *profanum* may have a little insight into the sphere of *sacrum*¹⁷. That's on top of Calvary, Jesus Christ was crucified. Here he redeemed the sins of the people. At Mount Horeb God gave the Israelites the Torah on Mount Sinai a covenant with Moses was concluded and on the Mount of Olives the ascension of Christ took place. Throwing Ring into the fire of Mount Doom saved Middle Earth against the Big Evil. What is more, like finding of the Holy Grail by the virtuous Galahad restored health of Fisherman king and healed the barren land so the destruction of the Ring restored the throne of the legitimate descendants of the rulers and transformed Gondor into flourishing kingdom, which has become a symbol of order, peace and prosperity.

During the trip the Fellowship travels through mountains, underground mines, enchanted forests, wetlands and wastelands. All these places have their own importance in the tradition found in folk tales and legends. Let

15 See: *Opowieści Okrągłego Stołu*, ed. Boulenger Jacques, transl. Dolatowska Krystyna, Komendant Tadeusz, PIW, Warsaw 1987, p. 322.

16 Moiraghi M., *Wiek księga Graala, między historią a legendą, od króla Artura po Marię Magdalę*, transl. Bochenek Barbara, Rodziewicz Lucyna, 'Bratni Zew' Inc. Publishing, Cracow 2007, p. 160.

17 'Vaus Mountain. An interesting interpretation of the true identity of the Mountain of Fire is in the history *Trium Regum* (History of the Three Kings) by John of Hildesheim. Namely it tells that the expectation for the Saviour has reached the East, as a result of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Micah boil. It was decided to choose the twelve wise men, especially those familiar with astrology and send them up the mountain to watch for and recognize the luminous mark on what was expected.' Moiraghi M., op. cit., p. 161.

us refer back to Adrian Mianiecki '*unknown and formless vastness, mysterious and scary world of demons, larvae, dead people and aliens — chaos, death and night*' which includes all types of waste land, gorges, forests, wetlands etc'¹⁸. For the distribution between the *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior* must be accompanied by more vertical separation of the universe into zones: the heavenly (positive), earth (neutral) and underground (negative) one¹⁹. All the bad events in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* take place either at the premises of the *orbis exterior* or at the lower *universum* — such as mine Moria, Shelob 's lair or the descent into the kingdom of the dead lying beneath the mountains, which refers to the visitation of hell. However, the positive events take place on the tops of mountains. Frodo destroys the ring in a cave at the top. Gandalf after falling into the deepest abyss of mine Moria comes on top of the mountain, where he defeats the terrible Balrog and is reborn of which a visible sign is the transformation from Gandalf the Grey to Gandalf the White and gaining more power. Additionally, high in the mountains Aragorn finds the strain of the White Tree which is the seed of hope for healing the wounds of Middle-earth.

The travel in *The Lord of the Rings* is a symbol of action, of taking the steps that lead to changes of the face of the entire world. For Aragorn this expedition is the inclusion of a struggle for power over the world. He abandons his current fate of exile. For him to be honest in many ways this trip is nothing new. He spent almost all his life on wandering, but this time he has a specific goal. Embarking on a journey to face with the challenge, an attempt to cope with their own destiny without the possibility of turning back.

Let us now return to the hobbits. As I mentioned before on the initial stage of the journey Merry and Pippin treated the trip as an adventure. Not only they do not realize the seriousness of the mission but also they ignore the dangers lurking on the road. For a long time they do not allow themselves to think about the possible risks, assuming that in the company of such experienced travelers as Gandalf and Aragorn nothing bad can happen to them. It is not until after the kidnapping by a branch of the orcs they are forced to make their own decisions. For them, this trip is primarily growing up and learning about the world outside the Shire. Even the Elrond, master of knowledge blessed with the gift of seeing the future does not know why they were sent along with the Ring bearer instead of the great warriors of his surroundings. At this point, another analogy to the tradition of the search of the Holy Grail is clearly visible. Hobbits are doing very well

18 Mianiecki A., op. cit., p. 96.

19 See: Mianiecki A., op. cit., p. 96.

in situations where there is a possibility that an experienced elf could not handle. After all it was Frodo who manages to slip under the watchful eyes of guards and bring the Ring to the Crack of Doom. Additionally Pippin and Merry save the kingdom of Rohan and Gondor by persuading the Ents to help in the fight. Where the best knights of King Arthur, Lancelot, Percival or Gawain cannot handle the inexperienced young Galahad manages to find the solution. The premonition did not confuse Elrond also for the future. After returning home, Merry and Pippin, thanks to experience during the trip liberated Shire from the hands of traitors — Saruman and Worm-tongue who have managed to capture the country and wanted to destroy it. Knowledge about the outside world allowed them also to open the country's relations with the other inhabitants of Middle-earth, which has caused benefits to all.

The same theme of travel as a way to maturity is found in the saga of *The Witcher* by Andrzej Sapkowski²⁰. The main character, Princess Ciri, spends her childhood in the royal court of his grandmother. Pampered and cherished by the whole environment she becomes arrogant and obnoxious child. After the fall of the kingdom, and the burning of the capital she is forced to flee and hide from the enemies. The reader follows her fate on the pages of the five volumes of the saga of *The Witcher*. Ciri at this time is traveling with refugees, then under the care of Geralt the title witcher visits Den of the Witchers. After discovering of the magical powers in her she travels with Yennifer the Witch to a magic school, where, in the course of trying to kidnap her, she escapes and enters a magic teleport by help of which she is moved to the desert in the far south. There she is permitted to the group of young people who make their living from robbery and plunder. Her journey is constructed upon the crossing of coincidences. The princess does not decide about her fate she has no specific purpose in life. Her world crashed down, and all loved ones died. Her exile is an attempt to find someone to replace her parents and will find their place in a hostile and dangerous world. The next stages of her journey are nothing but the further escape from rulers and organizations who try to use her in fighting for power over the world. Finally, thanks to the magic of the next teleport she goes to the world inhabited by the elves. There she learns that she is the bearer of an unusual gene that allows her to move in time and space without any restrictions. When she discovers that the elves also want to take advantage of her ability to conquer other worlds she runs away once again. Ciri runs

20 It should be noted here that, as Tolkien is considered the father of fantasy literature (even though R.E. Howard published earlier) so Sapkowski is considered the father of Polish literature even though Feliks Kres published earlier.

away even from Geralt and Yennifer the witch — people in whom she put her trust. This stage of the journey is a chaotic journey through time and space. Ciri cannot control her abilities yet. The reader travels together with the heroine through worlds including those that had been destroyed by ecological disasters, genocide or nuclear holocaust. It is worth mentioning that she appears repeatedly in the world, which the reader may consider as his/her own²¹ — we learn about this from the adventure of a Knight of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary riding from Czluchow to Malbork and from the relation of Mr. Malcolm Guthrie published in the weekly “Weekly Inverness” the release of March 18, 1906²². It turns out, however, that neither the witcher nor the witch are not able to protect her from people wanting to use her to gain power. Her last trip is another escape. This time she decides to leave her world permanently so that no one can use her for their own purposes. This well-thought-out decision is a consequence of the experience gained during the previous journeys. Ciri became independent she started to understand that if she trust someone, she is likely to be used and the consequences can be tragic for many worlds. The princess moves into the world of King Arthur, where she meets Galahad and is called ‘*The Lady of the Lake*’.

Apart from Ciri *The Witcher* series is full of many other travelers. In the world drowned the war on almost every page we can find wandering merchants, fleeing civilians, moving troops, etc. But the most interesting cases is the title character Geralt and his friend bard Jaskier. Both of them are constantly traveling because of their professions, but their steps are not directed by the desire to earn money. Andrew Waśko explains this in the most accurate manner describing the journey of Odysseus and Don Juan:

Jeśli Don Juan zarazem ucieka i ściga wiele kobiet, to wędrownica Odyszeusza w tym aspekcie daje się przedstawić jako powrót do tej jedynej — wiernej Penelopy. Owszem, król Itaki, jak wiedzą wszyscy czytelnicy Odyssei, w trakcie swej tulaczki nie dochowuje wierności żonie. Ale to, co pozornie zdaje się łączyć go z Don Juanem, w istocie pozwala lepiej dostrzec głębszą dzielącą ich różnicę. Odys w żadnej sytuacji nie jest uwodzicielem. W relacjach z kobietami pozostaje zawsze stroną bierną²³.

21 This fragment places the world of Wiedźmin as one of the parallel worlds which exists with our world simultaneously.

22 Patrz See: Sapkowski A., *Pani Jeziora*, SuperNowa, Warsaw 1999, pp. 239–244.

23 Waśko A., *Odyszeusz i Don Juan*, [in:] *Dziejczystwo Odyszeusza. Podróż, obcość i tożsamość. Identyfikacja, przestrożenie*, Universitas, Cracow 2007, p. 170.

Jaskier is a Don Juan. He keeps running from one scandal to another. His life requires continually new love conquests. The Witcher is the opposite – while traveling for new orders he is still looking for opportunities to return to his beloved Yennefer. Just as Odysseus he is not faithful to her but the situation and ease of women succumbing to him make another romance to happen. Jaskier does not have place which he could call home he is even not looking for it. Geralt can always go back to the Den of Witcher's but there is no need to do so because there is no Yennifer there. He cannot be with her because they cannot live together. Odysseus could not go home because of the obstacles before him made by the gods. Witcher's paradox lies in the fact that his goal is also the biggest obstacle to his achievement. Unlike the Odysseus, he does not have much hope for the end of his wanderings. Geralt's journey takes a new dimension only when Ciri — escaping her elfish pursuers — enter the teleporter and is transferred to an unknown destination. He believes that he is related to the princess by destiny so nothing can stop him from heading to her rescue. However, no one knows where the magic teleport moved Ciri. Trying to find it out seems absurd of which Geralt is totally aware. The journey towards any destination seems better to him than lack of action and waiting for news. The attempt to seek Ciri is like diminishing his stings of remorse for the failure of meeting the words that she will be safe with him. The Witcher starts a journey in the company of Jaskier and Milva the female archer. Along the way, they are joined by more characters. Some of them are not in any way associated with Ciri, but all of them are troubled with stings of remorse about shameful acts they have committed in their lives. The search for the princess are their attempt to redeem their sins. Joining in a mad quest to save a foreign girl to most of them is also an attempt to preserve humanity in the face of the ongoing war. This is evidenced by the scene in which the team helps a little group of refugees or saves handicapped girl accused of practicing black magic putting their own life at risk each time. It should be noted that this journey is an atonement. Atonement which each of these people put on themselves and decided to fill even with a small chance of success. Indeed, the decision itself to try become a purifying deed and proves that they work together for a good case.

Fantasy literature is primarily escapist in its character. Its main aim is to entertain the reader, providing him/her with entertainment and detachment from everyday life. The plot scheme of the majority of masterpieces is as follows: a) the formation of action — that is to create a situation that forces the hero to take some action; b) accumulation of the problems for the hero from which he must emerge victorious in order to prepare for the

implementation of the aim; c) climax — the objective (to reach the destination, and very often the final fight against the main enemy or great decisive battle); d) *catharsis* — usually in the form of a happy ending. Sending a hero on a journey is one of the most common ways to form the action in fantasy literature. At home, as the quote from *The Hobbit* shows nothing interesting happens until you exit the door. It is only there where we can meet elves, dragons and goblins. Only due to the setting off on the journey we have a chance to find the treasure or save the world from Evil. Novels about traveling or picaresque novels always had a lot of readers. They were read especially by people whose every day are moving between work, shop and home. The rapid development of means of transport and media of the twentieth and twenty-first century has enabled everyone to uncover the mysteries of distant lands. Today, a trip to Africa, the Antipodes, or even to the Arctic Circle is not a major problem. For lazy people there is always television and the Internet. The world has shrunk, and the white spots on the maps disappeared. Therefore, the only option is a trip into the unknown world of imagination. Only there you can still feel the excitement that accompanied the explorers of America the winners of the North Pole or the researchers of the 'Dark Continent'. Only there most readers can satisfy their instincts that always drove man to gain the highest peaks, flowing oceans or venture into the dangerous jungles. That is why the popularity of fantasy literature is still increasing.