

Fantasy is one of the most popular genres of popular literature, reflecting the changes taking place in social consciousness. In many cultural circles limited by political and moral censorship in the 19th and 20th centuries, fantasy enabled authors to express their opinion on various topics and criticize the socio-political situation of a given country, and reacted vividly to the changes taking place.

This species has played an important role in during the fight for women's rights in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. The emergence of female authors on the science fiction publishing market, previously unavailable to them, led to the emergence of new literary phenomena, including the introduction of a new type of heroines, gender and femininity issues, and new threads related to initiations. Women writers strived to achieve equal status both in the social and literary fields, which is why the themes of their works were issues related to gender, equality and the place of women in a patriarchal society. The authors deconstructed harmful patterns, created their own depicted worlds, far from male domination. Genre changes, inspired by the feminist movements of the 1960s, led to the emergence of a new literary trend - women's fantasy. Initially, authors deconstructed destructive patterns in science fiction literature, originally created for male readers, but over time this tendency began to appear in fantasy as well.

Thanks to feminist movements, today there is a departure from the representation in a literary work of the scheme of a hero and women who appeared as supporting characters, created on the basis of gender stereotypes - wives as housewives, princess-virgins, waiting for rescue or independent, but instead "shrewd" villains. Today, female characters have ceased to be a background and have become full-fledged and emancipated literary heroines. This tendency is particularly noticeable in fantasy, which today is the most popular form of fantasy.

In Poland, this genre began to develop only in the 1990s, which was caused by a complicated political situation. After 1989, political changes were introduced and censorship was abolished, and thanks to the opening to the West, the works of foreign fantasy writers began to reach Poland, which marked the beginning of the rise in the popularity of fantasy. Although in the West the postulates developed during feminist movements were consistently adhered to, fantasy in Poland followed tendentious and patriarchal patterns in the first stages of its development.

It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that female themes and a change in the perception of heroines began to become visible. Although the authors drew inspiration from the Western canon, there is a noticeable departure from popular patterns in their work.

Native fantasy writers are often inspired by Slavic mythology and local folklore, which is why many heroines in Polish fantasy novels are witches, whisperers and witches, i.e. "knowing" women, who in feminist criticism are a symbol of emancipation and independence.

In recent years, topics related to broadly understood femininity, motherhood, gender equality and sexual violence have been increasingly discussed in Polish fantasy. This trend is caused by the political situation in Poland and changes in social awareness (especially after 2020). Retellings, i.e. reinterpretations of fairy tales and myths, are becoming more and more popular. The authors are more eager to reach for mythical stories, change their patriarchal structure, bring out hitherto hidden 'herstory' and give voice to previously silent heroines.

Although women's fantasy is not yet a separate genre in Poland, the tendencies characteristic of this variety appear more and more often in the works of Polish authors.