

**In search of Success: The Literary and Market Paths of Polish Fantasy Writers
(in the Second Half of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries)**

The aim of this work is to trace the literary and market paths that Polish-language fantasy authors have traveled on their way to success. The time range of the work covers the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries because then the rapid development of Polish fantasy literature and the publishing market took place. For the analysis of specific cases, I will use, among others, the theory of the literary field proposed by the French sociologist of literature Pierre Bourdieu and the concept of the author's brand introduced by Dominik Antonik.

In my work, I analyze the case studies of four authors of literary fantasy who have, in various ways, built their artistic careers on the way to the status of an acclaimed author. I discuss the activity and critical reception of Stanisław Lem, Andrzej Sapkowski, Jacek Dukaj, and Szczepan Twardoch. These examples are not incidental: they show the multiplicity of approaches to the writing of fantasy literature, attempts to move towards mainstream literature, and the various ways of functioning in that world.

They all began their literary journeys as authors of fantasy, but later the fate of each of them began to take on individual traits, worth following due to the uniqueness of their actions, self-creative gestures, ambiguous critical reception, and, consequently, a unique form of functioning on the publishing market. To once again borrow from the terminology of Bourdieu, it should be said that it is instead “an attempt to trace the process of consecration in the variety of its forms and its manifestations [...], to observe the fluctuations to which the ‘listing’ of a certain writer is subjected [...], to extract the logic that governs the struggles for rehabilitation.”

It is also an encouragement for further research and inquiries related to the status and image of the writer on the publishing market and the changes he or she has undergone over time. It should be emphasized that the factors significantly influencing the fate of each of the above-mentioned authors include not only the writing of subsequent publications but also the modification and proper management of the author's brand and consequently the accumulation of symbolic and economic capital, have had a significant impact.

The life and work of Stanisław Lem demonstrate how important cultural capital is for an artist. His successively broadened knowledge also allowed him to achieve the status of a scientist and futurologist. Due to the marginal presence of fantasy literature in post-war Poland, Lem managed to develop his niche relatively quickly and become the leading Polish author in the fantasy genre in the latter half of the twentieth century. He often spoke out publicly not only as an author of science fiction, but also as a critic and legislator of conventions. As it turns out, the issue that aroused his dissatisfaction at some point was his affiliation with fantasy literature.

The change in Lem's approach to his science fiction output and the established position of a renowned science fiction author are evidenced by statements from his later life, in which he indicated that his journalistic and essayistic achievements clearly demonstrate that he instead merited the status of a philosopher. As it turns out, Lem's later work and the messages he sent were an attempt at rebranding his image. However, this shift was communicated to a small group of researchers, which prevented it from reaching the awareness of the general public.

Andrzej Sapkowski's writing was published on the pages of "Fantastyka" at the moment when Polish fantasy and science fiction fans were waiting for the advent of the "new Lem." An economist from Lodz, Sapkowski submitted a text entitled *Wiedźmin* (*The Witcher*) to a competition announced by the magazine and was quickly met with a significant and favorable response from readers. Sapkowski's significant cultural capital (knowledge of the canon of world fantasy and of economics) and his successively developed writing skills made him a widely read, recognizable, and award-winning writer very quickly, thanks to which he gains the status of a canonical author in the Polish field of fantastic prose. Parallel to the creation of fantasy, Sapkowski spoke out as a critic and lawgiver of fantasy, which was made possible by his earlier status as a consecrated author and the accumulation of prestige, thanks to which he can impose his habitus on the field.

The success of the *Witcher* series gained recognition in the field of mainstream literature, thanks to which Sapkowski received the *Polityka* Passport, one of the most prestigious mainstream literary awards in Poland. After completing the *Witcher* series, he wrote *Trylogia Husycka* (*The Hussite Trilogy*), which, however, did not repeat the success of its predecessor. It seems that, like Stanisław Lem, Sapkowski also tried to rebrand himself, but it was too strong and familiar for that attempt to be successful.

The literary path of Jacek Dukaj, meanwhile, is sometimes compared with that of Stanisław Lem. What they have in common is writing science fiction (in the case of the younger artist, it is more often hard science fiction), a strong scientific foundation of their literary texts, constantly developing the practiced convention, and repeatedly appearing as a critic and theoretician of the genre.

Dukaj's debut coincided with the peak in Andrzej Sapkowski's popularity and the strong lingering presence of Stanisław Lem; thus, Dukaj had to find out his own path. The scientific and philosophical background of his texts combined with the richness of imagination helped Dukaj to quickly build a recognizable brand, leading to his being given numerous awards from the science fiction and fantasy community relatively early. Gaining recognition and prestige in the Polish field of fantasy prose allowed him to move into mainstream literature, where he published the monumental *Lód* (*Ice*), which brings him a rain of mainstream awards and the status of a consecrated author. The reception of the writer's work indicates that although he is primarily the author of hard SF, his works devoted to Polish history such as *Lód* and *Wroniec* are the most popular.

Dukaj's artistic experiments and constant playing with convention have helped him to create his own artistic manifesto: his work is an attempt to create a literature of experience transfer. The confirmation of the willingness to create works that offer the transfer of experiences is the

establishment of Nolensum Studio, whose goal is to produce films and games based on the author's works. It seems that its goal is also to maintain autonomy, enabling it to situate itself outside disputes in the science fiction and fantasy communities and at the same time ensure intellectual and creative freedom.

Finally, Szczepan Twardoch began his literary career in the field of fantasy prose, and there he gradually built up his author's brand and accumulated symbolic capital. He also constantly expands his cultural capital, having published sketches bordering on philosophy in right-wing magazines and strongly affirming his Silesian identity. Despite the publication of over ten volumes (novels, short stories, essays), he has failed to gain the status of a canonical author in the field of fantasy. The breakthrough in his work was announced only with the novel *Wieczny Grunwald* (*Eternal Grunwald*), which prepared him to move towards mainstream literature. However, it was *Morfina* (*Morphine*) that took mainstream readers and critics by storm, becoming one of the most lively discussed publications of the past decade. As a changed writer, he has entered the field of mainstream literature, successfully rebranding his author's brand.

Fueling interest in one's writing brand helps to attract the interest of readers and critics, and eventually even sponsors. Twardoch has become a spokesman for a luxury car brand, sparking a national discussion about the writer's ethos, which has helped him significantly increase his media capital. Subsequent books, interviews, entries in social media, and columns indicate that Twardoch's own brand is becoming his most important work, consistently modified for the needs of subsequent publications and moving him towards the status of a celebrity and even an influencer.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, the above-mentioned writers have managed to build unique, recognizable author's brands with significant symbolic capital. Although each of them began his literary journey as a fantasy writer, in the course of artistic development and in connection with the decisions made they have modified their position, writing works that have attracted the attention of critics and expanded the horizons of readers, thus redefining the status of the creator and of fantasy literature itself.