



From tolkien to tiktok: mythopoeia, multisemiosis, and pop culture

De tolkien ao tiktok: mitopéia, multissemiotização e cultura pop

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Resumo: Este artigo examina a transformação da Fantasia de gênero literário em prática multissemioticamente e tecnoculturalmente estruturada, partindo do princípio de que a mitopéia opera como matriz simbólica e epistemológica na cultura digital contemporânea. Com base na formulação tolkieniana de construção de mundos e criação de mitos, propõe-se que a Fantasia constitui não apenas um modo narrativo, mas um modelo criativo e cognitivo por meio do qual mundos ficcionais são construídos como sistemas simbólicos coerentes. Com base nos estudos de mídias e na semiótica (Jenkins, 2006; Bolter e Grusin, 2000; Manovich, 2002; Wolf, 2012; Murray, 2017), o artigo investiga como a convergência de mídias e as plataformas participativas expandiram a Fantasia em um ecossistema multissemiótico que integra texto, imagem, som, performance e interação. Por meio de uma abordagem teórico-analítica ancorada em revisão bibliográfica e apoiada em exemplos ilustrativos oriundos de franquias contemporâneas e práticas digitais, argumenta-se que a Fantasia opera como uma práxis mitopéica distribuída. Nesse contexto, o público torna-se coautor, e os mundos ficcionais evoluem em sistemas transmídia dinâmicos, sustentados por práticas colaborativas e pela circulação algorítmica. Defende-se ainda que esse deslocamento reconfigura a função cultural do mito, transferindo-o de um regime de transcendência para um de imanência digital, sem perder sua função estruturante de sentido. Por fim, propõe-se que a Fantasia constitui um modo de conhecimento que organiza o imaginário contemporâneo, articulando dimensões simbólicas, tecnológicas e afetivas na produção de sentido na cultura pop global e nos ambientes digitais.

Palavras-chave: Mitopéia. Fantasia. J.R.R. Tolkien. Multissemiotização. Cultura Digital.

Abstract: This paper examines the transformation of Fantasy from a literary genre into a multissemiotic and technocultural practice, arguing that mythopoeia operates as a symbolic and epistemological matrix within contemporary digital culture. Drawing on J.R.R. Tolkien's formulation of worldbuilding and myth-making, it proposes that Fantasy constitutes a creative and cognitive framework through which fictional worlds are constructed as coherent symbolic systems. Building on scholarship in media theory and semiotics (Jenkins, 2006; Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Manovich, 2002; Wolf, 2012; Murray, 2017), the paper investigates how media convergence and participatory platforms have expanded Fantasy into a multissemiotic ecosystem integrating text, image, sound, performance, and interaction. Through a theoretical-analytical

methodology grounded in bibliographical review and supported by illustrative examples drawn from contemporary franchises and digital practices, the study argues that Fantasy operates as a distributed mythopoeic praxis. In this environment, audiences become co-authors, and fictional worlds evolve into dynamic transmedia systems sustained by collaborative practices and algorithmic circulation. The paper further contends that this shift reconfigures the cultural function of myth, displacing it from transcendence to digital immanence while preserving its role as a structure of meaning. Ultimately, it demonstrates that Fantasy constitutes a mode of knowledge that organizes the contemporary imaginary, articulating symbolic, technological, and affective dimensions in the production of meaning within global Pop Culture and digital environments.

Keywords: Mythopoeia. Fantasy. Multisemiosis. J.R.R. Tolkien. Digital Culture.

Introdução

In an age that has witnessed the mediatization of life on an unprecedented scale, Fantasy is perhaps the most emblematic expression of the intersection of aesthetics, technology, and culture. Far from being confined to escapist literature, as shallow readings have occasionally claimed (Moura, 2022a), it consolidated itself throughout the twentieth century as a space for constructing complex fictional worlds and symbolically elaborating worldviews. Taking J.R.R. Tolkien's (1892-1973) formulations in his essay *On fairy-stories* ([1939] 2014) as a point of departure, Fantasy came to be understood not only as a narrative mode but also as an ontological and epistemological gesture¹: a poetics of creation that seeks, through mythopoeia, to recompose the bond between modern humanity and myth, a bond fractured by technical rationality and secularization (Flieger, 2002; Chance, 2004; Shippey, 2005). In this sense, Tolkien's gesture inaugurates not merely a turn within the genre but a

¹ Throughout this paper, Fantasy is theorized as a mode rather than a genre. Drawing on David Roas's (2011) account of the Fantastic as a discursive effect that operates across genres, instead of a fixed category in the Todorovian sense, this study advances a broader claim: Fantasy functions as a transgeneric, multisemiotic mode that organizes meaning beyond the boundaries of literature. Conceived not as a closed genre, it operates as a flexible aesthetic and cognitive framework that traverses media, manifesting as an effect, a structure, and a worldbuilding logic. Accordingly, Fantasy should be understood beyond static structural classifications, as a dynamic mode of signification that underpins its circulation across forms, platforms, and cultural practices.

creative paradigm that conceives fictional worlds as sub-creation; that is, universes endowed with internal laws, coherence, and symbolic density, capable of instituting an aesthetic experience of wonder and recognition.

This mythopoeic impulse has found a significant space for expansion in new platforms. Being the direct heir to myth, that once expressed itself predominantly in literary form, either oral, written or performed, Fantasy began to operate within a multisemiotically amplified ecosystem, migrating to cinema, comics, video games, immersive environments, and, more recently, to social networks and algorithmic platforms. As Mark J. P. Wolf (2012) observes, contemporary worldbuilding transcends mere intermedial transposition, organizing itself as a system of signification in which text, sound, image, and performance coexist and complement one another. This transmedia nature of Fantasy enables not only the circulation of fictional worlds across media but also their reappropriation and co-authorship by audiences, a phenomenon Henry Jenkins (2006) terms participatory culture.

This scenario raises a fundamental question for understanding twenty-first-century aesthetics: in what ways has the relation between Fantasy and technology reconfigured the contemporary imaginary? The diffusion of platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, with their short-form videos and fragmentary narratives, reveals the emergence of new languages and cultural practices in which myth, once tied to orality and the epic, reappears as ephemeral, remixable, and interactive audiovisual performance. Within these platforms, myth is simultaneously aestheticized and democratized, instituting a logic of re-enchantment of everyday life through an aesthetics of sharing. This shift makes visible a mutation in Fantasy's cultural function: from a literary space of symbolic resistance, it becomes a device of social mediation, producing meaning and belonging in a world increasingly fragmented and governed by

informational flows (Bolter, Grusin, 1999; Manovich, 2001; Murray, 2016), created and disseminated at scale for fast consumption and algorithmically targeted to specific niches.

It is from this premise that the present hypothesis is framed: contemporary Fantasy, heir to the Tolkienian mythopoeic project, finds in current information technologies new territories for the creation and diffusion of myth, becoming the symbolic matrix of a popular culture that is essentially participatory and multisensory. Practices such as cosplay, fanfiction, role-play, and audiovisual recreations on social networks, among others, constitute manifestations of a collaborative mythopoeia that strains the boundaries between author and audience, creation and reception. Progressively, fictional worlds cease to close upon the individual work and expand into continuous semiotic ecosystems, sustained by affective and creative communities.

Accordingly, this paper discusses how Fantasy, in dialogue with digital technologies, contributes to the shaping of a mythopoeic popular culture marked by the convergence of languages and the aestheticization of myth within contemporary media. To this end, it adopts a theoretical-analytical methodology anchored in a literature review that brings into conversation authors such as Tolkien (2008), Wolf (2012), Jenkins (2006), Bolter and Grusin (1999), Manovich (2001), Groensteen (2007), and Murray (2016), and takes selected examples from contemporary franchises, as well as emergent practices of cultural production on digital networks, with emphasis on phenomena such as BookTok and TikTok's serialized and collaborative narratives.

One argues that the relevance of this discussion lies in recognizing Fantasy as an aesthetic and epistemological force central to understanding contemporary culture. By conjoining mythopoeia and

technology, it institutes forms of symbolic expression that not only reflect but also shape the social imaginary. To apprehend this process is, therefore, to map some of the ways in which humanity reinscribes its ancestral need to narrate the world, now mediated by algorithms, interfaces, and multimodal languages, reiterating that, even in times of acceleration and ephemerality, myth endures as a horizon of meaning, and Fantasy as its most vivid contemporary actualization.

Mythopoeia as ontological and semiotic matrix

In modernity, the term mythopoeia, from the Greek mythopoía (μυθοποιία), literally ‘myth-making’, acquires a specific meaning within literary thought through Tolkien, whose work marks a turning point in the history of Fantasy. Although the concept predates the author and had already been used in the nineteenth century by George Grote (1846) in his studies on Greek religiosity and imagination, it is in *Mythopoeia* (Tolkien, 1931), a poem composed in response to a theological discussion with C. S. Lewis, and, above all, in the essay *On fairy-stories* ([1939] 2008), which may be perceived as his mythopeic manifest, that Tolkien transforms it into a genuine poetic principle that would come to govern his entire corpus and radiate throughout the genre. In this context, mythopoeia designates the creative action of constructing fictional worlds endowed with symbolic autonomy and poetic potential, built in the likeness of the actual world yet governed by their own internal laws.

This gesture, as Verlyn Flieger (2002) notes, operates as a response to the demythologization of the modern world, establishing a space of reconciliation between reason and imagination, between *logos* and *mythos*. For Tolkien, world-creation would not, therefore, be a mere exercise in arbitrary fantasy, but an act of reverence toward Creation in the theological sphere: “We make by the law in which we’re made”

(Tolkien, 2008, p. 78). Thus, the author institutes the notion of sub-creation, through which the artist, endowed with imagination and language, becomes co-author of a symbolic universe that mirrors, on an aesthetic scale, the totality of being. Fantasy, therefore, acquires an ontological status, not reducible to an ephemeral escape from reality; on the contrary, it offers a path toward the re-enchantment of the world (Shippey, 2005; Chance, 2004), restoring the sense of wonder and transcendence obscured by modernity.

From this conception, mythopoeia emerges as both a narrative and cognitive device, combining mythic structure, internal coherence, and symbolic density. In it, artistic creation entails a commitment to the ontological coherence of the fictional universe: the articulation among natural laws, cosmogonies, genealogies, languages, maps, and cultures that confer consistency upon the imagined world. For Tolkien, such elements are not mere narrative embellishments but conditions of possibility for the voluntary suspension of disbelief first formulated by Samuel Coleridge ([1817] 1983), now reframed through the theological perspective of ‘making as a demiurge makes.’

However, as Dimitra Fimi and Thomas Honegger (2019) observe, Tolkien’s originality lies not only in the creation of his fictional world of Arda, with its ages, peoples, and languages, but also in the elaboration of an English national mythology, conceived as a symbolic remedy for the absence of an indigenous mythic national corpus. By fusing philology, theology, and poetics, the author formulated a model of mythopoeic fiction in which language and myth are two faces of the same aesthetic ontology, since “the invention of languages is the foundation. The stories were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse” (Tolkien apud Carpenter, 1977, p. 213). From this perspective, language assumes a cosmogonic role as an instrument for the institution of the fictional

being, a distant echo of the primordial Word (the *logos*) within the Christian tradition.

This foundational dimension of mythopoeia helps explain, at least in part, why Tolkienian fantasy transcended literature and reverberated across later artistic expressions, becoming a blueprint for narratives that construct autonomous universes. As Clute and Grant (1997) point out, it is from Tolkien onward that the distinction between High Fantasy, set in wholly fictional worlds, and Low Fantasy, which introduces the marvelous into the real world, is consolidated. In both cases, the organizing axis remains the same: the creation of a fictional world governed by internal coherence and symbolic depth. Such systematization brings the mythopoeic exercise closer to philosophical creation and anthropological projection, rendering it both aesthetically and epistemologically significant.

Moreover, as Wolf (2012) argues, Tolkien's legacy consolidates what is now understood as worldbuilding: a process in which the entirety of the fictional universe, not merely the narrative, becomes an object of design and contemplation. The scholar observes that the fictional world possesses an ontology of its own, distinct from the narrative that traverses it, which explains its ability to persist, expand, and be explored across multiple media (Wolf, 2012). This principle resonates in contemporaneity, as fictional universes transcend the print and unfold into transmedia ecosystems, wherein each medium contributes new perspectives, narratives, and signs.

In this sense, Tolkienian mythopoeia may be understood as an aesthetic matrix of popular culture: it provides the structural and symbolic model for contemporary franchises in which the creative act is oriented less toward narrative linearity than toward the weaving of a coherent cosmos.

The expansion of these universes into other languages underscores the multisemiotic character of the mythopoeic exercise, continually reinvented according to the technical possibilities of each era (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Manovich, 2001; Moura, 2022b).

Nevertheless, to confine mythopoeia to the realm of Fantasy literature would be a misreading. As Marek Oziewicz (2007-2008) demonstrates, mythopoeic fiction operates as a conceptual laboratory in which imaginative responses to philosophical, ethical, and existential questions are tested. By creating alternative worlds, the author inaugurates a symbolic field where models of society, origin narratives, and moral dilemmas may be explored, making Fantasy a medium for reflection on the human condition at a level of complexity unattainable by realist genres, precisely because of its intrinsic capacity to transcend the limits of reality. From this perspective, mythopoeia functions as an instrument of speculative thought, wherein imagination and reason are interwoven.

Finally, it is necessary to recognize that while Tolkien's mythopoeia was born from philological erudition and theological inspiration, its contemporary reconfigurations have expanded into a technocultural horizon. New media not only host but transform the mythopoeic experience, granting it a collaborative, multimodal, and procedural character. In digital environments, fictional universes often cease to be static, becoming interactive platforms open to exploration and remix. Thus, the Tolkienian tradition does not end with his *oeuvre* but persists as a structure rewritten through the languages of popular culture and the technological devices that now redefine the boundaries between myth, art, and technique.

Multisemioticity and the Aesthetics of Fantasy

Fantasy, as both a narrative mode and an aesthetic device, distinguishes itself through its capacity to articulate multiple systems of signification around a mythopoeic core. This feature, often overlooked by strictly literary approaches, reveals that it operates less as an isolated textual form and more as a complex semiotic ecosystem, whose symbolic efficacy depends on the interaction among diverse languages, i.e. verbal, visual, sonic, gestural, and interactive. In the context of contemporary culture, marked by media convergence (Jenkins, 2006) and the ubiquity of digital technologies, this hybrid nature of Fantasy becomes not merely evident but constitutive of its very aesthetic identity. Thus, to understand the phenomenon of multisemioticity is to grasp how contemporary fantasy constructs meaning through an intertwining of codes that transcends the domain of text and unfolds across a plurality of media, interfaces, and materialities.

As Thierry Groensteen (2007) observes, every work that employs visuality as a narrative componente (such as Comic Art, though extendable to contemporary visual culture more broadly) constitutes a system of signs governed by iconic solidarity, that is, by the interdependence among signifying units (panels, frames, layouts, etc.) that spatially articulate themselves in order to compose discourse. Within this logic, the (often print) page, the classical material support of the narrative, becomes the field upon which relationships between text and image, rhythm and pause, linearity and simultaneity are organized. This principle, which for Groensteen grounds the Semiotics of Comics, also offers a key to understanding contemporary Fantasy as a multisemiotically structured art: in it, meaning emerges rather from the dialogue among heterogeneous signs instead of the supremacy of a single expressive channel.

Similarly, Scott McCloud (1994) underscores that, unlike traditional literary discourse, graphic narrative operates through the juxtaposition of

sequential images that invite the reader to perform a cognitive act of synthesis, the so-called closure. This operation, which bridges the intervals between panels, constitutes a powerful metaphor for the functioning of Fantasy as a symbolic form: it calls upon the recipient to fill gaps, to traverse worlds, to co-create meaning through mediation between visible and invisible, said and unsaid. The aesthetic experience of Fantasy, in this sense, is always an exercise in intersemiotic translation, wherein distinct languages collaborate to establish a cohesive and immersive universe.

This dynamic finds resonance in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's (1999) formulations on remediation, understood as the mutual reconfiguration among media. According to the scholars, every new medium arises under the dual impulse of immediacy and hypermediacy: on one hand, the pursuit of transparency and immersion; on the other, the self-reflexive display of its own materiality. In the field of Fantasy, this principle manifests in the coexistence between the desire for total immersion, i.e., the experience of presence within the fictional world, and the aesthetic awareness that such a universe is constructed through technical mediation. Cinematic adaptations of works such as *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001-2003) exemplify this tension: digital technology (CGI) enables the creation of universes of spectacular verisimilitude, while simultaneously revealing, through their visual exuberance, the marks of the technical mediation that makes them possible.

Complementarily, in discussing the language of new media, Lev Manovich (2001) argues that digital culture reconfigures narrative aesthetics around principles such as modularity, variability, and automation. By enabling the infinite recombination of elements, these properties bring the contemporary creative act closer to a procedural model in which the artist not only composes but programs worlds. Fantasy, as a mythopoeic

practice, intimately dialogues with this logic. For in proposing universes governed by their own laws and symbolic coherence, it anticipates and adapts to the computational grammars that structure virtual environments; thus becoming a genre particularly suited to exploration in digital platforms and interactive experiences.

Within this horizon, the notion of immersion, so central to Wolf (2012) and further developed by Janet Murray (2016), gains renewed prominence. For the latter, digital narrative constitutes a form of cyberdrama that invites the subject to enter simulated worlds, experiencing them not merely as spectator but as participant. Aesthetic pleasure derives from the sensation of presence and agency within a configurable narrative space. Regarding Fantasy, such immersion manifests in varying degrees: from cognitive and emotional engagement with characters (absorption), to the active exploration of environments and plots in electronic games and virtual realities (spatial immersion). In both cases, the aesthetic effect depends upon the coherence among its multiple constitutive languages.

Thus, multisemioticity functions not as a formal ornament but as a condition for Fantasy as an aesthetic experience. As myth is updated across contemporary media, it assumes plural bodies: text and image in comics, sound and motion in cinema, interaction and procedurality in games, performativity and virality in social networks. Each semiosis adds new layers of meaning to the narrative core, reconfiguring it according to the affordances and constraints of its medium. This plasticity explains the genre's longevity and its capacity to adapt to technological transformations without forfeiting symbolic depth.

In the context of digital Pop Culture, multisemioticity becomes even more pronounced. Phenomena such as BookTok, fan trailers, cosplay videos,

serialized micro-narratives, and collaborative recreations illustrate how platform users assume the role of mythopoeic co-authors, expanding fictional universes through their own languages. In this environment, Fantasy is no longer merely read or viewed; it is performed, remixed, and reiterated through gestures, filters, sounds, and memes, all contemporary forms of symbolic inscription that, though ephemeral, reveal the persistence of the narrative impulse and the human desire for fabulation.

Contemporary Fantasy operates, then, as an intersemiotic laboratory in which myth reinvents itself under the sign of convergence. Multisemioticity, far from diluting the genre's poetic potential, amplifies it, allowing the imaginary to find new languages through which to manifest. By combining the Tolkienian mythopoeic legacy with the expressive possibilities of digital technologies, Fantasy confirms its vocation as an art capable of integrating word, image, sound, and interaction into a single creative gesture. In doing so, the aesthetics of the fantastic, upon migrating into digital and participatory environments, reaffirms its primordial function: to produce worlds. And in so doing, it reveals that Fantasy, more than a genre, is a mode of knowledge. A way of thinking and feeling the world through multiple signs, in perpetual dialogue with the technologies that render them visible.

Fantasy, technology, and the digital Pop Culture Imaginary

The consolidation of audiovisual and digital culture, marked by media convergence and the rise of participatory platforms, has inaugurated a new stage in the history of Fantasy: one in which fictional worlds cease to be confined to the materiality of the literary text and unfold into expanded technocultural ecosystems, wherein production and reception intertwine within a continuous flow of creation, remixing, and circulation. This overall transition, already anticipated in Jenkins's (2006) formulations on the

culture of convergence, redefines not only the conditions under which Fantasy circulates, but the very status of myth in the networked age. As it traverses languages and media, Fantasy becomes an ever-expanding narrative constructed collectively through the active engagement of audiences and the constant dialogue among author, work, and public.

In this context, convergence must not be understood as the mere coexistence of media, but as a cultural logic (Jenkins, 2006, p. 15), in which each medium contributes a unique fragment of meaning to the totality of the fictional universe. This is evident in contemporary franchises whose universes transcend their original narratives, reconfiguring themselves through films, television series, video games, comics, podcasts, theme parks, digital platforms, etc. As Derek Johnson (2013) notes, the industrial model of media franchises depends precisely on this capacity for coherent expansion, sustained by strategies of licensing and an ethos of narrative continuity. Such multiplication of media does not imply simple replication of content; rather, it constitutes a spatialization of narrative, wherein each medium adds new layers of information, characters, and perspectives, enriching the mythopoeic exercise and reinforcing the sense of immersion.

Add to this logic the emergence of collaborative cultural practices in which audiences cease to occupy the role of passive consumers and instead assume that of symbolic co-authors. According to Matt Hills (2002) and Paul Booth (2015), fan communities operate as interpretive and creative collectives that expand, contest, or reinvent fictional universes. By producing fanfiction, fanart, videos, games, theories, and performative enactments (cosplay, live-action roleplay), etc. these groups institute a participatory mythopoeia that blurs the boundaries between creation and reception, canon and apocrypha, official and derivative. In such practices,

myth ceases to be the monopoly of the author and circulates instead as a shared cultural asset, open to collective reinterpretation.

This movement toward decentralized authorship is further amplified by digital platforms, especially those governed by recommendation algorithms and short-form formats, such as TikTok. Unlike earlier media, based on linearity and duration, these platforms operate through logics of fragmentation, virality, and performativity. Thus, upon entering such spaces, Fantasy assumes new forms: cosplay videos synchronized with epic soundtracks, visual micro-stories, serialized narrative sketches, humorous or critical recreations of iconic scenes, as well as mythological analyses mediated by the aesthetics of rapid entertainment, etc. The phenomenon known as BookTok, for instance, as noted by Bolivar Torres (2021), has played a decisive role in popularizing Fantasy literature among younger generations, intertwining reading, performance, and belonging within a communal audiovisual language.

Yet, as it inscribes itself into platforms, Fantasy not only adapts to their technical and expressive conditions but also transforms them, establishing zones of re-enchantment within environments governed by ephemerality and accelerated consumption. From this perspective, TikTok can be read as a mythopoeic space in which brief and highly stylized narratives condense archetypes, journeys, and ancestral symbols into audiovisual performances shaped by filters, soundtracks, and algorithms. The looped and repetitive aesthetic native to the format reinforces the ritualistic dimension of myth, while the affordances of duet, reply, and remix translate the dialogic nature of oral tradition into digital language. The result is the emergence of what might be termed an algorithmic poetics of myth, in which symbolic circulation is mediated by technical codes but remains oriented by the human desire to narrate and share collective experience.

In parallel, the advancement of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies introduces new layers to the mythopoeic enterprise, enabling procedural co-authorship and immersive navigation within fictional worlds. In environments such as video games (e.g. *The Elder Scrolls*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*) or interactive experiences (VRChat, Metaverse, Minecraft), the user not only contemplates but inhabits the created universe, participating in its symbolic expansion through choices, constructions, and interactions. Edward Castronova (2005) designates such spaces as synthetic worlds, underscoring their significance as social and economic laboratories. In these contexts, mythopoeia becomes a collective process, sustained by digital architectures that enable both the continuity and mutation of fictional worlds.

These transformations reinforce a shift in how Fantasy is produced, distributed, and experienced. If, in the twentieth century, the genre found its privileged media in literature and audiovisual, in the twenty-first it hybridizes with the dynamics of platform culture, incorporating the logics of gamification, virality, and memetic circulation. Contemporary fantastic narrative thus operates simultaneously on multiple levels: as literary text, audiovisual image, digital performance, and social practice. This multivocality compels a rethinking of the role of myth, which ceases to function as a fixed narrative and becomes instead a field of narrative possibilities, continually updated through the interaction between humans and machines.

Furthermore, the entanglement of Fantasy and technology highlights the emergence of a symbolic attention economy, in which the capacity of a fictional universe to generate engagement, identification, and cultural circulation becomes a measure of its value. As Jonathan Gray (2010)

points out, paratextual elements such as trailers, teasers, posters, spin-offs, behind-the-scenes materials, memes, user-generated content, etc., play a crucial role in constructing and sustaining franchises, functioning as interfaces between the fictional world and the broader media ecosystem. In the case of Fantasy, such paratexts act as mythopoeic doors, introducing new signs and narratives that reinforce the cohesion and expansiveness of fictional worlds.

Nevertheless, this expansion of the mythopoeic experience in the digital era also gives rise to tensions. On one hand, there is a democratization of creative practices and the strengthening of communities of belonging; on the other, the commodification of myth, subjected to the logic of platforms and algorithmic consumption. Even prior to the twenty-first century, Jean Baudrillard (1981) and Fredric Jameson (1991) warned about the risk that the postmodern imaginary, saturated with signs, might reduce myth to simulacrum and Art to spectacle. Yet, even under such conditions, the symbolic potency of Fantasy persists: as it moves between art and industry, ritual and product, it reaffirms the role of myth as a language of resistance and reinvention of meaning.

Ultimately, the integration of Fantasy and technology configures a networked mythopoeia, in which worldbuilding unfolds in distributed, collaborative, and procedural fashion. Myth, once the repository of eternal truths, becomes a dynamic language, shaped by interfaces and algorithms yet still bearing the values, narratives, and affects that structure the collective imaginary. In this scenario, to comprehend Fantasy is to comprehend the contemporary forms of myth-making, articulated not only through the written word but also through gesture, image, sound, performance, and code.

Digital Fantasy, therefore, does not represent the dissolution of myth but its technocultural metamorphosis. In migrating into connected and interactive environments, it reaffirms the ancestral vocation of narrative as a space of mediation between the human and the transcendent, the everyday and the marvelous. From literature to digital platforms, mythopoeia endures as one of the driving forces of imagination; now expanded through the resources of technique and reconfigured by the dynamics of global Pop Culture.

Mythopoeia as the symbolic matrix of Pop Culture

The persistence of myth in contemporary culture cannot be explained merely by a nostalgia for the sacred or by the simple re-edition of ancestral archetypes. Rather, it derives from myth's own capacity for metamorphosis. Its ability to assume new discursive forms in response to the technological, social, and sensory transformations of the modern world. As Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers ([1988] 1991), remind us, myth is a symbolic language that gives form to experience and provides models for conduct, meaning, and transcendence. Even in an era marked by secularization, the function of myth endures: to offer narrative maps for understanding oneself and the other, the real and the possible. Following Tolkien's mythopoeic legacy, contemporary Fantasy emerges as both heir and reinterpreter of this symbolic function, becoming one of the central instruments of re-enchantment within Pop Culture.

Thus, as aforementioned, beyond a literary or audiovisual genre, Fantasy constitutes an epistemological matrix. A mode of knowing and representing reality through the fabulous. In his much-cited *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970), even within the conceptual limitations of a closed definition of genre, Tzvetan Todorov already pointed out that the fantastic operates on the threshold between the possible and the

impossible, establishing a space of hesitation that destabilizes the regime of reason and reopens the symbolic field. In the contemporary moment, however, this threshold manifests not only at the narrative level but also at the technocultural one, as digital devices render the marvelous perceptible, manipulable, and shareable. Myth, once confined to the territory of the imagination, becomes an aesthetic experience mediated by multiple semioses which are visible in virtual worlds, simulacra, and algorithmic performances that translate transcendence into technical language.

From this perspective, Fantasy operates as the syntax of myth within mass culture, articulating narrative structures that hark back to archaic traditions under new grammars. As Umberto Eco (1984) observed, by transforming foundational narratives into serialized products, contemporary culture engenders modern mythologies in which heroes, sagas, and fictional universes function as devices of symbolic and identity cohesion. Similarly, Roland Barthes demonstrated that myth does not disappear with modernity but rather shifts into the discourses of everyday life, becoming an ideological form, since “myth is a type of speech chosen by history [...]” ([1957] 1972, p. 108), highlighting its plasticity and its capacity to naturalize values. Fantasy, by adopting myth as its matrix, reinscribes it within the pop imaginary, transforming entertainment into a symbolic arena where ideology, desire, and imagination intersect.

This process finds a representative expression in the mythopoeic franchises that dominate the global cultural landscape. In them, myth is continually renewed through collaboration among authors, studios, technologies, and audiences. Each new product, be it film, series, game, comic, video, fanfic, expands the symbolic field of the fictional world, sustaining a shared collective imaginary. Contemporary mythopoeia thus structures itself as an open, ever-expanding system in which myth ceases

to be fixed and instead operates as a dynamic process of cultural construction.

Alongside this industrial and collaborative expansion, there exists a cognitive and affective dimension that reinforces the bond between mythopoeia and Pop Culture. Byung-Chul Han (2017) argues that humanity lives under the sign of hypercommunication and positivity, where the excess of stimuli and the dissolution of boundaries between life and spectacle generate a crisis of meaning. In this scenario, myth (and by extension, Fantasy) functions as an antidote to dispersion, offering cohesive narratives and symbolic worlds capable of reintroducing depth into a culture of surface. Fantastic sagas, by proposing journeys, conflicts, and resolutions, reconstruct totalizing narrative structures that restore to the subject a sense of orientation and belonging.

Conversely, the integration of myth into the dynamics of the Culture Industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947) and the symbolic economy of advanced capitalism also produces ambivalences. As aforementioned, Jameson (1991), in his analysis of the cultural logic of postmodernism, notes that the contemporary imaginary tends toward simulation and pastiche, emptying signs of their historical content and reducing myth to a depoliticized aesthetic repertoire. Similarly, Baudrillard (1981) warns of the risk that myth, subjected to the logic of the simulacrum, might lose its symbolic function and become a mere surface of consumption. Within Fantasy, this critique manifests in productions that privilege visual spectacle over narrative depth, transforming the marvelous into commodity and imagination into algorithm.

Yet, even as it is traversed by tensions between art and market, mythopoeia persists as a field of symbolic resistance, a space wherein alternatives to hegemonic narratives are elaborated and new forms of

subjectivity are experimented. The works of Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip Pullman, and Neil Gaiman, for example, mobilize the mythopoeic apparatus to engage with issues of gender, freedom, authority, and ethics, demonstrating that myth, far from restricting itself to a mere reiteration of the past, can function as a critical device oriented toward the present and future. In this sense, Fantasy not only re-enchants but also repoliticizes the imaginary, turning the act of world-building into a gesture of contestation and invention of new modes of being.

This transformative potential is amplified within participatory cultures and digital networks, where myth becomes material for collective creation. As Carlos Scolari, Paolo Bertetti, and Matthew Freeman (2014) observe, transmedia archaeology enables one to understand how narratives and myths migrate and are rearticulated over time, assuming forms that reflect the technologies and regimes of mediation of each era. In the contemporary environment, this archaeology reveals continuity between mythic orality and digital practices, such as remix, fanfiction, memes, short videos, that perpetuate the narrative gesture in new materialities. Pop Fantasy, therefore, can be read as the mythology of the digital age. Structured not by priests or bards, but by networked creators whose voices intertwine into narrative assemblages of global reach.

In this way, Pop Culture, far from trivializing myth through a simplistic lens, may be understood as its new symbolic habitat. It is within Pop Culture that archetypes are reenacted, cosmogonies reformulated, and shared ethical and aesthetic horizons constructed. The language of superheroes, space sagas, and fantastic worlds not only translates but organizes the collective imaginary of a technomediated age, offering myths of origin, fall, and redemption compatible with the anxieties and utopias of the present.

Ultimately, contemporary mythopoeia cannot be reduced to a literary form or narrative device: it is a structure of thought that articulates the symbolic and the technological, the archaic and the posthuman. Within Pop Culture, myth reemerges as an interface between tradition and innovation, becoming a symbolic matrix for the aesthetic, affective, and epistemological experience of the twenty-first century. Thus, by combining the creative gesture of Fantasy with the expressive potential of new media, mythopoeia reaffirms its original vocation: to give form to the invisible, to name the unnameable, to found worlds. Even when these worlds are now constructed in the language of pixels, data, and algorithms.

FINAL REMARKS

The trajectory traced throughout this paper does not merely describe the expansion of Fantasy across media, but rather demonstrates a more fundamental transformation: the consolidation of mythopoeia as a symbolic and epistemological matrix within contemporary digital culture. From Tolkien's formulation of subcreation to the multisemiotic environments of digital platforms, what persists is not simply a genre, but a mode of organizing meaning. Fantasy emerges, therefore, as a site through which the contemporary imaginary is structured, negotiated, and experienced.

In this sense, the shift from literary to digital forms should not be understood as a rupture, but as a reconfiguration of myth's mode of operation. Mythopoeia, which was once primarily articulated through authorial creation and textual coherence, now unfolds as a distributed, collaborative, and technologically mediated process. Worldbuilding ceases to be confined to the boundaries of the individual work and becomes an open-ended system, sustained by the interaction between creators, audiences, and platforms. This transformation does not diminish

the symbolic function of myth; on the contrary, it amplifies it by embedding it within the very infrastructures through which meaning circulates in contemporary culture.

Such a transformation entails a decisive epistemological consequence. Fantasy, as a mythopoeic practice, operates not merely as representation but as a form of knowledge. The worlds it constructs function as symbolic models through which reality is interpreted, reconfigured, and experienced. In digital environments, this function becomes even more explicit: fictional universes are no longer only narrated but inhabited, manipulated, and expanded through multisemiotic configurations that integrate text, image, sound, performance, and interaction. Myth, in this context, is refunctionalized within a regime of digital immanence, maintaining its role as a structure of meaning while adapting to new modes of mediation.

The centrality of Fantasy in contemporary culture, therefore, derives less from its popularity than from its structural role. Through processes of convergence, remediation, and participation, mythopoeia operates as a generative grammar underlying transmedia systems, fan practices, and algorithmically mediated forms of storytelling. What emerges is a distributed mythopoeic praxis in which meaning is continuously produced through the interplay of symbolic, technological, and affective dimensions.

This perspective also allows for a more precise understanding of the tensions that traverse contemporary Fantasy. While deeply embedded in the logics of the cultural industries and the attention economy, mythopoeia simultaneously retains its capacity for symbolic resistance. The same infrastructures that enable commodification also enable reinterpretation, contestation, and creative expansion. Fantasy thus

operates within a field of paradox: it is both a product of the system and a space from which that system can be critically reimagined.

Ultimately, to recognize Fantasy as a mythopoeic and multisemiotic matrix is to reposition it within the broader scope of cultural and media studies. Rather than an escapist form, it must be understood as a central epistemic mode of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, one that articulates how meaning is produced in a world increasingly structured by interfaces, algorithms, and networks. In this context, myth does not survive despite technology, but through it, reaffirming its role as a fundamental structure through which humanity continues to think, narrate, and make sense of the world.

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