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PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF MODERN FANTASY LITERATURE

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Secondary worlds which modern fantasists invent as settings for their fantastic adventures are frequently equipped with various additional elements – history, culture, language and religion – which create a more or less well-defined background for the narrative. When inventing the artificial history or language, fantasists often utilize existing historical and linguistic data, so that they do not have to create everything from the very beginning and so that they can make their own inventions realistic enough to fulfill their purpose in the story. The same happens in the case of secondary religions which, to a varying degree, borrow concepts and symbols from existing religions and mythologies. The existence of such borrowings, in turn, gives rise to disputes whether certain books are appropriate readings for religious people and whether such books justly promote or reject specific religious values. These disputes¹ have focused particularly on John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and its usage of Christian imagery, Joanne Kathleen Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and its portrayal of magic and wizardry, and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and its critique of Catholicism. In the article *Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature* I took into consideration these and others fantasy novels, and argued that

a fantasy narrative may approach religious themes by inventing secondary religions that enrich the imaginary realm, by reworking particular religious themes and turning them into an axis

¹ See, for example, Richard Abanes' *Fantasy and Your Family. Exploring The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter and Modern Magick* (2002), Russell W. Dalton's *Faith Journey through Fantasy Lands. A Christian Dialogue with Harry Potter, Star Wars, and The Lord of the Rings* (2003), Sarah Arthur's *Walking with Bilbo. A Devotional Adventure through The Hobbit* (2005), Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware's *Shedding Light on His Dark Materials* (2007).

of the narrative, and by supporting, promoting, or criticizing a certain faith through the means of fantasy fiction.²

These mechanisms imbue fantasy literature with various types of more or less well-developed religions which might remain in the center of the plot or on its periphery, depending on the author's vision. The study of these secondary religions and, generally, of an imaginary realm's secondary *sacrum* (i.e. sphere of the sacred) may reveal a lot about the fantastic world, its inhabitants and the author's inspirations, as well as initiate the reader's general reflection about certain problems and issues connected with religion. The aim of this paper is to prove that phenomenology of religion can provide appropriate tools for analyzing the secondary religions of modern fantasy literature. This claim will be developed in three stages which include a brief description of phenomenology of religion as a discipline, its applicability to the study of modern fantasy literature, and the study of a secondary religion present in Guy Gavriel Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry*.

The objective of phenomenology of religion is to identify and describe the religious phenomena which constitute the *sacrum* of human existence. A phenomenon is explained by Gerardus van der Leeuw as "an object related to a subject, and a subject related to an object; although this does not imply that the subject deals with or modifies the object in any way whatever, nor (conversely) that the object is somehow or other affected by the subject."³ The phenomenon's "entire essence is given in its 'appearance', and its appearance to 'someone'. If (finally) this 'someone' begins to discuss what 'appears', then phenomenology arises."⁴ In *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (2010) James L. Cox provides a concise summary of the most significant stages of the phenomenological approach to religion.⁵ First of all, a phenomenological study of religion is based on the concept of epoché, i.e. withholding one's judgment on and prejudice to the object of the study in order to maintain a neutral position during the study. Epoché should be combined with an emphatic attitude so that the observer will be able to relate to the unfamiliar religious concepts which are the object of his study. The study revolves around a description of particular religious phenomena, which includes naming the phenomena, dividing them into categories, and defining their relations with other phenomena. Furthermore, the study includes a stage of "making informed comparisons,"⁶ i.e. comparing the identified phenomena with similar ones from other religious systems in order to see "into their broader comparative significance."⁷ All in all, by understanding the essence of the individual phenomena, a researcher may be able to comprehend the entire religion to which these phenomena belong.

² W. Łaskiewicz, *Finding God(s) in Fantasylands: Religious Ideas in Fantasy Literature*, Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies 2013, no 1, p. 24.

³ G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vols. 1–2, trans. J.E. Turner, Gloucester: Peter Smith 1967, p. 671.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ J.L. Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, London: Continuum 2010, p. 48–72.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 62.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 63.

Phenomenological studies of Gerardus van der Leeuw⁸ and Mircea Eliade⁹ establish several categories of religious phenomena. People's concepts of divinity might be, for instance, associated with various elements of the natural environment: the sky and earth, water, air and fire, the sun and the moon, trees and mountains, plants and animals, etc. Divine power might be also represented by intermediary figures such as kings, priests, saints and prophets, or even incarnated in a savior figure. Moreover, people can address the divine entity and express their religiosity through speech (prayers, blessings, curses, magical and ritual formulas), taboos, myths and sacred scriptures, rituals and rites of passage, and even through everyday behavior and activities if behavior and activities are defined by the laws of a given religion.

These abovementioned categories should be further complemented by the study of another phenomenologist – Rudolf Otto¹⁰ and his concept of *numinous* (from Latin *numen*, i.e. “a deity”). Otto focused on analyzing human experiences of and emotional responses to *sacrum*, whose subject is his *numinous*. He defined *numinous* as an inexplicable and logically incomprehensible divine force/entity, independent of culture, history and institutional religion. Its manifestations are related to such concepts as *mysterium tremendum*, *majestas*, *fascinas* and *augustum*. *Mysterium tremendum* means that the subject of *numinous* is mysterious and the experience of it

may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. [...] It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. [...] It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of – whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *Mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.¹¹

Another attribute of *numinous* – *majestas* – highlights its magnitude and “absolute overpoweringness”¹² which leave a person in awe. *Fascinas* denotes people's fascination which lures them to *numinous* in spite of their fear. As Otto explains:

The demonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own.¹³

Augustum represents the humble obedience and respect of a person faced with the overpowering subject of *numinous*¹⁴.

⁸ G. van der Leeuw, op. cit., p. 23–590.

⁹ M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed, London: Sheed and Ward 1971, p. 38–409.

¹⁰ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J.W. Harvey, London: Oxford University Press 1923.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12–13.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

Even though van der Leeuw, Otto and Eliade focused on studying *sacrum* present in the real world, some of their comments acknowledge the fact that texts, particularly those relying on mythological motifs and patterns, may contain or recreate elements of that *sacrum*. Van der Leeuw, for example, highlights the connection between myths and fairy stories; he claims that fairy stories “have deep significance not merely for the history of religion, since they contain much ancient religious material, but for religion itself also. Telling fairy tales is therefore no affair of pure delight in fabulous narration, but has a magical effect.”¹⁵ Similarly to van der Leeuw, Otto argues that people’s fascination with *numinous* “became an untiring impulse, prompting to inexhaustible invention in folk-tale and myth, saga and legend [...] and remaining till to-day [...], whether in the form of narrative or sacrament, the most powerful factor that keeps the religious consciousness alive.”¹⁶ Finally, Eliade announces that “[a] whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads.”¹⁷ Eliade believes that “the sacred may be seen under any sort of form, even the most alien”¹⁸ and reconstructions of religious and mythological themes, though they alter the original forms, allow the themes to function within the consciousness of the modern man. Taking all of these claims into consideration, it is justifiable to study modern fantasy literature – a genre which draws heavily from both myths and fairy tales – for its literary experiences of *numinous*, transformations of religious patterns and symbols, and inventions of secondary religions. Such study will reveal a lot about imaginary realms and also prompt a reflection on the way a given author describes religion and its significance for human life.

The application of phenomenology of religion to the study of modern fantasy literature is a fairly recent approach; it is present in the works of two Polish scholars. In *Degradacja mitu w literaturze fantasy* [*Degradation of Myth in Fantasy Literature*, 2009; translation of the title mine – W.Ł.] Bogdan Trocha uses the phenomenological approach to analyze several groups of mythological borrowings within fantasy narratives. By analyzing different categories of borrowings, Trocha comments on the mechanisms of incorporating mythological elements into fantasy, as well as on the results of such incorporation. He argues that while fantasy fiction preserves elements of our mythological heritage by combining them with a fantasist’s vision of the imaginary world, it may at the same time distort the mythological borrowings, because they are removed from their original structures. Meanwhile, in *Idee religijne w literaturze fantasy* [*Religious Ideology in Fantasy Literature*, 2010; translation of the title mine – W.Ł.] Jolanta Łaba concentrates on the secondary religions appearing in a group of selected fantasy series in order to analyze their treatment of *sacrum*. Łaba focuses on such issues as representation of magic/power within a secondary realm, portrayal of people approaching and wielding that power, instances of the heroes’ religious behavior, and usage of mythological symbols

¹⁵ G. van der Leeuw, op. cit., p. 416.

¹⁶ R. Otto, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁷ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, trans. W.R. Trask, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World 1959, p. 205.

¹⁸ M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 29.

and archetypes. She argues that the reason for fantasy's reconstructions of spiritual/religious themes is an ever-present human need of *sacrum*, which modern fantasy texts, with their descriptions of otherworldly experiences and emphasis put on morality, might (perhaps only partially) satisfy, and as a result reconnect the readers with the *sacrum* of their own world.

Taking into consideration Trocha's and Łaba's works, the aim of this paper is to apply the notions of phenomenology to the study of religious/spiritual concepts appearing in a single fantasy series – Guy Gavriel Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry* – in order to grasp a better understanding of the imaginary reality and to reveal the spiritual message hidden behind the fantastic journey. Though the tools used by phenomenologists of religion were devised for the study of *sacrum* manifested in the real world, they can be easily modified and applied to secondary worlds of fantasy fiction. First of all, phenomenological epoché and emphatic attitude are still required (even when the researcher is dealing with literary religions) in order to approach the concepts present in a fantastic religion without prejudice or presuppositions. Secondly, the fantastic religious phenomena will be grouped in categories similar to those proposed by van der Leeuw and Eliade, and analyzed in terms of their own properties and their relations with other phenomena. Finally, the phenomena will be juxtaposed with certain concepts found in existing religions/mythologies.

Guy Gavriel Kay (b. 1954) is a contemporary Canadian writer of fantasy fiction; *Fionavar Tapestry*, consisting of *The Summer Tree*, *The Wandering Fire*, *The Darkest Road* (published between 1984–1986), was his debut work. Given Kay's involvement in the posthumous publication of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (1977),¹⁹ it is not surprising that his first work was greatly influenced by Tolkien's vision of Middle-earth. Nonetheless, *Fionavar Tapestry* is more than just a copy of Middle-earth, because Kay highlighted issues which did not appear or were not so conspicuous in Tolkien's texts: variants of secondary religions and the heroes' experience of *numinous*. The trilogy follows the adventures of five young people – Kevin Laine, Paul Schafer, Dave Martyniuk, Kimberley Ford, and Jennifer Lowell – who are transported from Toronto to the magical kingdom of Brennin in Fionavar, where they become entangled in a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Their adventures gradually uncover, and allow the heroes to experience several aspects of Fionavar's *sacrum*.

Fionavar's supreme deity is called "the Weaver." He is worshipped as the ultimate creator of all worlds and their inhabitants, and regarded as a benevolent god who deeply cares for his Children. He never makes a direct appearance in the story, but is indirectly present through the heroes' repetitive references to him and the eventual prevalence of good over evil. Thus, he seems to particularly represent that aspect of Otto's *numinous* (divinity) which was described as a great and incomprehensible mystery to humanity – *mysterium tremendum*. The Weaver's divine antagonist is Rakoth Maugrim (also called the Unraveller, Sathain – an obvious derivation from Satan – and "the first and fallen god"²⁰), an evil god-like being obsessed with the desire to control and destroy. Rakoth is

¹⁹ Kay assisted Christopher Tolkien who edited and published *The Silmarillion*.

²⁰ G.G. Kay, *The Summer Tree*, New York: Roc Trade 2001, p. 208.

not subjected to the Weaver's power, because he comes from outside the Weaver's Loom; as a result, he cannot be killed, but only imprisoned. When freed from his prison, Rakoth adopts a bodily form, restores his fortress and gathers an army; he also rapes Jennifer (one of the five heroes) and fathers a child. Having a child with a mortal woman makes Rakoth part of the Loom and mortal himself – the war against evil ends when he is killed. The trilogy never reveals Rakoth's origins; it is only mentioned that he appeared in the Weaver's world when the first man killed his brother.²¹ If Rakoth ever gained reign over Fionavar, his destructive desires would distort the balance between all existing worlds.

The people of Fionavar also worship some lesser gods and goddesses. The most important among them is Mörnir of the Thunder; his sacred place is the Summer Tree in Godwood (a place of ritualistic sacrifice) and his companions are two ravens, Thought and Memory. Mörnir's counterpart is the Goddess (also called Dana the Mother) identified with fertility, earth and the moon. Dana is the only deity in Fionavar whose worship was turned into institutional religion (with temples, priestesses and holy rituals). Other minor deities briefly appearing or mentioned in the trilogy are the twin goddesses of war – Macha and Nemain, Cernan of the Beasts who is the lord of woods and wilderness worshipped by the tribes of the Dalrei, his twin sister Ceinwen of the Bow who is the goddess of hunting, and Liranan – the god of the sea. These minor deities, though powerful, are bound by the Weaver's laws and cannot freely intervene in the affairs of mortals – thus, they are neither omnipresent nor omnipotent. Their origins are never revealed, and readers might only assume that since the Weaver is the ultimate creator, these lesser deities are also his creations.

The inhabitants of Fionavar occasionally encounter these minor gods, hence their heightened awareness of their world's *sacrum*, which affects their speech and behavior. They frequently say that something is “brightly woven” when it is good, or they talk about “threads of one's days” in recognition of the Weaver's reign. They are also painfully aware of the threat posed by Rakoth's desires to rule, and the history of wars against the evil deity is a vital part of Fionavar's mythology. The Kings of Brennin are particularly close to Mörnir to whom they sacrifice their own lives by hanging on the sacred Summer Tree when the kingdom is in need of divine help. Dana is worshipped in consecrated temples by numerous virgin priestesses; her annual celebration is a fertility rite called Maidaladan, and her symbols – the moon and a holy axe. The Dalrei, a tribe of hunters, are naturally closer to Cernan of the Beasts and Ceinwen of the Bow. The Dalrei believe in totem animals (obtained in adolescence during a ceremonial fast), and their hunting is regulated by taboos and sacred laws that define which animals can be killed and how. In general, the people of Fionavar display an attitude of great reverence for their deities (*augustum*) and do not disobey the divine rules (the King of Brennin's refusal to perform the self-sacrifice is a shameful exception which dooms the entire kingdom).

Apart from the already mentioned Summer Tree and Dana's temples, Fionavar possesses other sacred places, where the sense of something divine and otherworldly (*numinous*) is ever-present. Mount Rangat, Rakoth's prison, is both a memory of the

²¹ Ibidem, p. 296.

past victory over evil and a threat for the future generations. Starkadh, Rakoth's fortress which resonates with his evil powers, is the place of utmost dread. Cader Sedat (the Spiral Castle) is sacred, because it is situated in the center of all worlds and because it is a place of eternal rest for the mightiest people of all worlds. Pendaran Wood, a forest which possesses a kind of collective consciousness, turns against any mortal trespasser. The Wood's holy glade has been the place of many notable events: the birth of a beautiful forest spirit, Lisen, and a flying unicorn, Imraith-Nimphais, Amarigen's obtaining of the runes of skylore, and the battle between an earth-demon and Lancelot of the Lake. Another sacred place is Calor Diman (Crystal Lake) of the dwarves, which is the residence of the Crystal Dragon. The Dragon functions as the dwarves' protective spirit and decides who can be the next dwarf king through a ritual in which the potential king must spend a night of a full moon on the Lake's shore and not become insane. The king is then forever bound by the Lake's power. Whenever the main heroes or Fionavar's inhabitants visit any of these places, they instantly sense that they are surrounded by otherworldly powers, which are incomprehensible, but nonetheless awe-inspiring (*mysterium tremendum* and *majestas*).

In a similar manner, every meeting with one of Fionavar's fantastic creatures is an experience of the awe-inspiring *numinous*. Kay's secondary reality is inhabited by several extraordinary creatures – representatives of both Light and Darkness – which become an extension of Fionavar's *sacrum*. Apart from the Crystal Dragon, the heroes are supported by Imraith-Nimphais and the Paraiko. Imraith-Nimphais, a beautiful blood-red flying unicorn, was created by the goddess Dana as a weapon in the up-coming war against Rakoth. The unicorn's beauty, gentleness and mercilessness are also the attributes of Dana, hence the animal can be treated as the goddess's symbol. The beast later becomes spiritually united with a boy from the Dalrei as his totem animal, and eventually sacrifices herself to protect the child. As for the Paraiko, they are Kay's version of giants, described as one of the Weaver's first children and presented as gentle creatures protected by a bloodcurse, i.e. anyone shedding their blood will be cursed. The bloodcurse lasts until the Paraiko are called to war against Rakoth, and taught about hatred and violence – their Edenic innocence is then disrupted by knowledge of evil. Rakoth, on the other hand, has his own allies. The Black Dragon, Avaia – a carnivorous black swan, and a sea-serpent called the Soulmonger are embodiments of his evil powers and a mockery of the Weaver's perfect creations. Yet even though Rakoth is able to corrupt the already existing life and the Weaver's work, he is not an omnipotent god, because, e.g. he cannot restore his severely injured hand. The difference between the extent of the Weaver's and Rakoth's powers is best emphasized by their creation of the lios alfar (elf-like beings) and the svart alfar (who resemble traditional fantasy orcs). The beauty of the former and the perversity of the latter exemplify the powers of both gods. In addition to the creatures of Light and Darkness, there are some other – the Wild Hunt, Eilathen, Curdardh – that seem neutral or even indifferent to the cosmic conflict. The Wild Hunt is a group of ghostly horse-riders who roam the skies and kill without hesitation anyone in their way. They are described as random and unpredictable; the Weaver created them as such in order to prepare the foundation for the freedom (and unpredictability) of human will. Eilathen is a water spirit

resembling a merman; his powers allow him to create a series of visions which introduce one of the heroes to the entire history of Fionavar. However, he creates them only because he is enslaved; when he is set free, he does not have any intentions of helping the heroes. Similarly, Curdardh, the metamorphosing earth-demon living under and protecting the glade of Pendaran Wood, is presented as neither evil nor good; if anything, he is a symbol of the brute force of nature. Whenever any of these beings appears, it arouses both fascination and fear (*fascinas*).

Fionavar's *sacrum* is also connected to magic powers and the ways people use them. One type of power is accessible only to the virgin priestesses of Dana; its source is the earthroot (avarlith). The second type is the power wielded by the mages. It was established when the first mage, Amairgen, received from Mörnir the runes of skylore, which made the mages independent from the priestesses. Thus, Kay clearly separates the male and female powers. The third kind of power is the so called "wild magic" or "blood magic" – a power released in service of a god/goddess during a holy ritual (so accessible only to a few and temporarily). In addition, Fionavar's magic is connected to sacred objects. The Cauldron of Khath Meigol has the power to restore the dead to life. Owein's Horn can call the Wild Hunt to battle. Lökdal is a cursed dagger which will kill anyone who uses it without love in his heart – the weapon which ultimately kills Rakoth. The Circlet of Lisen, made by lios alfar, is the embodiment of Light. The ring Baelrath, also called the Warstone, is powered by the goddesses Macha and Nemain, and allows its bearer to call anyone to war. These objects are, in general, extensions of different magical powers, and in Fionavar all types of power are related to divinity.

During their adventures in Fionavar, the five people from Toronto directly experience, or even become part of, Fionavar's *sacrum*. Kim, for instance, becomes the new Seer of Brennín and discovers her gift to foresee the future. As the bearer of Baelrath, she is the intermediary to Macha and Nemain, and calls other characters to war. Jennifer, the other female protagonist, is violated by Rakoth and gives birth to his son, Darien, who is poised between Light and Darkness. The woman also discovers her true identity as Guinevere and eventually, having earned redemption for the sins committed in her previous life, she sails to a realm beyond time. Paul willingly sacrifices himself on the Summer Tree, is accepted by Mörnir, and then restored to life; he becomes the god's intermediary on earth and is given divine powers to cleanse and redeem the sinners. Similarly, Kevin makes a sacrifice of his life and he becomes a divine lover to Dana during the ceremony of Maidaladan – celebration of fertility and sexuality. Thanks to his sacrifice an evil spell is broken and spring finally returns to Fionavar. Dave also becomes a lover to a goddess, though he does not have to sacrifice his life like Paul and Kevin. Dave meets Ceinwen of the Bow and eventually impresses her with his courage and fighting skills; she takes him as her lover and later reveals that she will give birth to a child created from their union. All in all, though the encounters with Fionavar's god and goddesses force the heroes to acknowledge their human frailty, they at the same times contribute to their spiritual and psychological development. Kay particularly emphasizes the freedom of human will and

praises his heroes for making difficult moral choices and sacrificing their own well-being (Paul, Kevin, Darien) in exchange for a greater good.

If all of the given examples are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that Fionavar's *sacrum* is an odd blend of various religious ideas. Some of the religious references pertain to monotheism, particularly Christianity. The Weaver, described in masculine terms, a benevolent deity and the ultimate Creator, resembles the Christian God, the Heavenly Father. Consequently, Rakoth, called the first and fallen god and Sathain, is his Luciferian adversary who intends to corrupt the divine creation. The lesser gods and goddesses of Fionavar – bound by the laws established by the supreme Weaver, interacting with humans according to his will, and tending to various parts of the created world – might be seen as functioning in the roles of angels. What is more, the themes of creation, Edenic innocence, first murder among brothers, temptation, fall, and redemption through sacrifice which reappear through the trilogy are reconstructions of patterns appearing in the Old and New Testament. In addition, the freedom of human will – which is such a prominent factor to the spiritual development of Kay's heroes – is elevated by Christianity as one of God's greatest gifts to His children. Finally, the values promoted by the trilogy (self-sacrifice and love for other), as well as the ultimate victory of good over evil fit the Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, images from various mythologies appear as frequently as references to the biblical tradition. Though the Weaver, Rakoth and the lesser gods might be interpreted according to the Christian tradition, they might as well be seen as a pantheon of deities, borrowed from different mythologies. In terms of Norse myths,²² Kay's Mörnir of the Thunder is a combination of Odin and Thor, while his ravens, Thought and Memory, resemble Odin's ravens called Hugin and Munin. The sacred Summer Tree is similar to the Yggdrasil: Odin sacrificed himself on the tree to receive the magic runes, while Paul sacrifices his life in exchange for the salvation of Brennin. Finally, the Wild Hunt,²³ which Kay so heavily reconstructed in his story, also appears in the Norse mythology. Some other names and concepts used in the trilogy were borrowed from Celtic mythology.²⁴ Dana resembles the Celtic mother-goddess, Ana; the names of Kay's war goddesses, Macha and Nemain, sound almost like Macha and Nemai, which are the names of the Irish goddesses of war; Cernan of the Beasts is similar to the Celtic god Cernunnos; and the name of Kay's sea god, Liranan, is a derivation from the name of the Celtic sea god, Manannán Mac Lir. In addition, Kay's Cauldron of Khath Meigol, which can restore the dead to life, resembles a similarly powerful Cauldron appearing in Celtic myths. As far as classical mythology²⁵ is concerned, Ceinwen of the Bow resembles Artemis – the Greek goddess of hunting, and Curdardh, with his battle hammer, deformed leg and connection to earth, is similar to Greek Hephaistos, the lame smith-god that worked under a volcano.

²² J. Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, New York: Oxford University Press 2002.

²³ C. Eason, *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols. A Handbook*, Westport: Greenwood Press 2008, p. 105–108.

²⁴ G. Matson, J. Roberts, *Celtic Mythology A to Z*, 2nd ed, New York: Chelsea House 2010.

²⁵ A. Cotterelle, *The Encyclopedia of Mythology. Norse, Classical, Celtic*, London: Hermes House 2006.

In addition, Kay's Andain – the offspring of gods and mortals – resemble the semi-immortal heroes that appear in several world mythologies.

What is more, the trilogy contains reference to some other world religions. Kay's emphasis on balance and harmony (which will be sustained between the existing worlds only if Fionavar is protected) is close to the teachings of Taoism for which harmony is one of the primary goals. In addition, the text frequently relies on the concept of dualism similar to the dualism of yin and yang: the Crystal Dragon is opposed by the Black Dragon; the white swan, Lauriel, by the black Avaia; the female power derived from the earthroot by the male power of the skylore. However, while Taoism believes in the balance of powers, in Kay's Fionavar Light eventually triumphs over Darkness. Moreover, the trilogy introduces the motif of reincarnation: Guinevere, Arthur and Lancelot are punished for their sins by an unending cycle of death-rebirth. Only after Light triumphs over Darkness are they forgiven and allowed to move on to afterlife. The idea of reincarnation appears in many world religions, e.g. in Buddhism. Finally, the practices of the Dalrei, which involve shamans, totem animals, ritual fasts and hunts regulated by divine law, are similar to the practices of the Native Americans.

A more in-depth analysis of Kay's world could probably uncover even more religious and mythological references. Nevertheless, even such a brief study of *Fionavar Tapestry* reveals a lot about the realm's multi-faceted *sacrum*, its inhabitants' various attitudes and concepts of divinity, as well as the author's several sources of inspiration. This, in turn, proves that studying fantasy literature through the prism of phenomenology of religion can be a rewarding task. Secondary religions and variants of secondary *sacrum* are a vital part of numerous fantastic realms. It is frequently through the reconstructions of religious/spiritual themes that fantasists convey the most vital messages of their books. In *Fionavar Tapestry*, the heroes' reactions to (secondary) religion and *sacrum* help Kay argue that willingness to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of others, courage to make difficult choices and strength to bear their consequences are the most desirable features of character. Phenomenology of religion supplies the tools which allow to appropriately evaluate secondary *sacrum* and disambiguate the spiritual message of a fantasy text.

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Summary

Phenomenology of Religion and the Study of Modern Fantasy Literature

The aim of the following paper is to prove that the tools applied by phenomenology of religion to the study of *sacrum*, i.e. various religious phenomena and manifestations appearing in our world, can be successfully applied to the study of *sacrum* present in the secondary worlds of modern fantasy fiction. When applied, the phenomenological approach will contribute to a better understanding of the imaginary world and of the spiritual dimension of the heroes' adventures, and reveal the author's inspiration with particular religions/mythologies. The following paper, first of all, provides a brief summary of phenomenology of religion as a discipline; secondly, discusses this discipline's applicability to fantasy literature, and finally provides a sample study of a fantastic religion present in Guy Gavriel Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry*.