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# A Journey Beyond Reality: Poetic Prose and Lush Imagery in Tanith Lee's *Night's Master*

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*Tanith Lee was a "highly decorated writer" (Chappell 1) whose work ranged from science-fiction, through fantasy and children's literature to contemporary and detective novels. Although she published more than ninety novels and three hundred short stories, her audience has diminished through the years, affecting also the academic interest in her works. The aims of this article are to provide a literary analysis of one of her most famous novels,* Night's Master*, and answer the question of why readers describe her prose as "lush" and "poetic"; and also interpret the recurring symbolism and themes of beauty, sexuality and metamorphosis in the work. This article also highlights the similarities between the novel and fairy tales in regard of numeric symbolism and morals.*

**Keywords**
Tanith Lee; style; themes; contemporary; literature.

## Introduction

Tanith Lee was one of the most prominent British authors of science-fiction, fantasy and horror. She published more than ninety novels and three hundred short stories and was awarded the *World Fantasy Award, British Fantasy Award* and recently, in 2013, the *Lifetime Achievement Award* (from the *World Fantasy Awards*). Lee's works focus on many issues and themes; she was known for writing re-imaginations of fairy tales *(Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer)*, children's literature *(The Dragon Hoard)* and LGBT fiction under the pseudonym Esther Garber. She wrote futuristic novels *(The Silver Metal Lover)* and novels set in alternate universes *(Don't Bite the Sun),* books including vampires *(The Blood Opera Trilogy)* or unicorns *(Black Unicorn)*, young-adult fiction *(The Wolf Tower)*, and last, but not least, her *Tales from the Flat Earth*, which critics have noted as being "structured as a series of interconnected stories in a manner similar to the fables of One Thousand and One Nights" (*The*

*Telegraph*). However, to clearly classify Lee's work into established boundaries of genres could be difficult, since the author herself does not recognize genres: "For me, all genres or sub-genres, can and should be mixed when a writer wants to. (We all do, one way or another, anyhow.) Genre doesn't matter to me, as reader or writer, providing it's what I wish and need to read and write (and wallow in) at the time" (*Weird Fiction Review*).

Lee's themes are just as varied as the genres of her novels and stories. From general themes like love, life and death she moves through immortality and reincarnation *(Drinking Sapphire Wine)*, eroticism, homoeroticism and sexuality *(Death's Master)* to race *(The Storm Lord),* morality *(Louisa the Poisoner)* and feminism.

Despite the claims that Lee is supposedly "on an equal footing with such fantasy world-builders as Ursula Le Guin and Terry Pratchett.... [she] never quite gained the mainstream audience of Le Guin or Pratchett" (*The Telegraph*). We can only speculate why; after all, her work is extensive, covering many themes, and of good quality, as proved by many literary awards to the author. This lack of mainstream audience manifests itself also in the interest of academia. There are relatively few academic works that deal with Lee's writings, one of the most extensive ones being *The Hidden Library of Tanith Lee* by Mavis Haut, who analyses Lee's most common themes, symbols and subtexts in her numerous, but earlier works. Other works focus on Lee's specific novels/themes and are less extensive or a part of a wider problem, such as vampires (*The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature* edited by Leonard G. Heldreth and Mary Pharr), werewolves (*Tanith Lee's Werewolves Within: Reversals of Gothic Traditions* by Lillian M. Heldreth), fairy tales (*Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* by Jack Zipes), robots (*Robots and Romance: The Science Fiction and Fantasy of Tanith Lee* by Sarah Lefanu) and narrative structure of fairytales (*Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* by Cristina Bacchilega). A comprehensive bibliography exists online, including all Lee's works and the translations of her work, available at *www.daughterofthenight.com.*

To my knowledge, there is not yet an author who has provided literary criticism of Lee's *The Flat Earth Cycle*, except for the already mentioned *The Hidden Library of Tanith Lee* by Mavis Haut. Haut, however, tries to interpret and analyse the series, consisting of five books, in a little more than thirty pages, and is thus unable to cover all the issues, themes and symbols of Lee's *Flat Earth.* She also addresses the issue of Lee's celebrated style very briefly and leaves room for further analysis.

## *Tales from the Flat Earth* and *Night's Master*

Tanith Lee's famous cycle consists of five books, *Night's Master, Death's Master, Delusion's Master, Delirium's Mistress* and *Night's Sorceries*. The first book, *Night's Master,* was published in 1978 and then in 2009 reprinted by the TaLeKa print, which focused on republishing Lee's works. *Night's Master* was nominated for the World Fantasy Award, which it did not receive and only the second book in the series, *Death's Master,* was awarded the British Fantasy Award for Best Novel in 1980.

I address the five books as a "series", because they are set in the same universe and have recurring characters; however, they can be read as stand-alone novels. Indeed, the structure of the books, perhaps with the exception of *Death's Master,* is very loose. The subject of our analysis, *Night's Master,* is constructed of interconnected stories, which depend on each other mildly and the book itself does not have the structure of an ordinary novel, because it consists of three books numbered *Book 1, Book 2* and *Book 3*. These have individual storylines and function as "books within a book."

The reception of Lee's *Night's Master* was mostly positive. The reviews highlight Lee's writing style as an "extraordinary narrative style, gorgeous phrasing and wording" (Guslandi), a "lush, lyrical, sensual prose" (The Discriminating Fangirl) and a "lush imagery, sensual language" (*Publishers Weekly*). Mavis Haut also notes that "the language is highly patterned" (Haut 39), but does not elaborate. The issue of style seems to be one of the elements of Lee's writing that is frequently praised as a "lush, dreamlike style" (Moreno-Garcia) and "delivered with a passionate prose which is never less than beautiful" (Heroines of Fantasy). Lush, sensual, beautiful prose and imagery are recurring denotations of Lee's style. The first aim of this article is therefore to examine the stylistic aspects of Lee's prose in *Night's Master,* analyse the literary devices she uses to achieve this effect and highlight the stylistic patterns of her work.

As already mentioned, the academic work on Tanith Lee is rather sparse. Mavis Haut's *The Hidden Library of Tanith Lee* therefore serves as the basis for the second aim of this article, which is to examine the themes and symbols of *Night's Master.* I only chose to analyse the first book in the series as I felt that an analysis of all five of the novels calls for a work of a wider extent. Haut mentions the themes of love, sexuality, time, and nature in relation to all five of the books, which I interpret in the context of *Night's Master* and to which I add new observations and analyses.

## Poetic Prose and Lush Imagery

Tanith Lee's "writing style can easily be described as lyrical and layered" (Brandstatter) and the references to Lee's narrative style often come up in reviews and articles about the author. Indeed, the quality of Lee's style is very distinctive and her fiction is "inventive, elegant, sexy, bursting with imagination and gorgeous imagery" (The Guardian). In this part of the article I examine the poetic prose and imagery of *The Night's Master* and find literary devices and stylistic traits which give basis to the reviews favouring Lee's specific writing style.

First of all, "poetic or ornamental prose denotes the result of an overdetermination of the narrative text with specifically poetic devices such as rhythmicizing and sound repetition" (Schmid 1). The term poetic prose appears in relation to authors such as William Faulkner (Lehan) or Ursula K. Le Guin (*Kirkus Review*); however, it must not be mistaken for prose poetry or the prose poem. The prose poem "differs from poetic prose in that it is short and compact" (Delville 2) and it is seemingly the length that determines the difference between the two: "If it is any longer, the tensions and impact are forfeited and it becomes – more or less poetic-prose" (Delville 2). In other aspects than the length, poetic prose has very similar, if not the same characteristics as the prose poem. The prose poem is however, still classified as poetry even if the boundaries between poetry and prose are less clear, and poetic prose is classified as prose with elements of poetry such as heightened imagery.

Delville (4) speaks of poetic prose as being dense with metaphors, a stylistically complicated form which is also lyrically intimated as opposed to simpler, prosaic prose, which does not use the decorativeness of the poetic and has a utilitarian forwardness. Schmid (3) agrees, adding ornamentalization and the "restriction of narrativity" (Schmid 3) which results in fragmentation of the story and a lack, in some cases a complete omission of, plot. Structure is the starting point for an analysis of *Night's Master,* which then allows us to move to imagery and stylistic issues.

As previously mentioned, the fragmentation of the book is done by the author herself dividing the book into three parts. Every part focuses on a different story; the links between the stories exist only on two levels: the level of the recurring characters and the level of the setting, which is the Flat Earth. This fragmentation into almost short stories gives the basis for the lack of an overall plot. As a result, the reader is unable to say "what the book is

about" since the stories take place at different times, with various characters and are not interconnected through plot. The first part of the novel, or book one, deals with the love between a human and a demon, and the consequent destructiveness of such love. The second book focuses on the destructiveness of vanity on the example of an extraordinarily beautiful princess. The last book has the themes of self-sacrifice and rebirth. In all three books, the human characters are non-recurring and the stories are related only via setting and non-human characters. These are the creatures who serve the demons – the Eshva and the Drin; but most of all the prince of demons Azhrarn, who functions as a link between the stories, as it is his will, curiosity and boredom which often affect the fate of the human characters.

Relating to narrative style, the novel does not only feature dense narration, but has also very little dialogue. This results in numerous observations, descriptions and matter-of-fact statements without previous world building or explanations as apparent in the introduction: "One night, Azhrarn Prince of Demons, one of the Lords of Darkness, took on him, for amusement, the shape of a great black eagle" (Lee 19). The restricted dialogue adds to the continuous prosaic monologue, unbroken by direct speech, and thus Lee's work achieves the feeling of a (fairy) tale.

The ornamentalization, imagery, and lush prose are a result of poetic devices used in prose. As already mentioned, the limited direct speech unifies the prose and avoids disruptions. Mavis Haut (39) mentions Lee's patterned prose and often metaphorical denotations of the main character (*Azhrarn*), which cloak him in an aura of mystery: "Prince of Demons" (Lee 19), the Dark Lord" (Lee 29), "Peerless One" (Lee 54), "Wondrous One" (Lee 54), "Prince of Princes" (Lee 82), "the Black Jackal" (Haut 44). The imagery is also created through similes: "What she saw was a beauty surpassing the gorgeousness of a leopard, more poignant than the plumage of the spring, like the moon, the sun…" (Lee 126) and a "voice weeping as lonely and as bitter as the winter wind (Lee 19), through personifications: "In those days a curse or a blessing was like a bird. It had wings and could fly" (Lee 175), "The sigh said this: Like a white moth at dusk, a night-blooming lily. Like music played by the reflection of a swan as it passes over the strings of a moonlit lake" (Lee 165) and "The sea received him, opening its jaws greedily" (Lee 46).

The level of sound is also prominent in Lee's work; alliteration in the case of a city, its king and the king's daughter: *Zojad – Zorashad – Zorayas* and in the case of seven sisters: *Fleet, Flame, Foam, Fan, Fountain, Favour* and *Fair.* Further examples of alliteration can also be easily found throughout the

whole book: "a prince in a palace, with horses and hounds" (Lee 37), "little by little, fragment by fragment" (Lee 88). The rhythm is in certain cases created through onomatopoeic descriptions: "And terrifying they sounded when the clash of their metal was  heard, the tramp of feet and rumble of wheels, and the bellow of bulls' horns and trumpets" (Lee 93).

Repetitiveness is found in various forms: "Seven tears shed in despair beneath the earth, seven tears shed by a flower who is a woman" (Lee 71); "Forget, forget, no one remembers you, and come" (Lee 88); "This was like a wound, a new wound made in the old" (Lee 108), alongside with enumerations: "…which had known only the hurt of old wounds, a lash, a rape, the rasp of iron" (Lee 126) and irony: "You will grow old and you will die, and I wish you joy in so doing" (Lee 81). The figurative language is complemented with the inverted word order of the sentences: "A frightful thing is love" (Lee 141) and the theatricality of the direct speech: "Every man dies soon or late. Bow to your destiny. You must accept the burden and the grave. My fee for this advice is one silver piece" (Lee 138).

In addition, rhetorical questions: "Was she a half-wit or a cripple? Was she possessed?" (Lee 178) and paradoxes appear: "'Honey-Sweet,' said Azhrarn, 'your days shall be bitter hereafter'" (Lee 170). Together with strong descriptive phrases such as "this terrible Bird", "noise so horrible, so fearful", "the beautiful sorceress", "beloved of beloveds", "marvellous city", the author creates a tone resembling the tone of fairy tales. This tone varies from playful to vengeful; from depressive to optimistic. With the use of all the mentioned poetic devices, restricted dialogue and their theatricality, the narrative language becomes surrealistic, the abundance of literary devices creating a fantastical and exotic mood.

## The Quest for Beauty, Sexuality and Metamorphosis

In her literary analysis of Lee's works, Mavis Haut interprets the themes and symbols of the *Flat Earth* pentalogy. I use her work as the basis for my analysis, which aims to expand the interpretations made by Haut and add those that seemingly did not fit into the scope of her work.

The plot of *Night's Master* revolves around the main character, the demon prince Azhrarn, who meddles into the affair of humans. Azhrarn is a recurring character, while ordinary humans do not usually appear outside their own story. This fragmentation into stories is often compared with *The Arabian*

*Nights* in its structure and storytelling, but, as Haut notes, "Lee's world has no external point of reference or Scheherazade" (37).

Azhrarn, the demon prince, is also the starting point of Haut's analysis. As she observes, his "lives and deaths evoke both Christ and Ahriman, Dionysos and any dying god" (38). These similarities are based on the sources Lee draws from, which are myth, religion, fairy tales and folk, merging into one, new story. Azhrarn as a character is a romanticized version of Biblical demons; he is described as "marvellously handsome, with hair that shone like blue-black fire, and clothed in all the magnificence of night" (Lee 20) and has a "contemptuous and ironic glance" (Lee 19). He "overflows with contradictions" (Haut 38), as his nature – or his deeds – are not "demonic" or completely evil. On the contrary, he saves a mortal child Sivesh, whom he brings up, becomes his lover and only after several betrayals does Azhrarn destroy the young man. The demon prince is also capable of creating life, though he does this through magic rather than through biology. He also sacrifices himself for the sake of humankind. On the other hand, humans are afraid even of hearing his name: "Do not speak that fearful name aloud" (Lee 43) and the demon often kills what is unpleasant to him: "At that Azhrarn laughed coldly: 'I do not often grant favors, hag. But though I will not give you your youth, I will see to it you grow no older,' and a lightning slipped from his hand and struck the witch down. It was never wise to ask a boon from a demon" (Lee 29). He also destroys a girl's life for rejecting him as a lover, and cuts a human soul in two, rendering it mute and dumb, because "the little cruelties of man were as nothing compared to the huge cruelty of demon-kind" (Lee 28). Azhrarn's motives are his own amusement and boredom; he intervenes into the human affairs, because "without man on the earth, the time of demons and time of the Demon Lord would hang heavy indeed" (Lee 79). Haut acknowledges this boredom as a "cold dream", which the demon seeks to avoid at all costs.

One of the motives of the demon, and a constant theme in the book is not mentioned by Haut, and that is the seeking of beauty. Beauty as a concept is closely tied to Azhrarn; he himself is often called "Azhrarn the Beautiful" and numerous descriptions of his own beauty are repeatedly provided. Initially, he saves the human child Sivesh, "for the child was of an extraordinary and perfect beauty" (Lee 20). He makes his way through the world seducing beautiful humans; in fact, his servants come to him bearing news of any remarkable men and women. The quest for beauty is prominent in the story of the disfigured princess Zorayas, who is so ugly she has to hide her face behind

a mask. Azhrarn is the princess's means to achieve it, and he transforms her into the "daughter of beauty" (Lee 126) and lies with her, "smiling still that what he had created seduced him" (Lee 126).

However, Azhrarn, being irresistible to humans, does not accept rejection and if such a situation occurs, he becomes destructive again: "It only remained for him to destroy her, in the way of demons, the stale remnants of a feast that now he would disdain to sample" (Lee 170). This alternation between a lover and a destroyer is mostly apparent in the story of Sivesh, whom Azhrarn loves, but destroys after he cannot have him anymore. In the case of Zorayas, however, the princess who threatened the demon with destruction unless he makes her beautiful, avoids Azhrarn's anger: "Do you imagine that I would destroy anything I had made which was so fair?" (Lee 126).

Haut sees Azhrarn's unpredictable personality balanced by his "relationship with nature, either human nature or Nature itself" (Haut 41). After wounded and/or killed, Azhrarn regenerates in a cave and is reborn from a tree. He creates a new life through a flower rather than through conventional means. However, he is tied to the night, because the sun is the "light of dawn, which I abhor" (Lee 20) and sun is fatal to him. In the same manner, he avoids everything that resembles the sun, including gold, and cannot walk the earth through the day. Even the things that can summon the demon are carved from bones, suggesting his relationship to nature and darkness.

Closely tied to the character of Azhrarn and the theme of beauty are the themes of sexuality and metamorphosis. The demon himself is "sexually fluid, seemingly semi-androgynous and somewhat polymorphously perverse" (Haut 38). This corresponds with postmodern representation of sexuality as defined by Irvine (1): "androgyny, queer sexual identities, polymorphous sexuality" appearing in media and literature. Azhrarn has relationships with both men and women; with Sivesh, he has homosexual relationship that is clearly sexual: "The body of the mortal leaped and flamed and shattered in a million shudderings of unbelievable delight, the last chords of music, the cupola of the tower which smashed the roof of the brain's sky" (Lee 26). With Zorayas, he also has a sexual relationship and her body "knew loveliness in itself, and the embrace of Azhrarn upon itself, and within, the seal of dark night upon her morning" (Lee 126). The reaction of mortals to the demon is always described as full of pleasure, which is the result of a supernatural influence of a demon's touch: "Mortals did not refuse Azhrarn. His voice, his eyes, his touch produced an alchemy that thrilled their nerves, infatuated them, outlawed their wills" (Lee 168). The eroticism and sexuality in the story

are tied to the nature of the demons, of whom Azhrarn is "master and inventor of the erotic" (Haut 54) and can be perceived as a collector of beautiful things (humans), which he destroys if he cannot possess them.

In the story about Bisuneh, an extraordinarily beautiful girl, who refuses the demon, Azhrarn tries to seduce her by transforming into several representations of himself. First, he approaches her as a man, then, as a woman, and for the third time, as her intended husband. It is the ability of the demon prince to take on a male or a female form, making him seem androgynous. In both forms, he is described as beautiful, but his female representation mimics the original, male form of the demon: "She was impressive, imperious, her hair was blue-black, and her eyes brilliant" (Lee 167). The transformations of Azhrarn, whether into a male, female or animal form bear similarities. In all forms, Azhrarn maintains his "aura" that makes humans suspect he is not one of them, manifested mostly through his touch: "…the old man's [Azhrarn's] touch, which seemed as amazingly thrilling as the voice and eyes had done" (Lee 42) and "at her [Azhrarn's] touch, Bisuneh's heart began to pound, she could not tell why" (Lee 167). In his animal form, he chooses the colour black, which is typical for him: "[Azhrarn] took on him, for amusement, the shape of a great black eagle" (Lee 19).

The transformations of the demon culminate in his ability to be reincarnated. After Azhrarn is killed by sunlight, which is fatal to him, he "conforms to seasonal cycles and passes through a vegetal episode as a tree" (Haut 42), what again indicates his relation to nature and supports the claim that he is immortal. Immortality and reincarnation constantly reappear in the book; nothing can kill Azhrarn but sunlight, but even in this case his soul is resting in a tree, making him truly unable to die forever. He also plans immortality for his human companion, because time passes differently on earth than in the demon city. Reincarnation does not only happen to Azhrarn, but also to Ferazhin, the woman whom the demon created from a flower. Ferazhin is also reincarnated deliberately just like the demon prince, and like him, nature becomes the way back to life: "She stood in the cup of a vast flower, as once before" (Lee 89).

## Symbolism of Numbers and Lessons Learned

The prominent recurring symbolism of numbers was not analysed by Mavis Haut, although these numbers, in the mode of fairy tales, play a significant

role. The numbers three, seven and thirteen are, in the novel, tied to a magical/fantastical event, or character.

The number three is in literature and culture associated with spirituality and is featured in many folktales. "Three is universally seen as a special number" (Ashliman 7) because of Christian connotations of the trinity, and is seen as a basis for family consisting of father-mother-child. The number three also represents a triangle, "the most stable of all simple designs" (Ashliman 7). In fairy tales, we have three little pigs, or three wishes, three beautiful princesses or three heroic deeds to be done.

Lee's numeric symbolism of the number three is evident in several cases. The entrance to the city of demons (Underearth) consists of three gates: "First, there was a gate of agate which burst open at his coming and clanged shut behind him, and after the gate of agate, a gate of blue steel, and last a terrible gate all of black fire; however, every gate obeyed Azhrarn" (Lee 21). The number three, in this case, symbolizes an entrance to Lee's hell, a supernatural place where ordinary mortals cannot enter. The number three is also related to the demon himself – Azhrarn's child protégé Sivesh may anger him three times until the demon's patience is spent: "'This is the third time you have angered me', said Azhrarn in a voice of winter. 'Consider well whether you wish to leave me, for I shall not any more set my anger aside'" (Lee 35). Consequently, the number three relates to death, which is inevitable for Sivesh. In case of Bisuneh, the girl who refuses the demon three times, the number three again stands for destruction. The demon acts like a natural force which has its limits – three times can he be angered, refused, or disrespected – after which destruction resulting in death or madness is a consequence. The number three symbolizes death also in the story, where a baby is to be devoured by three jackals. These three animals stand for the inevitable death of the helpless infant.

It seems that in Lee's work, the number three relates to things associated with the demon prince Azhrarn; hell, darkness, death and destruction. Similar connotations arise with the number seven, which "also symbolizes completeness, as derived from the seven days of creation and the seven planets of Greek antiquity" (Ashliman 7). The number seven, similarly to the number three, relates to pain and destruction through fantastical elements. On the seventh night, the witch-princess destroys the illegitimate usurper of her throne. In the case of a magical collar, which is made from seven tears, the collar is created through suffering (producing tears) and becomes cursed. However, the "completeness" is evident, when in the name of true love, the

collar returns to the demons, where it can do no more harm. This completeness is most prominent in the story about the reincarnation of the demon prince. Here, the number not only loses its negative connotations, but becomes a means to achieving new life. The number seven "is often considered lucky, and it has a definite mystique, perhaps because it is a prime number" (Stewart 1). This luck is used by the demon, who loses his material body and as a means of obtaining a new one, he selects seven sisters. These sisters become pregnant for seven months and give birth for seven hours. The number seven is tripled in this story, increasing the magical aspect of the event: "On the last day of the seventh month the sun went down, and the seven sisters each gave a scream and fell on their beds. For seven hours there was screaming" (Lee 241). Finally, the seven sisters give birth to seven body parts, which join and create a body for the reincarnated demon. In this sense, the number seven is associated with life, birth, immortality and completeness.

Finally, the number thirteen appears in relation to a princess, who is the thirteenth daughter of a king. Being the thirteenth, the princess has access to magical abilities. In all cases, including the numbers three, seven and thirteen, a relation to magic and the supernatural can be witnessed. These numbers strongly resemble the numeric symbolism in fairy tales. Their repetitiveness underlines the fantastical aspects of the story and the mythical aspect of the storytelling.

In addition to numerical symbolism, the morals of the stories are also revealed, which, again, relate to the fairy tale aspects of the novel. Guroian writes about the morals that appear both in fairy tales and modern fantasy tales, which share common patterns. These morals or lessons deal with negative effects of vanity or the popular motif of "love conquers all". However, in Lee's universe they become twisted and though based on the traditional themes of fairy tales such as "the perils of being alone in the woods; the potential pitfalls of physical attractiveness; the dangers of being naïve" (Abler 1), the lessons learned deviate from the classic messages these tales were intending to tell. Also, the "struggles between good and evil where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong" (Guroian 4) are twisted, because Lee works with morality as a flexible term, casting her main character, the demon prince, as a protagonist who cannot be said to be entirely evil or good.

In the case of the princess Zorayas, who becomes infatuated with her own beauty, there is a warning against being vain. The princess, in Lee's universe, receives a mirror which shows the true self of a person. However, the princess

only sees herself. Her reflection acts on its own volition, finally swallowing the real princess, who becomes so obsessed with her own reflection that she disappears in the mirror. However, we see no regrets or horror in this act. The "compelling vision of the goodness of goodness itself" (Guroian 5) which should be presented in order to motivate humans should accordingly result in the end, where the princess reverts to modesty. Instead, accepting her vanity, the act of the joining of the reflection and the princess is presented in an almost sexual way: "… Zorayas walked to towards the mirror until breast met breast, limb met limb, palm touched palm" (Lee 158) and "Zorayas abandoned herself to an ultimate truth of matchless ecstasy that dissolved her in its fire" (Lee 158). This presentation contradicts the preference of virtue over wit or beauty, which is, as Guroian mentions, typical for tales like "Beauty and the Beast". Instead, there is an acceptance of vanity, of one's vice.

This twisted ending is also apparent in dealings of humankind with the demon prince Azhrarn. As Lee warns us, "[i]t was never wise to ask a boon from a demon" (Lee 29). When an old witch asks to be young again, the demon kills her, providing an accurate example of a moral. However, when a deformed princess asks him to make her beautiful, he complies. The two stories contradict each other, the outcome of the two characters' lives depended on the demon's mood.

A more typical example of morals relates to the theme of love being stronger than evil. In the story about a blind poet searching for his love, the poet gets tricked by the demons and his wife dies. However, through the power of his will, she becomes reincarnated and they live happily ever after. In another story about two predestined souls, these souls cross the world and find each other despite obstacles. Love as the strongest force saves humans from the demon Azhrarn, who causes wickedness just for his own amusement. However, even he, in both cases, is unable to part the lovers.

The morality of the novel is therefore ambiguous. Vanity is not punished, but rather rewarded. A quest for beauty may result in death or a granted wish. It is, in Lee's world, sometimes worth taking a risk and becoming involved in dark magic. These examples directly deviate from tales that stress virtues, modesty and an inherent goodness. Lee plays with morality, even mocks it by creating a character of a demon, whose amusement is wickedness, but who is also capable of love.

## Conclusion

In this article I focussed on the literary analysis of Tanith Lee's *Night's Master*. As there are very few academic publications on the author or her work, I felt the need to add my own contribution. The basis for my work is Mavis Haut's *The Hidden Library of Tanith Lee*, as it is the most complex publication on Lee's work I am aware of, yet it is still unable to cover all the issues and aspects of the author's writing, as it is so extensive. Lee's prose is often described as lush, poetic, dense and stylistically complex, which is why I focussed on this aspect in the first part of the article. The ornamentalization, fragmentation and heightened imagery in the book *Night's Master* give a basis to seeing the novel as written in poetic prose, which shares characteristics with poetry in terms of poetic devices; however, it is still written as prose, though dialogue and direct speech are restricted, resulting in a flow of language that evokes the above mentioned feeling of the prose being "lush" and "poetic".

In the second part of this article I focussed on the themes and symbols of Lee's book. While Haut (2001) mentions themes such as rebirth, immortality, gender, androgyny and sexuality, there is still room to expand on her analysis relating to the themes of beauty, morality and transformation. These themes are closely tied to the main character Azhrarn*,* whose demonic nature deviates from humanity resulting in a character that is tied more to nature, and functions as an unpredictable element. In the last part of my analysis I elaborated on Lee's numeric symbolism, which is a topic that Mavis Haut does not analyse and therefore needs to be commented on. The numeric symbolism as a recurrence of the number three is evident in several stories and has either positive or negative connotations, predicting a fantastical/magical event. The number thirteen relates to misfortunes, and the number seven gives ground to magic and the fantastical. All numbers are tied to a supernatural or non-human action, corresponding with the numeric symbolism of fairy tales. It is not only in relation to numbers that Lee's work resembles fairy tales – themes such as the moral of the story, e.g., "punishing vanity", or "love always wins", also indicate a close relation to folk and fairy tales. Lee, however, disrupts this moral lesson, creating a morally ambiguous fantasy world, where the usual "good vs bad" does not exist and presents us with a novel where magic, fantasy and supernatural function not only on the level of theme, but also the stylistic level, creating one of the fundamental works of British fantastic fiction.

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