Fantasy Literary Genre

Fantasy, from the Greek φαντασία meaning 'making visible,' is a genre of fiction that focuses on imaginary elements (the fantastic). This can mean magic, the supernatural, alternate worlds, superheroes, monsters, fairies, magical creatures, mythological heroes … anything that an author can imagine outside of reality. With fantasy, the magical or supernatural elements serve as the foundation of the plot, setting, characterization, or story line.

Fantasy is popular across a huge range of media—film, television, comic books, games, art, and literature—but its predominant and most influential place has always been in literature.

Types of Fantasy

There are dozens of types and subgenres of fantasy; below are several of the most well-known and typically used.

a. Medieval

This subgenre is focused on topics such as knights, the royal court, sorcery, and magic. They usually have European settings during the Medieval historical period. They often involve human protagonists facing supernatural antagonists like dragons, witches, or wizards.

b. Epic Fantasy

These are fantasy stories that are set in an imaginary world and/or are epic in nature; meaning they feature a hero on some type of quest. This subgenre became particularly popular in the 20th century and continues to dominate much of popular fantasy today.

c. Fairy Tales

Fairy Tales feature magical characters such as gnomes, fairies, and witches who use magical powers to accomplish good or evil. They can involve princes and princesses, fairy godmothers and wicked stepmothers, helpful gnomes and tricky goblins, unicorns and dragons. Fairy tales feature magical elements but are also based in a real world setting; for example, "Snow White" takes place in a human kingdom but has a magical witch.

d. Mythology

This subgenre includes fantasies that involve elements of myths and folklore, which are typically ancient in origin and often help to explain the mysteries of the universe and all of its elements—weather, the earth, the existence of creatures and things—as well as historical events. The most well-known are

Greek and Roman myths; for example, stories about the Greek Gods and heroes like Hercules have been retold countless times through fantasy films.

e. Fable

Fables are similar to fairy tales, but involve animals as the main characters, and conclude with a moral to the story.

Importance of Fantasy

While fiction in general is a popular way to tell stories, fantasy's key asset is that it allows authors to do things outside the confines of the common world.

By removing the limitations of reality, fantasy opens stories to the possibility of anything. People can become superheroes, animals can speak, dragons become real dangers, and magic can be as normal as anything else in life.

Most importantly, fantasy is for the audience—it allows people to escape from reality, becoming lost in exciting and unusual stories that provoke the imagination. Fantasy fiction inspires the reader to begin imagining, "What if … ?"

Fantasy allows authors and audience alike to fulfill their wonders about magic and the supernatural while exploring beyond what is truly possible in our world. Furthermore, some fantasy stories (particularly fairy tales) confront real world problems and offer solutions through magic or another element of fantasy.