Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

# THE CONCEPT OF THE WORLD-IMAGE AND ITS OBJECTS IN FANTASY LITERATURE

**Burieva Nargiza Kuchkarovna**

**PhD Associate professor of Jizzakh state pedagogical university, Uzbekistan**

## ABSTRACT

This article articulates the concept of the world-image in fantasy literature by distinguishing it from the related world-model and showing how objects serve as microcosmic "object-models" of secondary worlds. Drawing on Chudakov's "thing sphere," Propp's functionality, and mythopoetic theory, it demonstrates that in works like The Chronicles of Narnia and Harry Potter, key artifacts (e.g., the wardrobe, the Deathly Hallows) condense a universe's laws, values, and conflicts. By comparing these case studies, the article proposes object-images as a criterion to differentiate fantasy from authorial fairy tale and outlines a concise, interdisciplinary framework for analyzing fantasy's poetics.

**KEYWORDS:** World-image, world-model, fantasy literature, object-model, thing-sphere, poetics of fantasy, world-building, secondary world, microcosm, symbolic function, plot function, character function, mythopoesis, interdisciplinary methodology, genre differentiation.

## INTRODUCTION

The interest of researchers, artists, and readers alike in the problem of the image of the world in the 20th–21st centuries is driven by many factors: the break with traditional religious worldviews; the conscious horror at the potential physical annihilation of the entire planet in a nuclear war; scientific discoveries that compel people to rethink and fundamentally change their perception of reality; and significant social transformations—such as the shift from an industrial to an information society and the introduction of virtual spaces into everyday life. Investigating how this phenomenon is realized in the works of contemporary writers is especially timely.

The study of artists' worldviews has long been a branch of literary scholarship; by contrast, the analysis of the image of the world has only in recent years begun to establish itself in academic circles. Despite the undeniable proximity between the relatively new term "world-model" and the definition "image of the world," there is a substantial distinction between them. As shown by the monograph devoted to the world-model in the artistic text as a problem of literary studies [Korolev, 2013], the term "world-model" is primarily focused on analyzing the general patterns and textual properties of a work—such as mythopoesis, fragmentariness, symbolism, poeticity, and other semantic aspects. The "image of the world," by contrast, is primarily aimed at analyzing intra-textual aspects: isolating the elements of the secondary world, describing its properties, and only secondarily—at analyzing the systemic intra-textual relations of that world as one of several images within the artistic expressiveness and structural levels of the work.

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

The complexity of studying the world as an image lies in its multi-component, dispersed, and all-encompassing nature within a work. The world-model, as the authors of the monograph posit, should be considered as a certain structured system of representations about the world's order and humanity's place within it. The result is a secondary artistic reality by its very nature—an act of co-creation and vision of both world and human being [World Model…, 2009, pp. 4, 7].

Fantasy works provide fertile ground for researching the specifics of creating and functioning the image of the world for several reasons. First, world-building is the foremost task of modern fantasy: it is precisely to world creation that authors devote the greatest attention. Moreover, the model created in a fantastic work obviously differs both from models in works that recreate primary reality and from models in other works of the same genre, which facilitates the task of comparing different models. Finally, the specificity of fantasy—where an object serves both as world-analog and as world-model—allows one to study the image of the world on a more compact corpus than the entire body of works. The image of the world can be defined as the system of all objective images, in much the same way that a character is understood as the system of their various designations.

The analysis of the "thing sphere" was introduced into broad literary-critical usage by the work of A. P. Chudakov [Chudakov 1971; 1980; 1985; 1986]. Yet to this day, in existing theoretical studies, the understanding of the functional load carried by the depiction of objects in a text varies considerably. An object is a constituent element of the "image of the world." In fantasy—where the representation of a world other than our own constitutes the primary artistic task—objects play a special role.

In fantasy, the same object typically combines several functions at once: a character-revealing function coupled with a symbolic one (with respect to the character and to the world, respectively); a symbolic function coupled with a plot-compositional one; and a world-descriptive (or cultural-historical) function coupled with a symbolic one. An object, as an individual, autonomous phenomenon in close interaction with elements at every level of the work, restores the status of a "microcosm model." Foremost among its roles is the world-modeling function. It is precisely the cross-categorical nature of the object—its relations both with something and toward something—that underpins its world-modeling function in fantasy: the world is likewise described and apprehended through relations, but in the reverse direction—of world to human, and of human to object.

The semiotic-linguistic content of an object provides the basis for its symbolic, substitutive function, pointing to otherness, to metaphysical phenomena. Such a complex image of the object, which must be unfolded through the characters' perspectives, is dictated by the fact that in fantasy the object re-acquires its status as a model of the world. An object is as complex as a microcosm; it reflects the depths and systemic structure of the world order as a whole. In fantasy, an object's connection to the world is not mediated indirectly through the characters who created it. Rather, the object is set in direct comparison with the world and endowed with corresponding characteristics. The bond between object and world in fantasy is tighter than that between object and character. Studying the functions of objects in fantasy makes it possible to isolate each

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

individual object as a significant element of the work's world—distinct from mere detail or embellishment—and to speak of its special, autonomous function: world-modeling.

The central images of a work unite those functions that are fundamental both to the creation of the secondary world and to the work as a whole: the genesis of conflict, the movement of the plot, and the embodiment of the world's laws and the characters' destinies. A character enters into with these objects into complex, often subordinate relationships; the character-revealing function therefore acquires a dual orientation: the object characterizes the character (far more deeply than is typical in realistic fiction), and the character in turn serves as one of the means by which the object's own character is disclosed.

Note that speculative literary studies have yet to develop a fully fleshed-out methodology of their own; only the very first steps toward such a methodology have been taken. Classical methods of analysis often prove inadequate. At present, the one thing that is clear is that studying fantasy works requires drawing on a range of methods and turning to the achievements of multiple disciplines.

Likewise, the most effective approaches to analyzing the image of the world seem to be methods of quite different natures and foundations: analysis of a work's nomination system (its lexical and onomastic structure), study of object-images, and symbolic-archetypal analysis (a cultural-anthropological perspective). There is still no agreed definition of fantasy as a genre. Describing a poetics of fantasy remains a task for literary scholarship. "The very idea of fantasy as a literary direction and as a sociocultural phenomenon has still not received proper attention in domestic scholarship" [Korolyov, 2013, p. 178]. Researchers also note that "the absence of a single definition, in our view, is connected to the typological syncretism that the fantasy genre possesses" [Dvořák, 2015, p. 18].

The world conceived as an image or world-model is the paramount artistic task of fantasy; within its objects, the model of the universe—seen as the author conceives it—is condensed, concentrated, and brought into focus for the reader. The world-model inherent in a text is at once the essence of the author's design and the embodiment of the work's laws and values. In fantasy, the genre's peculiar nature allows one to create an image that duplicates and substitutes for the world-model in the reader's perception. Accordingly, analyzing the key object-images (and natural symbols) in a fantasy text can serve as the basis for determining the inner laws of its secondary reality, and ultimately for deriving the basic criteria of a poetics of fantasy. A particular challenge for today's literary scholarship is distinguishing between an authorial fairy tale and fantasy. In this article, we aim to illustrate the role of object-images as an element that can serve as a criterion for determining a work's genre affiliation, by comparing the functioning of object-images in three "borderline" texts that can be read either as authorial fairy tales or as fantasy.

Objects in the Structure of a Fantasy Work

Individual objects in fantasy do far more than carry symbolic meaning. Their sense and substance are only fully revealed when one analyzes the relationships these objects bear to the full variety of levels and subsystems within the work. Symbolic significance, as well as symbolico-mythological and cultural-philosophical content, comes into play primarily in relation to the plot, although an object may perform a narrative role apart from its symbolic function.

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

An object is connected to every level of a work's structure and can influence those levels to varying degrees. As noted above, in-depth study of fantasy texts has shown that an object serves within a work as a model of the world-model—a microcosm, a duplicate of the image of the world. Fantasy is a modern form of myth (perhaps not the only one in literature, but arguably the most consistent). A fairy tale, by contrast, is not a form of myth, even though it is presumed to describe the same events/processes/phenomena as mythological reality.

As analysis of contemporary fantasy shows, the most semantically rich symbols of this functional style are a direct development of the oldest mythological images. One can state that mythological images remain relevant to modern culture—and thus a certain mode of thinking oriented toward synthesis and a holistic grasp of the world endures. Moreover, fantasy clearly aims to employ those images that have existed widely and independently in different cultures yet share similar meanings. In this way, fantasy operates on the level of a global code. By drawing on symbols historically used nearly everywhere, fantasy creates works intended for readers across the world. Their intuitive clarity and the recognizability of these object-images for readers of any culture may explain the unprecedented demand for and popularity of the genre in every corner of the globe. Fantasy works, on the one hand, retransmit and actualize the oldest mythological images for today's reader.

Thus, the categories of a text bearing the strongest mythological charge can serve to distinguish between fairy tale and fantasy. In fantasy, object-images perform a world-modeling role—and world-modeling is a key feature of myth [Meletinsky 1976, pp. 169, 171]. Accordingly, analyzing the functions of objects and their roles in a work can serve as a criterion for assigning that work either to fantasy or to the authorial fairy tale, depending on whether the object acts as a microcosm—a model of the world—or not.

Intuitively, both readers and literary scholars categorize Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as an authorial fairy tale, while C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia and J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series are classed as fantasy—albeit with a strong fairy-tale "cast."

When reading Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, we encounter a significant number of objects that function differently than the familiar things of everyday life. Some of them can be said to possess magical properties—first and foremost the drinks and foods that change Alice's physical size at astonishing speed. Clearly, these objects have their own function: to alter the size of whoever eats or drinks them. According to V. Propp, functionality is the most characteristic trait of an object [Propp 1986]. Indeed, the fairy-tale object is defined by its strict functionality.

However, it must be acknowledged that among the abundance of strange things and items in Wonderland it is quite difficult to single out a dominant object that would serve as a macrocosmic analogue, a model of the Wonderland universe as a whole. The Cheshire Cats vanish; the cakes and curiouser-and-curiouser eatables appear, but their functions are varied. Objects and natural motifs—like the roses—are constructed more as details. They create an image of a strange world that one cannot grasp "at a glance" and that demands on-the-fly rethinking and even reconstruction of its laws. Yet none of them becomes a key object through which the principal laws of Wonderland might be revealed.

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

As studies of classic fantasy works have shown, even very large-scale pieces (for example, the epic The Lord of the Rings) tend to feature one leading object-image (or a small set of them, as in Michael Ende's The Neverending Story) that most fully embodies the laws of the entire universe and performs the world-modeling function with respect to the story's world.

Let us consider C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia. At first glance, one might think—much as with the two Alice books—that there is no single object in Narnia that holds a special status above the many detailed items of that world. The Lamp-Post, the Stone Table, and the Silver Chair share little in common, including their degree of "magicalness." However, on closer reading there emerges a group of objects sharing similar purposes and similar "magic." These are mainly the items belonging to the Kings and Queens of Narnia (that is, in most of the books, the children from our world). Furthermore, these objects are most often gifts from Aslan, the creator and true ruler of Narnia. What these gifts have in common is, for example, the power to summon children from our world into Narnia. Joining this group are a few other items—not Aslan's gifts, yet likewise capable of bringing people into Narnia: the wardrobe made from the wood of an apple tree grown from a seed brought from Narnia, and the ring from The Magician's Nephew, which first brought the two human children into Narnia at the moment of its creation, forever binding the histories of the two worlds. Thus, from book to book it is not necessarily the identical objects that recur, but a particular function of the object-image. And that function—connecting the two worlds, Narnia and ours—directly reflects the overarching concept of the special bond between those worlds and the unique role of the "Children of Adam" in Narnia's fate from its creation to its conclusion. It is no accident that the most striking image of the final, seventh volume of the Chronicles is "the stable that was larger on the inside than on the outside," unmistakably recalling the wardrobe within which all of Narnia exists.

Given that the image of the world may be reflected not by a single object but by several object-images (as in Ende's The Neverending Story with the book itself, the AURYN, and the Ivory Tower; in Zelazny's Chronicles of Amber with the Jewel of Judgment and the Pattern; and so on), it is reasonable to suppose that a group of items can function together as a "recurring" or "through-line" image.

In the world of Harry Potter, the variety of magical objects is especially great. The first several novels present a vast array of enchanted items—wands, textbooks, timepieces, mechanical devices… Nevertheless, it becomes perfectly clear that the author gradually converges on a few objects of greatest significance for the development of the entire world: the Deathly Hallows. First, these three objects—the Resurrection Stone, the Elder Wand, and the Invisibility Cloak—are bound together. Their origin lies beyond the "natural" history even of the wizarding world: Harry and his friends know of them only through legend and fairy tale about their creation. This structure corresponds exactly to the status of truly magic-endowed objects in The Lord of the Rings: all the artifacts of great power—whether Palantíri, the One Ring, or even the less potent Elven weapons—were forged long before the events of the epic by beings all but vanished from Middle-earth. "History became legend. Legend became myth." It is worth noting that by the end of Rowling's seventh novel, nearly all the especially potent magical objects—such as the Time-Turner or the Philosopher's Stone—have also been destroyed, bringing the wizarding world as

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28

close as possible to the stage of legend rather than myth (that is, toward ordinary, profane reality).

The Deathly Hallows—especially the Elder Wand—play a decisive role in generating conflict in the later books of the series. Voldemort thirsts to possess the most powerful wand, and in the end this ambition leads to the death of Severus Snape. The Invisibility Cloak primarily fulfills narrative functions, enabling Harry to undertake crucial actions that would otherwise be impossible. The Resurrection Stone seems the least developed of the three; however, this is clearly because in the first book the reader has already encountered an artifact with similar powers—the Philosopher's Stone—so we can readily infer the capabilities of such a potent object by analogy with the one we know. Taken together, these three items define the boundaries of what is possible, permissible, and acceptable in the magic of Rowling's wizarding world. Other magical objects merely supplement these limits and more vividly manifest, in specific situations, whatever falls within them.

An analysis of objects and their magic in Harry Potter is undoubtedly of special interest [Nesterova, 2016]. Some derive from the imagery of The Lord of the Rings (for example, the Horcruxes), some are borrowed directly from mythology, some refer to historical phenomena (as the Philosopher's Stone alludes to the real alchemist Nicolas Flamel), and others are authorial inventions—such as the Pensieve or the materialization of prophecies.

Thus, in The Chronicles of Narnia one can identify a group of objects that perform the world-modeling function: they clearly reflect the connection between Narnia's history and our own world. These items provide access from our world into Narnia, forming a distinct class of objects whose other magical properties are usually minimal. From one of these—the wardrobe—a symbolic image emerges by the series' end that encapsulates the entire meaning of Narnia's existence and its bond with the children from the human world.

In J. K. Rowling's novels there likewise exists a set of artifacts defined by the author herself. First, the Deathly Hallows set the limits of magic's possibilities in this world. Second, these items are presented within the narrative as originating in the legendary (mythological) past of that world, which explains their extraordinary magical power. They also perform conflict-generating and plot-advancing roles. In Lewis Carroll's tales, however, we do not find any single object whose world-modeling function predominates. Instead, Carroll's transformative objects possess specific, singular functions whose resolution is necessary for the plot to progress—entirely in keeping with the fairy-tale "helper object" for the hero. Thus, the cycles by C. S. Lewis and J. K. Rowling are works of fantasy that draw heavily on the experience of fairy tale—incorporating fairy-tale moods, motifs, and images—whereas Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass are authorial fairy tales.

## REFERENCES

1. In Search of the Boundaries of the Fantastic: Towards a Methodology. Wrocław: Russo-Polish Institute, 2017. 220 pp.
2. Dvořák E. Yu. Russian Children's Fantasy: Genre Specifics and Features of Mythopoetics. PhD diss. in Philology. Moscow, 2015. 237 pp.

Published: July 30, 2025 | Pages: 22-28


3. Korolyov K. M. Fantasy in Contemporary Russian Literature. PhD diss. in Philology. St. Petersburg, 2013. 178 pp.
4. Meletinsky E. M. Poetics of Myth. Moscow: Nauka, 1976. 406 pp.
5. The World-Model in the Literary Text: A Collective Monograph / ed. N. M. Rakovskaya; A. V. Aleksandrov, T. Yu. Moreva, V. B. Musiy, N. V. Spodarets. Odessa: Astroprint, 2009. 336 pp.
6. Nesterova E. A. "The Golden Circle – the Object-Fate of the World" // In the Circle of Problems of Literary Anthropology: Body and Object in Literature, vol. 2. Białystok: University of Białystok, 2016. Pp. 81–91.
7. Propp V. Ya. The Historical Roots of the Magic Tale. Leningrad: LGU Press, 1986.
8. Contemporary Western Literary Studies: An Encyclopedic Guide. Moscow: Intrada, 1999. 320 pp.
9. Chudakov A. P. "The Object in Gogol's World" // Gogol: History and Modernity. Moscow, 1985. Pp. 259–281.
10. Chudakov A. P. "The Object in Reality and in Literature" // The Object in Art: Proceedings of the 1984 Conference (no. 17). Moscow, 1986. Pp. 15–46.
11. Chudakov A. P. "The Objectual World of Dostoevsky" // Dostoevsky: Materials and Studies, vol. 4. Leningrad, 1980. Pp. 96–105.
12. Chudakov A. P. The Objectual World of Chekhov. Moscow: Nauka, 1971.
13. Dreier S. "Learning to Be a Hero: The Role of Magical Objects in Harry Potter and Reckless" // Eastern European Studies, 2017, no. 7, pp. 17–30.