MEDIEVAL WAVE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: NAOMI MITCHISON'S *TO THE CHAPEL PERILOUS*

ÇAĞDAŞ EDEBİYATTA ORTA ÇAĞ DALGASI: NAOMI MITCHISON'IN TO THE CHAPEL PERILOUS *ROMANI*

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Abstract

In recent years, nostalgia for the medieval period has appeared in the form of the fantasy genre, which generally includes magical and supernatural elements as in the works of the Middle Ages. The revival of the medieval romances and poems in popular culture in the 20th century was named "neomedievalism" by the critic Umberto Eco. Neomedieval works retell notable medieval stories or develop new plots in the light of medieval narratives and at times, they consist of chivalry and/or feature medieval settings like castles. All these features coincide with the essential characteristics of fantasy. In contemporary literature, both neomedievalism and the fantasy genre offer authors a chance to criticise the deficiencies and wrongdoing of their own periods. The Scottish author Naomi Mitchison, keeping the spirit of medievalism alive in her works, especially in To the Chapel Perilous (1955), rewrites a well-known Arthurian legend, the quest for the Holy Grail, from her own point of view, adding some anachronistic details such as the newspaper industry and reporters who are following all the steps of the knights in search of the Grail. The intertwinement of modern elements with a medieval legend is Mitchison's way of criticizing contemporary journalism, and by emphasising the dominant Medieval Church institute in her work, she points out the existence of authoritative figures in every period. The connection between the Middle Ages and the contemporary period dissociates Mitchison's novel, which is regarded as a parody, from the other neomedieval works, which often protect the chivalric spirit by glorifying medieval values. Within this frame, this paper will discuss the neomedieval elements in the fantastic novel To the Chapel Perilous as a means of criticizing Mitchison's own period and explore the place of medievalism in contemporary literature.

Öz

Son yıllarda Orta Çağ dönemine duyulan nostalji, genellikle Orta Çağ eserlerinde olduğu gibi büyülü ve doğaüstü unsurları içeren fantezi türünde de görülmektedir. 20. yüzyılda Orta Çağ romanslarının ve şiirlerinin popüler kültürde yeniden canlanması, eleştirmen Umberto Eco tarafından Yeni Orta Çağcılık olarak adlandırılmıştır. Yeni Orta Çağ eserleri, önemli Orta Çağ hikayelerini yeniden anlatmakta veya Orta Çağ anlatıları ışığında yeni olay örgüleri sunmaktadır. Bu edebi ürünler zaman zaman geleneksel Orta Çağ eserlerinde olduğu gibi şövalyelik ve/veya şatolar gibi Orta Çağ mekanlarından oluşmaktadır. Tüm bu özellikler fantezinin temel özellikleriyle de örtüşmektedir. Çağdaş edebiyatta hem Yeni Orta Çağcılık akımının hem de fantezi türünün yazarlara kendi dönemlerinin eksikliklerini ve yanlışlarını eleştirme şansı sunduğu açıktır. İskoç yazar Naomi Mitchison da eserlerinde Orta Çağ ruhunu canlı tutarak To the Chapel Perilous (1955) adlı romanında Arthur efsanesini kendi bakış açısıyla yeniden yazarken gazete endüstrisi ve Kutsal Kâse arayışındaki şövalyelerin adım adım takip eden muhabirler gibi bazı anakronistik ayrıntılar eklemektedir. Modern unsurların bir Orta Çağ efsanesiyle iç içe geçmesi, Mitchison'ın çağdaş gazeteciliğe yönelik eleştiri biçimidir. Eserinde baskın Orta Çağ Kilisesi kurumunu vurgulayarak her dönemde otorite figürlerinin varlığına da dikkat çekmektedir. Orta Çağ ile çağdaş dönem arasındaki bağlantı, parodi olarak değerlendirilen Mitchison'ın romanını, Orta Çağ değerlerini yücelterek şövalyelik ruhunu koruyan diğer Yeni Orta Çağ eserlerinden ayırmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, bu makale Mitchison'ın kendi dönemine yönelik bir eleştiri aracı olarak To the Chapel Perilous adlı fantastik romandaki Yeni Orta Çağ unsurlarını tartışarak çağdaş edebiyatta Orta Çağcılığın nasıl bir yere sahip olduğunu incelemektedir.

Introduction

For a long time, art, literature, and even the world of entertainment have presented products that have mingled with medieval figures, which could be interpreted as yearning for medieval times or finding a new way to comment on the contemporary problems. Nowadays, the fantasy genre in popular culture appreciates miracles, magic, monsters, knights, gothic castles or supernatural phenomena related to the medieval period. Umberto Eco points out this increasing interest in the medieval world in contemporary literature, as "neomedievalism," which is the revival of medievalism from the 19th century. Within the context of neomedievalism, either a medieval story is re-narrated, or a new plot set in a contemporary world is elaborated with medieval elements. In literature, especially, the fantasy genre often covers all these features, moreover, by distracting readers, it makes them evaluate their own period from a critical distance. The 20th century specially created significant space for fantastic works that have gained in popularity. Like the 19th-century author William Morris, many 20th-century writers such as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have contributed to the fantastic genre with their works, including medieval elements. Within this context in the 20th century, works became a bridge between the medieval period and the contemporary period. Among the works establishing a tie between these periods, the Arthurian sagas have a significant place. In addition to the love triangle among Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere, the quest for the Holy Grail is one of the most popular sections that is re-narrated in contemporary literature.

Naomi Mitchison's fantastic novel *To the Chapel Perilous* is one such reinterpretation of the Grail story. Even though Mitchison mostly stays loyal to the original Grail narrative, she embellishes the story with some anachronistic figures and details that parallel the contemporary period. Journalism is the most striking insertion in her reinterpretation of the Arthurian legend, through which she adds journalistic perspectives and creates an Arthurian world where the press companies have a voice. In doing so, Mitchison draws attention to the attitude of the 20th-century British press companies. The aim of this paper is to discuss how a fantastic work created with a medieval setting becomes a way to criticise authorities, and why Mitchison chooses to reinterpret a medieval story with contemporary details.

Fantasy and Neomedievalism

Mitchison often develops stories set in different periods of time. She prefers moving her readers away from his or her own time and reality. Historical fiction set in ancient times and contemporary times simultaneously, or those exploring nostalgic themes like Arthurian quests and witchcraft, or science fiction handling time travelling are the genres that

Mitchison chooses in her writing. The common point of many of her works is that she integrates her political views into these works. Evidently, for her, writing is an intellectual revolt against fascist and dictatorial governments. As a socialist, Mitchison addresses the perceived misdeeds of authorities by creating a fictional world. In doing so, she benefits from her own experiences. The author had the chance to observe the politics of governments during World War II, and being a journalist and diarist of wartime provided her with a critical perspective to evaluate the circumstances. She was a part of the mass-observation project. In 1937, within the scope of this project, the 500 mass-observers, both trained and untrained, half of whom were women, were requested to record the everyday life of the local people. After the outbreak of war in 1939, diary keepers sent their full and complete diaries to the British Government (Meschia, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, Mitchison began to write her diary as a mass-observer during the wartime, which provided her with insight into both the conditions of the civilian population and the chaos caused by the authorities. To criticise the wrongdoings of those authorities, she usually creates fantastic worlds where realities of our world take place in the form of supernatural elements and imaginary characters. Since, as Miéville notes, "*fantasy is in some systematic way resistant to ideology or rebellious against authority*," Mitchison benefits from the fantasy genre in *To Chapel Perilous* to draw readers' attention (Miéville, 2009, p. 242). The fantasy genre is usually characterised by supernatural elements in a work. Fantasy includes mysterious and magical elements, yet it is not limited to these units. Supernatural elements are blended with realistic details. Thus, defining fantasy could not be limited to the parts that do not fit the real world. According to Charlotte Burcher et.al., fantasy has a comprehensive definition highlighting both fantastic, in other words, abnormal elements, and normal elements. They state,

> While there are many definitions [of fantasy], a generous approach to the genre includes any work that contains magic or other elements that cannot be understood by the rules of reality. It also includes largely realistic works set in imagined variations on certain historical periods - the *medieval* era in particular (2009, p. 227). [my emphasis]

The attention to "the rules of reality" reveals the common understanding of the fantasy genre. Those rules are generally ignored in medieval texts; the world of the medieval narratives is composed of 'unreasonable' characters, setting, animals, or quests. All these elements allow the works to be categorised under the heading "*epic high fantasy*," which becomes the most common type of fantasy after Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *the Lord of the Rings* (Bucher et al., 2009, p. 227). Epic high fantasy, with its magical atmosphere, is fed by neomedievalism, one of the essential spirits of fantastic works. Like the other types of fantasy, epic high fantasy presents escapism for readers.

Mystical and supernatural works open a new portal to a carefree place for readers. Similar to medieval romances, contemporary fantastic works are accepted as escape fiction. Fantasy helps readers avoid the reality of their world. Particularly, taking readers to the past by offering a universe that readers are not familiar with is one of the functions of fantasy. Daniel Baker, in his article "Why We Need Dragons," discusses the importance of the past in such works: "*the realist strategy does not, and cannot, fully engage the reader. By going past reality, by plunging through and beyond it, fantasy can offer an interesting, at times disturbing, perspective*" (2012, p. 437). Realism related to their time no longer satisfies readers, and thus they prefer engaging with narratives of the distant past. As the unfamiliar setting of medieval towns meets fantasy, and as fantasy gains more popularity, medieval themes and elements attract more interest. The relation between them contributes to the medievalism movement of the 19th century, and neomedievalism of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Mitchison's Use of Fantasy in the form of Neomedievalism

Neomedievalism binds past and present. Yet, this bridge does not offer an insight into the past for all time, it could bring the present to light. According to Kaufman, "*[n]eomedievalism finds a way of clinging to the past by rejecting the 'history,' the alterity, the time and space that separated it from its desired object and bringing it into the present*" (2010, p. 3). As is pointed out, neomedievalism is an alternative way to revive the past. However, to say 'history repeats itself' is misleading. In *To Chapel Perilous*, Mitchison, by reinterpreting a notable medieval quest, explores a problem related to reaching the future. The Grail legend is a story that stands the test of time. The medieval specialist Juliette Wood emphasises that *"[a]s a symbol of personal transformation and cultural renewal, it [the Grail story] continues to fascinate a particular corner of the publishing industry*" (Wood, 2008, p. 168). Therefore, by reinterpreting the Grail legend with the modern figures, Mitchison's novel serves the same purpose, and regarding the story "as a symbol of personal transformation" she individualises the legend. Mitchison creates her own Grail story, to criticise the wrongdoings of the contemporary press.

With regard to her own observation, she is familiar with the role of media in the society and the power of the authority on media; hence, as she states in *The Moral Basis of Politics*, Mitchison "*gives voice to the unsaid and unseen, those subversive elements which exist in the unmapped margins of social space*" (qtd. in Amey, 2004, p. 70.) During her visit to Vienna in 1934, she had a chance to observe the press and the broadcast media in a wartime and witnessed that the journalists were not totally free to reveal the truth. Moreover, in Britain the censorship trials (from 1928 to 1935) against the writers seem to affect the media, as

well; in her diary, Mitchison states that it was not easy to reflect the facts in the papers: they were supposed to be careful about which topic they would touch upon or ignore. The author emphasises that the journalists, were far from reflecting the "pure" facts, by saying *"[s]o odd, this newspaper world-writer, and yet how unlike highbrow writer! Applied writing. But can writing be 'pure', like 'pure' science?*" (qtd. in Benton, 1990, p. 98). Since the journalists of the period could not write the bare facts, Mitchison took on a task as a reporter and wrote down whatever she had witnessed. Accordingly, in her only Arthurian novel, To the Chapel Perilous, she could develop the Grail story by inserting the views of Dalyn and Lienors, who are rival reporters in pursuit of the knights' quest for the Grail.

By way of adding reporters and newspapers to a medieval setting, the author uncovers a significant element of fantasy, which is anachronism. In his article, "The Politics (If Any) of Fantasy," Brian Attebery reveals that fantasy commonly reconstructs medieval villages with anachronisms he emphasises the use of anachronism in fantasy as follows:

> But the more important function—dare I say political function—of creative anachronism occurs when you take a little bit of the Middle Ages and plop it down in the midst of freeways and shopping malls. The contrast, the disjunction, transforms the present (1991, pp. 15-16).

Creating a medieval setting in works often brings anachronism. In the novel, the reporters Lienors from the *Camelot Chronicle* and Dalyn from the *Northern Pict*, are on the trail of the knights in search of the Holy Grail, which offers a natural anachronism to readers while Mitchison veils her criticism of the contemporary British press. According to Alan Lupack, *To the Chapel Perilous* "*is also a satire of power and the manipulation of information*" and it presents an "*anachronistic portrayal of Arthurian story*" and "*postmodern skepticism about the reliability of a received story*" (2001, p. 140). The deception of the press in an imaginary medieval setting paves the way for alienation. While readers escape from their reality, they are aware of the fact that those anachronistic details with the period are used to draw attention to the problems of their time. The existence of the press and the way the reporters spread the news illustrate the quest of knights of Arthur's.

In the original Grail story, narrated in *The Vulgate Cycle*, a reflection of the Holy Grail appears over the table during a Round Table meeting. Thereupon, the knights are summoned to find the Holy Grail; they are supposed to bring it to Camelot, where it belongs according to Arthur. The quest of all knights begins, and they travel many lands. However, at the end of the quest, it is Galahad, son of Lancelot, who finds the Holy Grail and brings it to Camelot. The quest does not end with the finding. Arthur and others decide to take the

Grail to the holy land, Sarras[1], since they believe it is not in situ. When they come to Sarras, the Grail is lifted up to the sky through a light, which is interpreted as God's will. After Galahad completes the mission, he dies in Sarras. Unlike this well-known version of the story, *To the Chapel Perilous* introduces more than one Grail, and every knight in the quest finds his own Grail, so the mission of the reporters is to find out which Grail is real. They decide to visit the five major knights, namely Gawain, Lancelot, Perceval, Bors and Galahad. Moreover, Mitchison introduces different aspects of each Grail; Gawain's Grail is an old-fashioned cauldron of plenty; Lancelot's is a silver cup healing people, that actually originates from Lancelot's healing of Sir Urry in Sir Thomas Malory's version of the Arthurian legend; Perceval's is a shining stone which spills gold; Bors' Grail is the dish of the Last Supper, used at the harvest; and finally Galahad's Grail is a vessel which frees the souls. In fact, although there are many other knights from the different European countries, Lienors and Dalyn prefer to announce that the real Grail has been found by one of these English knights because of their alliance with England.

> [T]he watchers were quiet determined not to have foreigners. After all, if the Grail had come to Britain, then British it was going to stay, part of Arthurian way of life. If you denied that, then you denied the whole purpose and pattern in everything and who would bother to read the papers then? (Mitchison, 1999, p. 22)

Thus, in order to meet the expectations of the English readers and to prevent common people from searching for new Grails, they decide to write a story in which only one real Grail is held in Britain, and they think that "*it wouldn't be a story if there was more than one*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 24). The existence of the press in a medieval world presents a political criticism, which is essential for the fantasy genre. According to Attebery, "*[d]eliberately invoking such anachronisms is often seen as a political act*" and escapist fiction provides a basis for criticism through fantasy (1991, p. 10). As is seen in *To the Chapel Perilous*, Mitchison underlines the twisted news announced by Lienors and Dalyn to draw attention to the false politics of the 20th-century British press. The narrative strategy of Lienors and Dalyn is a sort of misleading representation; by twisting the facts, they try to make people believe in their story. Dalyn gives the main points of their job: "*once we've made our choice I'd advise all the others to keep quiet. If they think they've got a Grail, keep it in the family [...] until everyone believes our story, and then there'll be no danger*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 31). When the unknown hermit living close to the Chapel Perilous

[1] A legendary place believed to be somewhere in the Middle East.

approves, the reporters will make certain which one is announced as the true Grail and who will be 'the Grail winner.' They will not announce every knight who has found a Grail.

The newspaper companies of the 'Dark Ages' reveal 'what is real' according to their interest. Such misconduct gives prominence to how the press works not only in a fictional world, but also in the contemporary world. At this juncture, the reason behind the use of medievalism assumes importance. There are several ways of benefiting from medieval elements. In his essay, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages", Umberto Eco specifies the ways of dreaming of the Middle Ages: they are, namely, the Middle Ages of pretext, ironical revisitation, barbaric age, Romanticism, philosophia perennis or neo-Thomism, national identities, Decadentism, philological reconstruction, the so-called tradition or occult philosophy, and expectation of the Millennium. He thinks that "*before rejoicing or grieving over a return of the Middle Ages, we have the moral and cultural duty of spelling out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about*" (Eco 1986, p. 72). For Mitchison's novel, there is a return to "*the Middle Ages as the site of an ironic revisitation*" (Eco, 1986, p. 69). Mitchison uses the Arthurian world ironically to demonstrate that the authority employs methods that are reminiscent of the 'Dark Ages.' In the novel, the finding of a Grail by every knight is a twisted detail used to show how hard it is for journalists to find and report the facts in every period. Unlike the other Arthurian novels, which focus on the magnificence of King Arthur and his Round Table, Mitchison's work presents an ironic narrative which depicts an Arthurian world in which the facts are covered up.

Mitchison, as a prolific writer of over eighty books, usually deals with social issues. In her works, she presents her observations to the reader and in doing so, she reflects her thoughts about what is happening within society. As her biographer, Jill Benton even states, "*[h]er children's books are not as naïve as she deceptively makes them appear. They usually have a social message, […] Naomi's writing was so sufficiently subtle that her didactic intention was seldom noticed*" (Benton, 1990, p. 42). *To the Chapel Perilous*, which is categorised as a children's book by certain critics, is regarded as a complex vehicle for social critique because the author demonstrates that the present authoritative figures decide what will be said and what will be seen in the papers. In the novel, the reporters Lienors Blanchemains, from Merlin's *The Camelot Chronicle*, and Dalyn, from Lord Horny's *The Northern Pict*, are developed in line with the understanding of the 20th-century journalists. In her interview with Raymond H. Thompson, an Arthurian scholar, Mitchison states that "*[t]he characters in the novel are based very much upon the people working for* The Guardian *newspaper at that time, which was the 1950s*" (Thompson, 1989). *The Guardian*, known as the Manchester Guardian in those years, chased Britain's international projects and was

one of several newspapers that could report against the government and its international policies[2]. Like the reporters of *The Guardian*, Lienors and Dalyn, visit different districts following the knights for the purpose of seeking the truth about the Grail. The distance and the inadequacy of technology are the major obstacles to transmitting the news. Dalyn, as a reporter aware of what is happening around him, expresses the difficulties in his job: "*[w]e've got two things to deal with […]. Space and time. […] We're long way from what is actually happening. […] in that distance anything can happen. […] We're always having to translate quickly from the doer to the reader and we can't help going wrong there"* (Mitchison, 1999, pp. 140-141).

Despite all problems related to distance, Mitchison does not neglect the role of the subs (subeditors) in reporting the news. In fact, the reporters in Camelot do not try to find out the facts but pursue the best story which the editors will countenance publishing as the story of the real Grail winner. As their search evidently shows, the facts and "*what is reportable*" depend on the editors' appreciation, which is what Mitchison finds unacceptable in the 20th-century journalism (Obermier, 2005, p. 203). Thus, the novel, as Robert W. Barber states, "*is in one sense a witty diatribe on the craft of the journalist*" (Barber, 2004, p. 322). Eventually, the author, by returning to a medieval story with anachronistic details, shows her ability to fuse mythic structures with contemporary concerns.

As mentioned above, the novel is a representation of the 20th-century press. Mitchison's words in her diary, clarify why she does not approve of the attitude of the contemporary newspapers. When she lost her interest in newspapers and periodicals, which were negligent about what was happening in Vienna, she writes "*[t]hese dear little papers that are willing to call one a genius when one's writing fiction –words that they don't need to take action about- but won't have anything to do with one's writing something but really matters!*" (qtd. in Benton, 1990, p. 99). She points out that the press chooses what they report based on the actions they might need to take or criticism they will face. In a similar way, in the novel, the news is published after the knights reveal the nature of journalism in Camelot. During the visit to the Castle Bran de Gore, where Dalyn and Lienors observe Sir Bors' Grail, Sir Bors' father-in-law King Barn passes away. The papers focus only on the death of the king; there is nothing about Sir Bors' Grail. They prefer not to report anything related to the Grail: in the words of Lord Horny, the owner of the *Pict*, "*anything setting people thinking*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 72). In this world, there is no place for "thinking".

[2] For further information see, Michael J. Turner, (2009), *British Power and International Relations during the 1950s: A Tenable Position?* Lexington Books, and Gary D. Rawnsley, (1999), *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*. Macmillian Press.

Moreover, the control of the Church over the press is depicted through the same story, in which Canon de Gofyn, on behalf of the Archbishop, wants Merlin to suppress the death of the King and to announce a contrived story about how the sister of Sir Peredur has given her blood to a woman with leprosy to distract the reader. The assistant of Merlin, Ygraine la Grande, clarifies that "*if they [the Church] don't get what they want, they'll withdraw their contributions*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 108). As it can be seen, the novel reveals that people know as much as the authority wants them to, and the newspapers are forced to obey its will in order to survive.

Mitchison speaks of the press companies taking a political side, as well. The Guardian supports the left-wing, while the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* are on the side of the Conservatives. Consequently, the *Camelot Chronicle* and the *Northern Pict* also take political sides instead of reporting the news objectively. While the *Camelot Chronicle* is on the side of King Arthur, the *Northern Pict* opposes Arthur. The news is formed according to its political expedience because *"[t]here's no time or space for the whole truth*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 47). *The Camelot Chronicle* is depicted as a newspaper that has the Church's support. In addition, The Camelot Chronicle is also against Sir Lancelot since the Church is against him because of his affair with Guinevere. Furthermore, the news of the Chronicle proves its subjectivity after the visit to Joyous Garde, where Sir Lancelot lives: "Camelot Chronicle's *story about Joyous Garde was a shocker. Not a word that would make anyone suppose it was Sir Lancelot's Grail. He was mentioned certainly, but a reader would think he was acting as a kind of priest for his son"* (Mitchison, 1999, p. 76). In order not to receive a rebuff from the Church, the *Chronicle* avoids any news that causes the public to sympathise with him or exalt him. On the other hand, the *Pict*'s attitude is more different from the *Chronicle*'s. Even if Lord Horny does not stand up against the Church, he always has alternative plans in case of a change in throne. He acts in compliance with the meaning of his name, which is "*what the Scots call the Devil*", and "*[h]e always impales people with his horns*" (Thompson, 1989). Even the *Pict* reporter Dalyn recognizes the malicious intent and thinks that the Pict is "*trying to stir up trouble in Camelot*" (Mitchison, 1999, p. 114). Following the result of the battle between King Arthur and his nephew Sir Modred, it seems that the *Pict* will have to rewrite their previous news.

> If Modred won that battle, […] we'll be doing a lot of re-writing of all the Arthur and Round Table stories. Modred will have to come creditably into all of them. It will also certainly be said that Sir Lancelot killed Gareth and Gaheris on purpose and attempted to kill Modred. Fairly easy to make Lancelot into a villain (Mitchison, 1999, p.176).

In addition to distorting the results of Lancelot's rescue of Guinevere from execution, the Pict is ready to overthrow the present king and his supporters in order to save and ingratiate itself with the next king. Lorn Horny's attitude is just another example of 20th-century journalism; to survive, he changes his publishing policy and takes the side of the authoritative figure.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Naomi Mitchison's work *To the Chapel Perilous* offers a remarkable criticism of the 20th-century press through the movement neomedievalism. In the novel, the fantasy genre allows the author to widen the perspective of the readers with a critical distance. The reinterpretation of the quest for the Holy Grail is harmonised with the perspective of the contemporary journalism. When the fantasy genre is considered, it is clear that it consists of farfetched elements; yet also realism is the natural part of the genre. For that reason, fantasy is generally preferred by the authors who disapprove the policies of the governments. Moreover, the supernatural world of the medieval writing inspires Mitchison in terms of composing an escapist novel reflecting her opposing view about the contemporary politics. The use of neomedievalism repurposing medieval tropes for contemporary literature offers a critical framework through which Mitchison examines the ideologies of the authorities. By illustrating how hard it is to reveal the facts and report everything that the public should be aware of, the author shows that she disapproves of the control exercised by authorities over the ways of getting informed. By way of depicting two rival reporters, Lienors and Dalyn, Mitchison accentuates that 20th-century publishing companies could report only to the extent appreciated by the authorities. In her novel, the author represents how the Church gets involved in the publishing process, or how the editors choose what they publish in accordance with their interests. Mitchison's fantastic world illustrates socio-political misconduct that she has witnessed in person and that are extremely common in her time. *To the Chapel Perilous*, as a representation of the fantasy genre, is a novel that depicts the unethical behaviour of the 20th-century press companies and takes neomedieval principles as tools to criticise the wrongs society.

Summary

The Scottish author Naomi Mitchison, known as an outspoken socialist critical of authority, deals with socio-political problems of governments in her writing. She usually produces fantastic works to cover her views on the wrongdoings of present ideologies. In 1955, she published her only Arthurian novel *To the Chapel Perilous*, which is also a noteworthy contribution to the fantasy genre, blending socio-political consciousness with imaginative storytelling. Mitchison's work occupies a political position within the 20th-century fantasy genre, not merely as a revisiting of Arthurian legend but as a complex vehicle for social critique. At the heart of the work lies a deliberate turn toward neomedievalism, a cultural and aesthetic movement that reinterprets medieval themes and symbols for modern audiences. Neomedievalism comprises literary works written in accordance with the essential conventions of medieval literary products or containing elements and figures that are

associated with the Middle Ages. Since medieval romances and fantastic works serve escapism, *To the Chapel Perilous*, as an epic high fantasy, could be regarded as escapist. Moreover, the movement, neomedievalism, is a way of yearning for the past; in other words, it contributes to nostalgia. However, Mitchison's use of neomedievalism in the novel could not be evaluated as either nostalgic or escapist. Rather, she employs medieval topics as tools for satire and subversion. The anachronistic existence of the reporters behind the knights in search of the Grail becomes a metaphorical confrontation with the moral and spiritual vacuity of contemporary British media. The novel is a means of Mitchison's criticism of the contemporary British press. Since she worked as a journalist, she witnessed the oppression over the journalist in person. Furthermore, during the World War II, for the British government, Mitchison kept diary based on the daily lives of the local people who were influenced by the war. For that reason, she knew well what the journalists announced and what was the truth. By taking these personal experiences into consideration, she added the reporters to a medieval setting in a realistic way.

In contrast to traditional Arthurian retellings that often glorify the past, Mitchison reforms the legend as a parody to criticise the present. In the novel, the media is portrayed as manipulative and superficial—an institution more interested in spectacle than truth, a portrayal which could lead readers to "think." The editors change what is real in accordance with what they want to reveal. Although each knight finds a Grail, to attract more attention, they decide to announce one "real" Grail by making up an exaggerated story. Mitchison worked as a journalist and witnessed World War II, which helped her shape the frame of her novel in detail. The portrayal of post-war society and changing conventions of the institutions reflects Mitchison's purpose in *To the Chapel Perilous*. For that reason, the press symbolises the contemporary equivalent of medieval corruption that appeared under the control of the Church. Just as the Church controls the media in the novel, so too does the government exert power over the contemporary press Within the broader context of the fantasy genre, To the Chapel Perilous stands out as a supernatural quest, but the narrative remains firmly anchored in the socio-political realities of the 20th century. Mitchison's use of fantasy serves not to distract readers as an escapist novel might, but to illuminate them. It could be said that her work paves the way for "thinking" that is blocked by the editors of the Camelot Chronicle and the Northern Pict. It is clear that, Mitchison aims to both draw attention to a problem and encourage change. Therefore, the novel serves as an intellectual revolt, aligning with her purpose of writing. *To the Chapel Perilous* is a significant work that merges the conventions of the fantasy genre with neomedievalism to underline the political problems of the present. The lens of the past provides a distance for readers, providing a new shelter to escape. Yet the reinterpretation of the Grail legend through a contemporary perspective hides a harsh criticism of the 20th-century British press. Naomi Mitchison's sophisticated use of neomedievalism allows her to critique dominant ideologies, particularly the role of the media in post-war Britain. In the novel, fantastic escapism, serving as satire, takes the form of medieval legend.

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