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Weronika Łaszkiewicz
Institute of Modern Languages
University of Białystok, Białystok, Poland

Warriors of Our Imagination: Native Americans in 20th-Century Polish Literature

The following article explores the similarities between Polish Indian novels (written mostly in the second half of the 20th century) and modern fantasy fiction in an effort to argue that the former should not be examined–and then criticized–only in terms of their idealized representations of Native American tribes and life in the wilderness. To demonstrate the parallel between these Indian novels and fantasy fiction, this article will first analyze how the works of Polish writers and fantasy narratives are motivated by similar desires. It will then examine the Indian novels in the context of John H. Timmerman's study on the six generic traits of fantasy. This perspective will allow us to circumvent the question of authenticity in representation, and instead acknowledge the significance of the Indian novels for the readers and writers of the People's Republic of Poland.

Key words: Polish Indian novels, Native Americans, fantasy fiction

While it is said that nothing is beyond the human imagination, the writerly imagination in particular seems to know no limits and roams wild and free, frequently conceiving of worlds that do not even exist outside the minds of their beholders. If writers of fantasy fiction can bring to life entire races and cultures, then perhaps it should not come as a surprise that Polish writers of the 20th century were able to create works depicting the American wilderness and the lives of its native inhabitants, even though most of them–like the German writer Karol May prior to his invention of Winnetou–had never even been to the United States. In *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature* (2005), Joy Porter writes that "1492 began the long and hotly resisted history of attempts to translate Indian lands into non-Indian property and Indian cultures and expression into forms that met the needs of non-Indians. However, it also marked the beginning of a history of ongoing reciprocal influence between Indian and Western European cultures" (45). In Poland, that influence proved strongest during the second half of the 20th century. The images of life in the Wild West, the beauty of the American landscape, and the alien life of its

native inhabitants constituted major themes of novels targeted at young Polish readers. In fact, as Marek Paryż points out, fiction revolving around Native Americans "mushroomed, becoming one of the most intriguing phenomena in the history of juvenile literature in Poland" (156). Since the novels in question are considered popular literature, adventures are their primary asset, and young Polish readers have undoubtedly found these adventures quite entertaining. More mature readers may have noticed the shortcomings of these novels, e.g. their lack of in-depth characterization, simple language, and frequent narrative failures. Yet the aspect which raises perhaps the most objection today is their depiction of Native Americans, which has been criticized for being idealized and for perpetuating stereotypes.

In recognition of such criticism, the following paper is not intended as a defense of the Indian[1] novels written by Polish authors. Still, it will avoid the issues of authenticity in representation by suggesting a different approach to these novels, i.e. one that will explain their reception by Polish readers, and their function within Polish society. My intention is to prove that these works should not be regarded only as a category of adventure novels with dubious claims of authenticity–i.e. as texts which Gerald Vizenor describes as "the scriptures of dominance" that are "the absence of tribal realities not the sources of a presence" (1999, 14)–but as a subgenre of Polish popular literature that is based on the same premises as the fantasy genre, in which case the issue of authenticity becomes less significant for the reception and significance of these texts. Though the Indian novels cannot be identified either as a part of the modern fantasy genre *per se*, or even as a variety embraced by the fantasy mode,[2] the following analysis will demonstrate that they nonetheless function according to mechanisms characteristic for fantasy fiction.

The main analysis should be preceded by a brief introduction to the historical and cultural background of the novels chosen for investigation. Commonly called Indian literature[3] (Polish–*literatura indiańska*), this subgenre of Polish popular fiction flourished during the second half of the 20th century.[4] First of all, we can argue

[1] The word "Indian" poses certain problems. In *Fugitive Poses* (1998), Gerald Vizenor argues that "*indian*" is an artificial construct based on a romanticized perception of Native Americans; an "ethnographic metaphrase, a cultural traducement" (34). He then adds in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999) that "Indians, and other simulations, are the absence of tribal intimation" (11). In *Tribal Fantasies: Native Americans in the European Imaginary, 1900-2010* (2013) David Stirrup uses the term "American *indian*" (2) in a similar fashion. Since the images of Native Americans present in the chosen novels are–more often than not–highly romanticized, it is not a mistake to call them "Indian" novels. Yet it is also worth noting that, though the term "Indian" might today have negative connotations in the United States or among scholars dealing with the history of Native Americans, the term does not evoke as much ambiguity among Polish speakers, and was not perceived as derogatory by the writers of the Indian novels.

[2] The fantasy mode is defined as a broad category encompassing texts which contain supernatural and fantastic elements, but remain outside the modern fantasy genre which is rooted in the works of William Morris, George MacDonald, and J.R.R. Tolkien (Attebery 1992, 9-11).

[3] This is a highly ambiguous name, since it is not even clear whether it denotes works by or about Native Americans.

[4] An equivalent phenomenon occurred in Nazi Germany. Hartmut Lutz calls it "Indianthusiasm" (236-240).

that its existence was somewhat conditioned by the political reality of the People's Republic of Poland (as the country was called until 1989)–particularly by state censorship, which encompassed all types of media and artistic performances. The goal of state censorship was to eliminate opinions that the state deemed socially and politically dangerous. What was actually published or transmitted by the media was often intended as a distraction from the political reality and a substitution for daily life. In this respect, Indian literature–and later TV shows focusing on Native Americans–may have seemed a safe choice, as it moved Polish readers throughout time and space (to the United States and Canada of the 18th and 19th century), far away from the country's political situation. Yet despite such spatial and temporal separation, there was a major similarity between the fate of Poles and Native Americans: the experience of oppression. Given their country's history of partition and then invasion during and after World War II, Polish readers could easily sympathize with the Indian nations in their struggle for freedom against the colonists, who thwarted Indian culture for their own benefit. As Paryż argues, "the history of Indian insurrections appealed to the Poles who had a history of hopeless uprisings and had been imbibed with the romantic notions of national sacrifice" (170). This similarity of experience explains why the Indian novels created by Polish writers typically present very favorable images of Native Americans and unanimously condemn the European colonists. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, such as an occasional Indian villain or a valiant colonist who adopts the Indian way of life and truly respects the indigenous people. Nevertheless, such characters are usually set against the backdrop of a conflict in which Native Americans are portrayed as victims of the white man's unscrupulous progress.

What is more, the rise in popularity of Indian novels and the general interest in Native Americans in Poland can be attributed to the figure of Sat-Okh, also known as Stanisław Supłatowicz (1920-2003). Allegedly born to Stanisława Supłatowicz and a Shawnee war chief, Sat-Okh came with his mother to Poland in the late 1930s, and later joined the Polish resistance during World War II. Years after the war, he became a writer of Indian novels. His books, as well as his colorful biography, turned him into a widely recognized persona who popularized Native American culture and became the central figure of *Polski Ruch Przyjaciół Indian* (the Polish American Indian Friends Movement). Though the authenticity of Sat-Okh's identity as a half-Indian is still questioned sometimes, the impact of his work is incontestable. It is thanks to him that generations of Polish children and young adults have become fascinated with the culture of Native Americans, thus creating a demand for novels that correspond to their interests. If all of these historical and cultural factors are taken into consideration, the popularity of Indian literature in Poland becomes less surprising.

Apart from Sat-Okh, the most popular writers who contributed to the Polish Indian literature movement were Arkady Fiedler, Login Jan Okoń, Nora Szczepańska, Alfred Szklarski and Krystyna Szklarska, Wiesław Wernic, Yáckta-Oya (the Indian pseudonym of Sławomir Bral), and Bolesław Zieliński.[5] Their novels, written from

[5] It is worth noting that their literary predecessor was Henry Sienkiewicz, whose trip to the United States in 1876 inspired several works focused on the life of settlers and Native Americans, e.g. *Komedia z pomyłek* (1878), *Przez stepy* (1879), *Orso* (1880), and *Sachem* (1889).

the perspectives of both the colonizers and the colonized, contain narratives set in wild American forests and on the western frontier, which combine adventure and romance with historical data and native folktales. Although the authors focus on the same subject matter, their approach differs, as they emphasize different elements. For instance, the works of Sat-Okh focus strongly on Native American characters and their culture, and that the narratives occasionally become ethnographic accounts of Indian customs and beliefs. This is particularly true of the novel *Głos prerii* (*The Voice of the Prairie*,[6] 1990), in which readers follow the life and adventures of Wandering Bear, a man from the Kiowa tribe. The novel combines the tale of Wandering Bear's progression from childhood to adulthood with an account of the habits and customs of his tribe. In many places, descriptions of the tribe, together with numerous footnotes, intrude into the hero's narrative and abound with so many details that it quickly becomes clear that their primary function is to inform readers of the Indian way of life. Paryż notes a similar tendency in Sat-Okh's autobiographical novel, *Ziemia Słonych Skał* (*The Country of the Salty Rocks*, 1958). He writes, "the adventure story provides an attractive formula for the presentation of ethnographic details, and the autobiographical mode of narration makes the storyline harmonize with the ethnographic content" (157). Yet not all of the writer's works are equally ethnographic or self-explanatory. *Biały Mustang* (*The White Mustang,* 1987) is a collection of Indian legends which convey a deep appreciation for nature and its spirit world.[7] The novella *Serce Chippewaya* (*A Chippewa's Heart*, 1999) is the tragic tale of Neewatch, a warrior whose family is killed by white men who believe he possesses gold. After the death of his loved ones, Neewtach seeks revenge, but eventually acknowledges the futility of his actions and becomes a wanderer awaiting death. *Serce Chippewaya* is no longer a depiction of Native American life, but a tragic story of loss and an account of the evils done by the white men. As such, the novella is among Sat-Okh's finest works.[8]

Serce Chippewaya is similar to the works of Nora Szczepańska who, like Sat-Okh, also chose Native American heroes as focalizers of her stories. However, her stories paid more attention to characters than to their customs. Szczepańska seldom disrupts the main narrative with artificially inserted descriptions of native practices, and there is greater depth to her characters. This is visible, for instance, in her novels

[6] Unless indicated otherwise, Polish titles have been translated by the author of this article.

[7] For instance, the story entitled "Hanuaute" seems to be a Native American-style version of the classical story of Narcissus. A beautiful Indian girl constantly admires her reflection in the waters of a lake, and gradually grows so conceited that she announces that she will marry only the Spirit of the Forests. The Spirit punishes the girl by throwing her into the lake. In "Powstanie człowieka" ("The Creation of Man") the Great Spirit tries to create a human being and succeeds only at his third attempt, whereby he creates the red man–the perfect inhabitant of the woods and prairies. The red man is preceded by the white man and the black man, whom the Great Spirit discards as insufficient.

[8] Yet its quality–when compared with the quality of the author's other works–adds plausibility to the theory that Sat-Okh was assisted by ghost-writers. This and other issues are addressed by Katarzyna Krępulec in the MA thesis, *Stanisław Supłatowicz: Niezwykła biografia Sat-Okha, czyli jak się zostaje legendą*. The entire thesis is available at http://www.indianie.eco.pl/litera/sat-okh1.html

Dziki Anda (*Wild Anda*, 1963) and *Karibu* (*Caribou*, 1965). Both texts narrate the adventures of eponymous Indian youths in the context of moral dilemmas inherent to Indian culture–Anda is an outcast who has to reestablish his relationship with the community, whereas Karibu struggles with feelings of guilt and the desire for revenge. The adventures of both boys address the conflict between individualism and tribal identity; between responsibility for oneself and the community.[9] Though Szczepańska could not claim Indian descent like Sat-Okh, her writerly sensibilities allowed her to create realistic native characters who are entangled in serious moral dilemmas.

Other writers such as Longin Jan Okoń and Sławomir Bral leaned more towards historical fiction (however, occasional references to historical figures and events are present in all of the above-mentioned works).[10] One of Okoń's best-known works is a fictionalized account of the life of Indian chief Tecumseh (*Tecumseh*, 1976; *Czerwonoskóry generał*, 1979; *Śladami Tecumseha*, 1980). While the trilogy presents Tecumseh's pan-Indian campaign fairly accurately, the story is focalized through Ryszard Kos, the fictional figure of a Polish expatriate who befriends and then assists the Indian chief.[11] It is through Kos's adventures that Okoń familiarizes his readers with selected fragments of the history of the United States and Canada, indirectly undermining their perception of America as a land of unlimited freedom. Similarly to Okoń, Sławomir Bral (pen-name Yáckta-Oya) also blended the adventures of his fictional heroes with references to historical events and locations. For instance, in *Leśny goniec* (*Runner of the Woods*, 1988), readers follow Paul, a white man kidnapped and raised by the Mohawks, as he tries to earn money by trading fur. During his adventures, Paul encounters authentic figures from Canadian history (e.g. Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, Pierre-Esprit Radisson, and Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut), and visits authentic locations whose historical significance is explained in the footnotes. The book is complemented by a brief sketch of the country's early history and a bibliographical section containing works on the same topic. Ethnographic elements are also present as the author provides information about the people's eating habits, methods of tracking animals, and several other activities. If all of the above-mentioned works are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that Polish Indian novels not only provided entertaining adventures, but were intended to familiarize readers with the culture of Native Americans and American colonial history.

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[9] This choice of motif corresponds to motifs present in authentic Native American literature. As Porter writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, "it is possible to isolate aspects of belief thought of as common to most traditional Indian lifeways. These include a sense of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, peoples and their language, and a requirement to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance. This quest for balance, whether it is between various tribal, non-Indian, or social imperatives, drives a number of Indian protagonists within contemporary Indian literature" (42-43).

[10] For instance, in *Dziki Anda*, Szczepańska creatively reworks the story of Petalesharo (in her novel called Petalaszaro)–a Pawnee chief who rescued a Comanche girl from being sacrificed to the Morning Star.

[11] Kos frequently declares that he sympathizes with Indians and joins them in their struggle because their fate resembles that of Poland (1976, 44-46).

Several features of these novels indicate a crossover into the fantasy genre, which means that they cannot be evaluated solely in terms of their renditions of Native Americans. As far as contemporary fantasy is concerned, the genre is divided into many sub-categories, whose boundaries are not always clear.[12] In its analysis, this article will refer to "prototypical" fantasy literature, i.e. the subgenre of high fantasy fiction (sometimes called epic or heroic fantasy), rather than to its more novel forms, such us urban fantasy or paranormal romance. High fantasy is represented by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), Tad Williams (*Memory, Sorrow and Thorn*), Stephen R. Donaldson (*The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*), and George R.R. Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire*). In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, high fantasy novels are described as "Fantasies set in Otherworlds, specifically Secondary Worlds, and which deal with matters affecting the destiny of those worlds" (Clute and Grant 466). They usually follow a group of heroes who travel through an imaginary realm in order to complete a quest which typically revolves around a cosmic conflict between antagonistic forces that endanger the heroes' community and the entire world. Though Polish Indian novels obviously do not fully emulate this pattern, their emotional premise, as well as several elements of their structure, correspond to those of high fantasy fiction.

The term "emotional premise" is understood here as the fundamental concept underlying a text, which denotes a particular emotional state of the author and the target reader. In this sense, the emotional premise for both high fantasy and Polish Indian novels is longing; that is to say, the longing for a different world and its freedom, shared by both the reader and the writer.[13] Fantasy fiction offers its readers a temporary escape into a fantastic world unhindered by logic and physics; a world in which nothing is beyond possible, good always vanquishes evil, and people have lost neither their connection with nature nor their awareness of the mystery permeating the world. As Eric S. Rabkin puts it, "The real world is a messy place where dust accumulates and people die for no good reason and crime often pays and true love doesn't conquer much. In one sense all art is fantastic simply because it offers us worlds in which some order, whatever that may be, prevails" (3). Polish Indian novels did just that. They satiated readers in their longing for a different world and its freedom by imparting the experience of life in the wilderness epitomized by Native Americans, who for centuries were bound not by state censorship or political regulations, but only by the customs of their tribes and the laws of nature (which could be equally ruthless). Of course, these literary renditions of life in the wilderness were highly idealized, and it is quite easy for readers to renounce the comforts of civilization when they experience the wilderness from the safety of their own homes. Not many of them would be able to survive–much less enjoy–such conditions in reality. Still, the images of fearless warriors prowling through uncharted expanses of American land[14] appealed to Polish readers, and offered them a temporary respite from

[12] For different attempts at classification, see *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction* by Lisa Tuttle (2005) and *Rhetorics of Fantasy* by Farah Mendlesohn (2008).

[13] "The very fact that Bral signed his books with an Indian name, as if he wanted to assume an independent identity at least in the literary domain, clearly suggests that he treated books as an imaginative escape from the reality that in ordinary life he helped to sustain." (Paryż 171)

[14] It is worth mentioning that all of these novels are set during the period of colonization. Consequently, the Indians depicted therein are only associated with the past and the

their own reality. Sat-Okh, Szczepańska, and others invited Poles to fantasize about a world completely unlike their own, in the same way as readers of fantasy fiction.

More importantly, the structures and themes of the Indian novels in question correspond to those of fantasy fiction. This becomes clear if the novels are analyzed according to the six generic traits of fantasy presented in John H. Timmerman's book *Other Worlds* (1983). Timmerman argues that the six traits are: the Story; a Common Character and Heroism; Another World; Magic and the Supernatural; the Struggle between Good and Evil; and the Quest (4). The Story is "a structure with a purpose and end" (5) that allows the reader to become immersed in an imaginary world that serves as more than a didactic allegory of the real world. In his analysis, Timmerman focuses on notions such as the meaning of the Story and its relations with mimesis and myth, yet he does not comment on plot mechanisms. Some of these mechanisms he discusses later as generic traits of fantasy (e.g. the Struggle between Good and Evil), but it should also be pointed out that fantasy fiction plots rely heavily on strategies typical for popular and mass literature. In his seminal work, *Il superuomo di massa* (1976),[15] Umberto Eco identifies several elements characteristic of popular novels, e.g. the significance of intrigue and suspense, the ubiquitous motif of hiding and revealing a hero's true identity, the consolatory nature of the ending (i.e. the resolution of a conflict), and the prevalent figure of a superman who is universally respected and praised for his cleverness, determination, extraordinary skills, etc.[16] These elements can easily be identified within fantasy novels. The plots of such novels are generally based on intrigues and conflicts which involve a wide cast of characters; and the resolution of the conflict is deferred to the last volume, which gradually builds suspense (George R. R. Martin's multi-volume series is a prime example). The fantasy hero–often an orphan or a person from a broken family–is frequently revealed to be of superior descent or a legitimate heir to great power, who is able to resolve a great conflict and save the world. This rise from commonness to uniqueness can be regarded as a variation of the motif from Eco's superman. Yet it is also what Timmerman perceives as the second generic trait of fantasy: an initially average person–the Common Character–becomes exceptional thanks to his innocence, child-like wonder, readiness for adventures, and heroism confirmed by strength and endurance (30-46). The endings of fantasy novels usually bring some sort of a satisfactory resolution–if not on the hero's personal level, than at least on the level of the imaginary world which is saved from destruction.

Many of the Indian novels discussed are constructed in a similar fashion. Their adventures are crafted into patterns of unexpected meetings, revelations, twists of fate, and dangerous situations, which sustain the reader's interest (Bral's *Leśny goniec* is particularly true to this formula). Their heroes, e.g. Anda, Paul, and Ryszard Kos,

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wilderness, and nothing is said about their contemporary situation. This feature of Polish novels seems to support the words of Louise Owens, who argues that "media representations of Indians as romantic, noble, savage artifacts who inhabit an unchanging past are important weapons in this war of eradication. As long as the world is encouraged to imagine that 'real' Indians exist only in the past, it will be easier to ignore the presence of actual Indian people living today in reservation communities" (130). Yet it is doubtful whether Polish writers had any intention of joining this "war of eradication."

[15] In my work I refer to the Polish edition entitled *Superman w literaturze masowej* (1996).

[16] Examples of Eco's superman are Arsène Lupin, Tarzan, and James Bond.

also represent Eco's supermen. They are brave warriors who–thanks to their skills, wisdom and luck–always manage to win, even if the odds are against them. Though they experience grief and witness the failures of others, by the end of the story they manage to solve their problems and secure personal happiness (at least on some level). Anda proves his brother's innocence and redefines his relationship with his community according to his own beliefs; Paul seals a lucrative deal and wins the heart of an Indian princess; and Kos decides to resign from fighting and start a family with his beloved Indian maiden.

Moreover, these heroes also fit Timmerman's pattern. Though they begin as one among many, their deeds and virtues of character confirm their uniqueness throughout the course of their stories. Anda breaks a taboo held by his tribe and rebels against injustice; young Karibu continuously saves others from danger; Paul repeatedly outwits all of his enemies; and Kos is unrelenting in his ideals and becomes Tecumseh's second-in-command. Like the heroes of fantasy fiction, these men firmly reject evil, have a deep appreciation for nature, always accept adventure, and prove their worth through fighting and perseverance. Of course, there are some exceptions to these rules, and also Timmerman signalizes that the traits he identifies "must be present *to some degree* to characterize the work as fantasy literature" (4). For instance, Sat-Okh's *Głos prerii* and *Serce Chippewaya* do not feature "the superman" type of hero and do not offer their readers consolation at the end of the story. On the contrary, readers are reminded of the Indians' unavoidable doom. This doom, however, is an element inseparable from the history of Native Americans, so it cannot be altered by the mechanisms of popular fiction.

The third trait identified by Timmerman as a feature of fantasy is the presence of Another World, i.e. a fictional reality in which the reader can become immersed–if it is well crafted and if the reader is willing to suspend disbelief, as Tolkien argues in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* (in *Tree and Leaf*, 1988), calling Another World a Secondary World. Today, worlds of fantasy fiction come in various shapes and sizes, but typically they contain staple elements such as imaginary races, cultures, beliefs, and languages, as well as all kinds of fantastic creatures and various sorts of magic. Thus, the act of reading fantasy becomes an encounter with an alien environment inhabited by the Other(s) whose customs and actions are governed by laws unlike those of the reader and therefore require an open mind and an emphatic attitude. The worlds evoked by Polish Indian novels required a similar approach, because they too offered the experience of immersion in a different reality–that of the American wilderness inhabited by its native people. For Polish readers of the People's Republic of Poland, most of whom were denied travel abroad, a literary venture into the reality of Native Americans was akin to a trip to Another World, in which they encountered a culture of fierce warriors and skilled hunters whose communities depended on their understanding of nature and their relationship with the spirit world. Details of rituals, clothing, myths, and morality–so unlike those of Europeans–combined with evocative descriptions of life in the wilderness could not have been any less fascinating than the "artificial" worlds of fantasy fiction. Of course, the world of Indian novels is supported by history to some degree, so reading them has never required such suspension of disbelief as in the case of fantasy.

The experience of immersion in an Indian world was further enhanced by two factors which also work within the structures of fantasy fiction: languages and maps.

Since the publication of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, in which the author invented entire lexicons and grammatical systems for his imaginary languages, writers of fantasy have regularly enriched their worlds with bits and pieces of their own fantastic languages. In a way, the writers of Indian novels did the same: they interspersed their narratives with various Indian names and words in order to strengthen the authenticity of their texts on a linguistic level. Yet since the native words may have seemed as fantastic as the artificial languages of fantasy fiction to Polish readers, some authors tried to make them more familiar. They either provided Polish translations, Polonized the spelling (e.g. Szczepańska's heroes are called Hodasz and Isztesunda), or–like Bral and Sat-Okh–informed their readers of the Polish pronunciation of the borrowed expressions.[17]

Since *The Lord of the Rings*, so too have maps become a standard element of high fantasy–perhaps even a cliché. Though some readers might treat them as a decorative element only, the maps serve as "evidence" of the fantastic world because they give it a physical shape outside the minds of the author and reader. What is more, they become "an instance of interplay between the author, the reader and the heroes, with the heroes treated as the original map-makers/map-users, and the author and the readers as secondary figures" (Łaszkiewicz 153). This cannot be said of the maps appearing in the Indian novels (e.g. in the works of Bral, Okoń, and Sat-Okh) since they depict real territories and places. Yet since most of them are sketchy or even simplistic,[18] their main task is not to provide precise information. Like the maps of fantasy fiction, they are included in order to allow the reader to conceptualize the boundaries of the narrative's geographical dimension, give the events a more meaningful context, and make more tangible a world which remains beyond the reader's immediate grasp. During the period of the People's Republic of Poland, even when the borders were not closed, Polish readers could seldom afford a trip to the United States. Thus, the world of Indians and the American wilderness were for them virtually as inaccessible as the worlds of fantasy fiction; and a map served as at least a small compensation and visualization of that distant world. Yet for contemporary readers, that Indian world also remains inaccessible, though not because of distance or restrictions on traveling, but because the world depicted in the novels is long gone (if it ever even existed in the way that it was depicted), and can be entered only through reconstruction and recreation.

The fourth trait of fantasy–Magic and the Supernatural–is clearly the one that is the least relevant for the Indian novels. In fantasy fiction, readers encounter magical forces, fantastic creatures, and supernatural figures of all shapes and sizes, which frequently play crucial roles in the story. In the Indian novels, this seldom happens. Of course, the native heroes do confirm that they believe in various spirits, the shamans perform their rituals, the warriors seek spiritual guidance from their totems, and at different times the characters feel or fear some otherworldly presence. However, supernatural forces and creatures never become a part of the narrative like they

[17] But language can also undermine immersion in a fantasy world. In *Głos prerii*, for instance, one of the Indian legends says that a particular plant can heal asthma (75), yet the word "asthma" is too modern and does not fit the context.

[18] Typically, they provide a contour of some part of the American continent, and the names of a few major cities, rivers, lakes, Indian villages, and battlegrounds.

do in fantasy novels–the heroes neither obtain magical powers nor battle monstrous beings. The only exceptions appear in the collection of myths published by Sat-Okh.

While Timmerman links Magic and the Supernatural with the fifth trait–the Struggle between Good and Evil[19]–here it will be paired with the sixth one, the Quest, because both can be regarded as the primary axes of high fantasy narratives. Novels of this sort typically delineate very clearly a conflict between good and evil forces (the latter frequently commanded by a Dark Lord of some sort), and the resolution of the conflict is or turns out to be the main goal of the hero's quest. Timmerman writes that the quest "is always a grave, serious undertaking. It is often life-threatening, marked by a sense of struggle, of imminent or immediate danger in which the character must call upon all of his will and power to push on" (91). According to Clute and Grant, fantastic quests can be divided into two categories: external and internal. The former is focused on gaining knowledge or an object necessary for the survival of a community, while the goal of the latter is self-knowledge; both involve trials and testing (Clute and Grant 796). While the external quest is dominated by men, the internal quest includes more female characters (796). Brian Stableford adds that in fantasy the quest "becomes a search for a particular objective, whose attainment will involve some kind of revelation–a double meaning ideally suited to fantasy literature, where objects of search tend to be symbolic as well as material" (337).

As far as the Indian novels are concerned, the struggle–or better yet, the opposition–between good and evil is also what underlies their structure. In addition to the usual conflict between positive and negative characters, the narratives are built upon pairs of antithetical entities which are an extension of the conflict between good and evil: Indians vs. white settlers; good Indian vs. bad Indian; and nature vs. civilization. These opposing entities are presented in a way that leaves little doubt about what is right and wrong. Noble Indians are invariably shown as the victims of white colonists, who are generally untrustworthy and greedy. The figures of noble white men, such as Ryszard Kos or Paul, only accentuate this separation. "Good" Indians are always those from whose perspective the novel is written, so if there are other tribes present in the story and their goals or ideals do not correspond to those of the main characters, they are depicted as "bad" Indians. As a result, in various texts readers are asked to sympathize with one tribe over another. Some texts also present hatred for white people as justifiable (given their crimes against the Indian nations); whereas others present it as inappropriate if directed towards the good white protagonist. The conflict between the natives and the settlers is further mirrored in that between nature and civilization. Like many high fantasy novels whose authors invest a lot of time in evoking captivating images of natural and numinous landscapes, the Indian novels also praise nature's beauty, and readers cannot resist sharing the natives' grief when their lands are taken over, their forests are cut down, the animals disappear, and the wilderness is gradually "tamed." Porter summarizes these conflicts in the following way:

> European culture was considered superior to Indian culture of any sort, but from the beginning non-Indians differentiated Indians into 'good' and 'bad,' with 'good' Indians

[19] In his analysis he focuses on the distinction between the powers of good and evil, and on the ways in which these forces are used by heroes (72).

> having noble, innocent, and virtuous qualities and 'bad' Indians having fiendish, warlike, and occult ones. Non-Indians understood Indians in antithesis to themselves: because they thought themselves civilized, dynamic, and in history they judged Indians to be culturally static and somehow outside of history. (45)

What is more, like the worlds of fantasy fiction, the world of the Indian novels is highly idealized. The good heroes hardly ever fail to behave morally,[20] the evil characters never question their wrongdoings, and the hardships of life in the wilderness seem less prominent than the freedom and beauty of such life. Despite all their traveling, the protagonists of Indian novels hardly ever become sick, starve to death, or complain about problems of personal hygiene. Grim reality invades the novels only occasionally, e.g. in the episode about Karibu's famine-stricken village or in the scene from *Serce Chippewaya* when the protagonist's wife and daughter are brutally killed.

As for the motif of quest, though its prominence and details differ in particular Indian novels, in most cases the novels meet the "standard requirements" of a fantasy quest, i.e. they depict life-threatening ordeals that usually involve only male heroes (occasionally aided by females) who struggle to survive and/or pursue something which, once obtained, usually significantly alters their life. Thus, though the heroes of Indian novels do not save the world like the heroes of fantasy do, their ordeals are still quests–only they are more personal and concern the well-being of an individual and his community. For instance, in Bral's *Leśny goniec*, what starts as an adventure eventually turns into a quest. Initially, it seems that Paul only has to safely deliver his transport of furs, but when his enemies (both white– and red-skinned) continue to increase in numbers, the task of delivering the furs becomes a struggle for survival in which the hero (aided by loyal companions) has to outwit his enemies, prove his innocence, and confirm his true identity. In Sat-Okh's works, the personal quest takes on different forms. At the most basic level, the heroes need to fulfill certain tasks as members of a community (e.g. discover a totem, become a warrior), though these are usually not prolonged quests that involve the safety of the community. A different variant is the quest for revenge. For example, in *Głos prerii*, Wandering Bear temporarily leaves his village to avenge his friend; and in *Serce Chippewaya*, Neewatch permanently leaves his village to avenge his family by killing white settlers. In the legend "Biały mustang," included in the collection under the same title, the quest motif appears in its most traditional form; namely, to win his divine bride, a young warrior temporarily leaves his village and agrees to execute certain tasks set out by the girl's father, while his enemy tries to thwart his efforts. In Szczepańska's *Dziki Anda* and *Karibu*, the personal quest also involves community affairs. While Anda's decisions to prove his brother's innocence and retrieve his horse Luteja lead to several life-threatening situations which put the boy's strength and cleverness to the test, his actions affect the entire tribe. Anda not only discovers

[20] For instance, Paul from *Leśny goniec* is depicted as a brave, young entrepreneur who understands and respects the native people. Yet the author fails to notice that, as Porter writes, "the fur business for Indians generated a cycle of trade, violence, dependence, and poverty. Non-Indian trappers brought epidemic disease to which native peoples had no resistance; overhunting caused severe ecological disruption and species elimination, and trade severely eroded Indian social cohesion and dominated tribal relationships" (47).

and deals with a threat to his tribe's safety, but by keeping Luteja–who was given freedom in a sacred ritual–he questions the tribe's tradition. Anda's second adventure is a variant of the quest for a fantastic object, i.e. he has to retrieve the ear of his dead chief in order to restore both the chief's and the tribe's honor. Karibu's struggle to avenge his father and his decimated tribe also pertains to the honor of the Indian community. Yet paradoxically, vengeance endangers the Indian nations, because by killing the white culprit, Karibu almost breaks a peace treaty between his people and the English army. Finally, in Okoń's trilogy, readers witness the failure of a quest to protect the world (which seldom happens in fantasy fiction). Here, Tecumseh's attempts at uniting the Indian nations and defeating the settlers for the preservation of Indian lands eventually end in disaster. All in all, though the heroes of Indian novels do not search for magical items or fight against supernatural monsters, their actions follow patterns of trial and testing, which not only alter their own lives, but also prove central to the welfare of their communities.

On the one hand, the influence of Polish Indian novels is questionable, as they fill the minds of Polish readers with stereotypical images of Native Americans. Even though the novels generally speak in defense Native Americans, the authors' treatment thereof can be seen as appropriation and exploitation of one culture by another. The novels can be regarded as an extension of what Gerald Vizenor describes in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999) as "simulation of dominance," i.e. narratives and performances characterized by the representation and artificial invention of Native tribes from which real Native Americans are painfully absent (5-19). On the other hand, if the novels are perceived less as non-fiction literature meant to inform readers about Native Americans (though some authors did intend for their works to be just that), and more as a literary construct expressing the mindset of Polish writers and readers during the period of the People's Republic of Poland, then the novels can be partially redeemed. It is from this angle that the abovementioned Polish Indian novels have been analyzed; that is to say, not in terms of their historical and cultural accuracy, but as a very distant extension of fantasy fiction. Issues of accuracy and appropriation are therefore less relevant here.

This analysis has demonstrated that the Polish Indian novels are indeed a product of the same desires as fantasy fiction novels, and employ the same literary mechanisms Such a conclusion might raise questions pertaining to the notions of realism and escapism. But similarities in the structures of both genres do not mean that their authors worked with similar goals in mind. On the contrary, while writers of high fantasy consciously move beyond realism and include magical objects and supernatural entities to transport the reader and evoke a sense of wonder, the authors of the Indian novels (Sat-Okh and Okoń in particular) seem intent on teaching their readers about the life and customs of a real nation. Nonetheless, despite these authors' aspirations to historical realism, their novels are a combination of realism and fantasy. This, however, does not result from the evocation of purely fantastic worlds, but from the authors' insufficient knowledge of Native Americans, as well as from the factors which conditioned the publication and reception of these novels in Poland. The world depicted in them is fantastic in the sense that it is highly idealized. The writers' romantic notions of life in the wilderness, paired with their inadequate knowledge of real Native Americas, generated landscapes and peoples whose

authenticity is questionable and at times is more fantastic than realistic. Of course, the Indian novels are never fully fantastic because they do not engage in speculation or subversion. None of the authors deliberately re-invent Indian worlds or attempt to rewrite the history of the US in order to allow the natives to triumph over the settlers (in which case I could, indeed, be writing about Indian fantasy novels). Still, however, the idealized and romanticized images undermine the novels' realism and limit their didactic utility. They also strengthen the novels' escapist qualities. For the politically oppressed readers of the People's Republic of Poland, the world depicted in the texts–remote and inaccessible as it was–might have inspired escapists dreams similar to those inspired by the worlds of high fantasy (e.g. Tolkien's Middle-earth). Thus, both genres present worlds which are not entirely realistic (though for different reasons). They also generate and temporarily satiate the desire for escape. Consequently, while the didactic intentions of the Indian novels should be considered with common sense, it should also be noted that the supernatural aspects of fantasy fiction do not exclude realism altogether, and that fantasy often serves its own didactic purposes.[21]

In today's Poland, the Indian novels are no longer popular for several reasons. The collapse of communism granted Polish citizens more freedom in various spheres of life, including in travel and publishing, which meant that Indian novels were no longer needed as a substitute. The subsequent cultural and social transformations, together with the growing popularity of the Internet, redirected the attention of the younger generation and changed their dreams. Sat-Okh's death in 2003 meant that there was no longer a Polish Indian present to fuel public imagination. Finally, because of the proliferation of professional documentaries and publications, people interested in "real" Native Americans are no longer limited to reading the old novels.[22] Indeed, new sources of knowledge undermine or even completely destroy the idealized picture of Indians. What may follow in the wake of shattered stereotypes is a deeper understanding of Native American tribes, which will include not only their past, but also their present situation; and which, as Vizenor writes, will

[21] On the topic of fantasy and mimesis, Attebery writes: "They can and do coexist within any given work; there are no purely mimetic or fantastic works of fiction. Mimesis without fantasy would be nothing more but reporting one's perceptions of actual events. Fantasy without mimesis would be a purely artificial invention, without recognizable objects or actions" (1992, 3). Though fantasy fiction portrays magical objects, entities, and solutions, it is not devoid of realism in the sense that it has to adhere to rules established for the imaginary world, lest the plot become meaningless. The only difference is the fact that some of those rules defy the laws which govern the real world. What is more, some sub-genres of fantasy fiction, e.g. medieval fantasy romances and novels which rework authentic literature and culture, also have their own claims to realism. A good example is George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which many readers are inclined to treat as a very accurate rendition of the Middle Ages (save, of course, the dragons and the undead). Finally, many fantasy novels also serve didactic purposes, e.g. C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which is permeated by layers of references to Christian theology and morality.

[22] Though they are still available in some local libraries, they do not seem to be borrowed frequently (at least as far as I could see). Arguably, the books are of particular interest to older Polish readers who might want to nostalgically revisit the literary landscapes of their youth.

be grounded not in representations provided by the dominant culture, but in the postindian simulations of survivance (1999, 5-6), in which the natives (and not the *indians*) appear to resist representation and victimry. Still, this understanding may be rooted in a youthful fascination with Natives Americans incited by the Indian novels. Immersion in an imaginary world, be it that of high fantasy or Indian novels, can lead to "Recovery," which is what Tolkien calls the process characteristic of fantasy fiction (53), i.e. when the act of reading directs the reader's attention towards his surroundings and inspires his appreciation for reality. Readers have enjoyed fantasy fiction and Polish Indian novels not for their faithful reproduction of reality, but for the liberation they offer. Yet both fantasy and Indian novels can eventually direct the reader's gaze towards reality.[23]

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[23] The creation of Polski Ruch Przyjaciół Indian, which for many years united people fascinated by Native Americans and interested in recreating their culture, supports such a conclusion. Of course, we might question the extent to which the participants knew the culture of the native tribes, and the extent to which they relied on their own wishful thinking and stereotypes. This, however, is a topic for separate research.

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