

demic audience (which is evidenced, for instance, by the praise cited on the first few pages, coming partly from publishers or writers — not just from scholars). Evaluating the strength of Thompson's claims may be more difficult for readers unaccustomed to the methodology of the social sciences.

Still, *Merchants of Culture* is a significant work. Despite its shortcomings, it may well be considered mandatory reading for all academics who are eager to know more about the realities of Anglo-Saxon trade publishing. And I will venture to say that this certainly includes many researchers of popular literature.

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### Approximating Slipstream

Review: Martin Horstkotte, *The Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary British Fiction*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Trier 2004, 224 pp.

The scholarly discourse on the broadly understood “fantastic”<sup>1</sup> or non-mimetic literature has long become dominated by the authors from either the USA or the United Kingdom. This, obviously, was unavoidable due to both the special position of English language culture in modern world in general, and the fact that such popular literary non-mimetic genres as SF or fantasy came into being and evolved largely in England and the USA. It is, however, regrettable that academic works from other countries usually go completely unnoticed even if they have been published in English and demonstrate unquestionable merit.

Such is the case of Martin Horstkotte's study which explores a very interesting and topical issue and — despite several weaknesses — definitely deserves the attention of all scholars interested in non-mimetic literature, and, particularly, in modern fiction usually denominated as the so-called “slipstream” (or the “postmodern fantastic” as Horstkotte proposes himself) that lies somewhere on the border between mainstream, postmodern and fantastic literature defying simple genre classifications.

The whole study, as the very title suggests, explores the connection between the two key terms — the postmodern and the fantastic, and, subsequently, attempts to approximate the specific category of the “postmodern fantastic.”

The book roughly falls into two parts. The first, mainly theoretical, encompasses chapters 2 to 7. Its structure may seem a bit chaotic, perhaps, as it addresses several various and not necessarily directly related issues. And, thus, chapter 2 — *Theories of the Fantastic* — summarizes classic proposals by Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson,

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<sup>1</sup> The term “fantastic literature” does not refer here to any specific definition of the fantastic but simply denotes a very broad, cultural rather than theoretical label, encompassing all literature that does not pretend to describe phenomenal reality and includes some at least elements perceived by readers as “fantastical.”

briefly mentioning several other approaches towards defining this term (it is, however, hard to resist the impression that some of them are treated a bit superficially), whereas the very brief chapter 3 discusses the distinction of the fantastic viewed as a genre or a mode, emphasized in some of the contemporary criticism. Chapter 4 — *Delimiting the Fantastic* — attempts to draw in its three subsections borderlines between the fantastic and realism, fantasy, and magic realism, respectively. Chapter 5 — *The Other* — abandons genealogical discussion altogether for the sake of introducing Bernhard Waldenfels' theory of the Other, which the author finds essential for the interpretation of modern fiction. Chapter 6, in turn, researches various approaches towards another key term of the study — postmodernism, elaborating mainly on the works of such authors as Brian McHale or Linda Hutcheon, but also on Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist theory. Finally, chapter 7 defines the postmodern fantastic.

It should be noted that Horstkotte's research is extremely well documented. He not only quotes popular or "classic" authors the likes of Todorov or McHale, but also refers to less known, but nevertheless interesting researchers such as, to mention only a few, Theodore Ziolkowski, Yuan Yuan or Lance Olsen (what is notable, also Polish scholars, Andrzej Zgorzelski and Witold Ostrowski are referred to). Arguably, Horstkotte's study offers one of the most complete bibliographies of literary criticism devoted to the literature of the fantastic.

On the other hand, the genealogical discussion presented in the initial chapters apparently lacks comprehensiveness. For example, the whole genre of science fiction seems to be excluded from the argument, which is rather surprising, taking into account the fact that a special affinity between modern science fiction and postmodernism is usually emphasized (especially by Brian McHale frequently quoted in the study). It would have been only advisable to establish relationship between SF and other key categories of texts. As it has already been suggested, some of the approaches and frameworks have been treated to a considerable extent superficially — the problems of the genealogy of the broadly understood fantastic (or non-mimetic) literature are, perhaps, even more complex than the argument suggests. Also, the study does not seem to try to identify the main sources of the terminological confusion enshrouding the contemporary criticism of the fantastic, which nowadays probably proves obligatory if one wants to begin any genealogical discussion.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, it should be appreciated that, all in all, the initial part of the study succeeds in fulfilling its main objective — that is, approximating in a reasonable way the category in question. Postmodern fantastic is described by Horstkotte as a mode which can be clearly distinguished from both postmodernism (in which he opposes several researchers who find the fantastic and postmodernism synonymous) and the traditional fantastic although it combines both these categories. As Horstkotte implies

Postmodern fantastic consists of a *mêlée* of elements of the traditional fantastic and of postmodern elements. These two are inextricably bound together; if one of the two definitions is not satisfied, the postmodern fantastic disappears, leaving behind a text that belongs either to the traditional fantastic or to literary postmodernism [...] the fantastic takes up current anxieties

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<sup>2</sup> As it has, for example, been skillfully done in Marek Oziewicz's study *One Earth, One People. The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madelaine L'Engle and Orson Scott Card*, Jefferson, N.C.a and London 2008.

and combines them with the fear of the uncanny that inheres in man, a characteristic that brings about the combination of postmodernism and the traditional fantastic in contemporary fiction.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent chapters — 8 to 11 — analyze particular aspects of the postmodern fantastic that surface in the fiction of such contemporary British writers as Peter Ackroyd, Nigel Williams, Ian Watson, Jasper Fforde, Michel Faber (the Australian who lives in Scotland), Haydn Middleton or Stephen Fry. The issues that Horstkotte finds most significant in the context of his discussion are the motif of “the other,” non-linear models of time and history, metafictionality and genre transgressions. His arguments are often complex, inspiring and well-researched.

In chapter 12, Todorov’s notion of the pure fantastic is researched on the basis of texts introduced previously, whereas the final chapter 13 — perhaps a bit redundantly — again emphasizes the existence of the postmodern fantastic as a separate mode. In the conclusion the author elaborates on the ongoing process of “a totalisation of the fantastic that crucially depends on the contact between postmodern techniques and elements and theories of the traditional fantastic.”<sup>4</sup>

Although Horstkotte’s work is heavily indebted to the existing criticism, and it seems at times too repetitive, it does offer many interesting insights, especially in the second, more analytical part of the study. The scope of the author’s interests and his scholarly ambitions certainly deserve respect, even if some of the arguments are questionable. Additionally, the book may also serve as a quite good introduction to both the contemporary theory of the fantastic and the postmodern theory. Horstkotte’s study is definitely recommended for all scholars interested in modern “fantastic” fiction.

<sup>3</sup> M. Horstkotte, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

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## **Dawno, dawno temu w kulturze ponowoczesnej...**

Recenzja: Weronika Kostecka, *Baśń postmodernistyczna: przeobrażenia gatunku. Intertekstualne gry z tradycją literacką*, Wydawnictwo Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, Warszawa 2014, ss. 288.

Niejednorodność i złożoność baśni sprawiają, że jest ona gatunkiem szczególnie trudnym w definiowaniu oraz wymykającym się całościowym ujęciom. Problemy te nasilają się jeszcze w wypadku badań nad baśniami powstałymi w epoce postmodernizmu, gdyż wówczas ich cechą prymarną staje się niustanna gra z tradycyjną formułą i strukturą genologiczną. Wskazać cechy dystynktywne baśni postmodernistycznej oraz istotne przemiany tego gatunku spróbowała Weronika Kostecka w pracy *Baśń postmodernistyczna: przeobrażenia gatunku. Intertekstualne gry z tradycją literacką*, opublikowanej nakładem warszawskiego Wydawnictwa Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich jako drugi tom serii „Literatura dla Dzieci i Młodzieży. Studia”.

Badaczka literatury dziecięcej i młodzieżowej podjęła się w swojej książce próby scharakteryzowania obecności baśni w kulturze literackiej XXI wieku, wskazując przede