



Izabela Symonowicz – Jabłońska, *Fable/Fabulous themes in popular culture as an educational challenge (Baśniowość w kulturze popularnej, jako wyzwanie edukacyjne)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2016, pp. 207

The subject of the review is a book by Izabela Symonowicz - Jabłońska, titled *Fable/Fabulous themes in popular culture as an educational challenge (Baśniowość w kulturze popularnej, jako wyzwanie edukacyjne)* published in 2016 by the Nicolaus Copernicus University Press.

Izabela Symonowicz - Jabłońska, a doctor of humanities in pedagogy at the Faculty of Education Sciences at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, also works as a certified teacher in the: **Nicolaus Copernicus School Complex: Academic Middle and Academic Secondary School in Toruń (Zespole Szkół Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika Gimnazjum i Liceum Akademickiego w Toruniu)**. Her research is focused on the issues of youth, on their participation of culture, shaping of moral values and developing emotional competence. The reviewed book is a result of her dissertation under the same title, defended in 2012 at the Faculty of Education Studies NCU in Toruń, supervised by Dr Hab. Henryk Depty, Prof. UW.

The reviewed book consists of 207 pages, containing an introduction, three chapters and final remarks. Each chapter is accordingly divided into sub-chapters. The book contains a rich bibliography and an index of names.

The presented book is theoretical. The author, in an incredibly interesting way, analyses the content of fables, as created by popular culture. The introduction contains an explanation of the issues discussed in the book, indicating at the challenge posed, regarding education.

In the first part of the book, titled *Poetics and aesthetics of a fable (Poetyka i estetyka baśni)* Izabela Symonowicz – Jabłońska explains the essence of a fable, presenting the properties of the values of fables, indicating at their anthropological source. The aim of the first chapter is to define **fable themes/fabulousness**. In the following sections, the author, in a logical and thoughtful way, accordingly to the logic of the book, presents the relations between the fable and the myth, discusses fantasy and the symbolism of fables.

The second chapter titled *The framework and areas of popular culture (Ramy i obszary kultury popularnej)* consists of three sections. Here, the Author indicates the multifaceted nature and distinguishes between mass culture and popular culture, by presenting the function and properties of the latter. The author, in the search for popular culture in **fable themes/fabulousness**, indicates four areas of its presence: popular literature, popular films, television series and computer games.¹ The author carefully examines the first two areas.

The third chapter is titled *The aspects of fable themes/fabulousness in selected areas of popular culture (Oblicza baśniowości w wybranych obszarach kultury popularnej)*. This chapter is dedicated to discussing the **fable themes/fabulousness** regarding two examples: *Harry Potter*

by J. K. Rowling and *Star Wars* directed by G. Lucas. The choice was accurately justified: “we found that, regarding popular film and popular literature, these works, in which, as in through a looking glass, we can recognise characteristic properties and the fable themes/fabulousness atmosphere, apparent in these two areas of popular culture”². Izabela Symonowicz – Jabłońska also indicates, that in the book by J. K. Rowling: “one can recognise and highlight certain properties and values of contemporary **fable themes/fabulousness**, characteristic of the entire, not only literary, popular culture”³. The chapter presents the plot of the book with highlights of analogies regarding fables, mythology, and folk tales, that can be found in Harry Potter. Importantly, the Author recalls reservations and objections, regarding the book, posed by the Christian circles and school representatives, as well as defends the book series, presenting own counterarguments. Izabela Symonowicz - Jabłońska highlighted, that the Harry Potter books satisfy the needs regarding childhood nostalgia, adventure seeking, positive values, such as faith in friendship. The books also provide children with emotional support⁴.

In the *Star Wars, a modern fable? (Gwiezdne wojny, czyli baśń na miarę naszych czasów?)* section, the author analyses the stories presented by G. Lucas regarding reference to Greek mythology, Arthurian legends, Zen philosophy, novels, old comic books, Akira Kurosawa and western films⁵. Additionally, the author highlights the educational aspects of the films, claiming that “the Saga presents, how a struggle with adversity is inevitable, that one should follow heart in life, be tolerant and empathetic, and that the strength comes from the character”⁶. The author concludes, that the film is a fable made for the current times, as it expresses expectations and nostalgia of contemporary individuals⁷.

In the subsection titled *Television series, a fable interlude within everyday life*, the author explains the term “television series”, presents the structural elements and conducts an analysis of popular television series and soap operas. The author indicates, that despite the lack of the fantastic and the wondrous, television series are filled with the wonders of a safe world and a happy ending.

The last subsection of chapter three, titled *Computer games, the recipient in the role of superman*, is dedicated to the description and characterisation of computer games, as well as, to the description of the phenomenon regarding fascination with computer games. The subsection highlights the fabulous poetics, characteristic in games. Hazards and positive aspects of computer games were also carefully highlighted.

In the summary, the author proposes an argument that one can indicate the **modelling functions of fables; compensative, escapist and entertaining**, and describes their significance regarding pedagogy.

The entire work is an example of a thoughtful structure, that constitutes an integral description of **fabulousness**, present in popular culture. The abundant amount of references to specialist literature and popular culture elements, is notable, as it denotes the vast knowledge and careful research of the Author.

² Ibidem, p. 16.

³ Ibidem, p. 83.

⁴ Ibidem, pp. 110 – 112.

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 119 -120.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 126 -127.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 127.

The reviewed book is a highly intriguing publication, not only because of the presented issues, but also regarding its interdisciplinary nature. The author draws upon accounts by psychology, anthropology and culture studies, which was highlighted by Krystyna Pankowska in her publishing review. To summarise, the book provides a valuable source for pedagogy students, encouraging them to draw upon different scientific disciplines, as well as showing the students of other disciplines the broad scope and variety of pedagogical studies.

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