THE FANTASTIC: TOWARDS A DYNAMIC NOTION OF GENRE[1]

Suradech Chotiudompant[2]

Abstract

Fantasy has played a crucial role in shaping literature since time immemorial. Yet, proper systematic work on fantasy has not been done until the last century, when scholars began to realize its importance and give it due recognition. First published in 1970, Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* represents one of the touchstones of critical work on the fantastic genre. His pioneering ideas have inspired literary critics worldwide to develop their own premises on the genre, some of which bear Todorov's indelible imprints. This essay attempts to chart how Todorov constructs his paradigm by means of his structuralist standpoint and how later critics, such as Christine Brooke-Rose and Rosemary Jackson, respond to his theoretical postulate. The main objective of this essay is to investigate how these theoretical dialogues, with Todorov's model of the fantastic genre functioning as an axis, shed light on a complex notion of genre as dynamic institution, which needs to be resilient enough to accommodate changes and in turn prescriptive enough to be the guideline for readers and writers alike.

[2] PhD. candidate, Department of Comparative Literature, Warwick University, England

Introduction

Recent work in literary studies has opened up a new space where traditional literary institutions are subjected to a critical revision. In fact, such technical terms as genre and canon had long been taken for granted and it was not until the last two centuries that critics seriously started to take a closer look at whether the benefits received from their classificatory nature was worth the lack of recognition of a great deal of literature which was excluded simply because it diverged from norms.

Literary scholars, therefore, felt the need to reexamine the notion of genre. It is no wonder that genre theory yields positive results in colleges, being discerned as a model on which students can depend and a paradigm to which they can refer. However, it cannot be denied that genre can sometimes have a reductive impact, acting as a straightjacket to a literary work. Neo-classical literature provides a clear example of how the classical generic framework influenced the work produced in this era when writers tried to carefully observe the demands of stylistic decorum set out mainly by Greek and Roman philosophers. In France, Corneille and Racine reinterpreted classical generic forms, as did Dryden and Pope in England. The idea was also fostered that a work of art should carefully follow the rules of pure genres, be they comedy or tragedy, epic or satire. These pure genres were placed in specific hierarchies and their characteristics could not be mixed. Yet, genre can also function as a ground rule on which a writer can base his or her work. It is dubious whether a writer can work

without any formalist paradigm in mind since, in order to convey a message to the reader, the writer needs to build up certain generic implications in his or her work to create generic expectations that the reader can use in interpreting the work in a valid way (Hirsch, 1967:79).

Genre, being one of the most popular literary frameworks, thus becomes a necessary yet discomforting phenomenon which we need to encounter because its durability since Greek times reflects its substantial benefits. In other words, genres function not only as explanatory instruments that serve to help writers and readers understand more of literary works, but have also been regarded as prescriptive agents, inscribing the rules to which literary works are to be subjected. In a nutshell, it is not the conception of the model itself that needs to be repudiated; instead it is, I argue, *our* conceptions of the model that need to be challenged.

Even though genre has considerable impact on works of art in various aspects, literary scholars have often been at pains to give an accurate definition. Dubrow (1982:6-7) attributes this to the application of the same generic names to different works of art across the temporal and cultural span. For example, the Greek and the Elizabethan renditions of tragedy are so distinct that any attempt at purist or a historical definitions of tragedy are naturally undermined. Even though a clear definition of genre is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, what everybody cannot deny is the fact that genre denotes classification and it is a form of connection between an individual work of art and the tradition of art as a whole (Scholes, 1974:128). In order that a genre can be created, works of art must be analysed and disintegrated into properties. Genre always involves the differential process of finding these properties in works of art and the privileging of one or several of these properties.

Modern genre theory is partly characterized by a tendency towards a historicist aspect of genre: it is no longer perceived as an ahistorical element that remains unchanged through time. Genre should not be considered as a timeless prescriptive agent, providing literary works with an ideal. Far from that, it should be deemed as always in a state of change. A new literary work, even though it is created on the basis of a certain genre, always changes its genre, either minimally or dramatically. This idea is inherent in T. S. Eliot's notion of ideal order, in which he suggests that we see literary tradition (in this case, genre) not as a fixed paradigm but in a state of flux, in which each new work of art makes the already existing tradition alter, even slightly.[3] This stress on the historicity of genre, therefore, proves to be a giant step away from the notion of fixed and ideal genre that neo-classical writers believed. Genre, therefore, should not be viewed as a rigid and independent institution, but as a dynamic entity influencing, as well as influenced by, the active participation of the reader and the writer. In this essay, the analysis of the growth of the fantastic genre will exemplify this tendency of genre theory and its impact on our notion of genre.

Todorov and the Fantastic

The Fantastic Before Todorov

The fantastic as a genre was theorized by Tzvetan Todorov in 1970 to explain a literary phenomenon developed in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. However, it would be a mistake to consider Todorov as the first theorist to deal with the subject; in fact, quite a few works on the fantastic had been published before his book.[4] Yet what distinguishes Todorov's work from the works of other scholars is his clear and elaborate structuralist paradigm.

Before Todorov, several critics, especially from France, already defined fantastic literature in several distinctive ways, basing their definitions on various literary and non-literary elements. Most of the definitions are thematically based: for Louis Vax, Roger Callois, and Pierre-Georges Castex, the fantastic is characterized by an intrusion of a mysterious or inexplicable event into the normal world. From these definitions, which privilege the existence of inexplicable and supernatural phenomena and place them as a generic defining factor, fantastic literature can be seen to be closely linked with horror and gothic tales.

For these critics, fantastic literature naturally uses the supernatural as its chief element and very much deals with the realm of the human mind, the so-called fantasy[5] and imagination. What distinguishes this genre is the use of the supernatural against the backdrop of the empirically real world. In order that fantastic narrative has an impact on readers, the attitude that nothing can exist beyond the phenomenal world is undoubtedly crucial (see also Schlobin, 1984:xiv). The fantastic plays on this specific space, where reason cannot explain all phenomena in the real world and fantasy comes into play to give an alternative explanation.

The Fantastic *à la* Todorov

Todorov's theory of genre is idiosyncratic in the sense that he imposes his theoretical construction on past works, rather than builds up a generic framework to accommodate future ones. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, distinguishes between comedy and tragedy, and his schematic distinction has been followed by various critics. Unlike the Greek philosopher who is revered by literary critics worldwide, Todorov's work is a self-confessed failure, charting the attempt of a critic to theorize a genre who subsequently ends up voicing his inability to account for more recent works. It is, in a sense, a meaningful failure which gives insight into the complex notion of genre.

Written when he was about 30 years old, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*[6] follows Roger Caillois's terminological pattern, using the adjective *fantastic* to denote a genre and relegating *fantasy* to an element.[7] His represents one of the first structuralist attempts to explain the genre, imposing limits on fantastic narrative as well as creating an interesting paradigm for contiguous genres. The fantastic is mainly dependent on ambiguity at the

literal, as opposed to poetic, level of the text, and hesitation at the level of the reader, whose feeling is annexed to that of the main protagonist. Todorov(1975:33) lays down three main classificatory principles as follows:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations.

Fantastic narrative need not fulfill the second requirement. Yet, the first and the third are indispensable. In the pure fantastic, the hesitation of the reader needs to be sustained until the end, thereby causing the reader to be suspended between the real and the imaginary.

According to these requirements, it should be noted that Todorov highlights the role of the reader. In defining the fantastic genre, he does not privilege departure from the norm as much as the hesitation on the reader's part. In fact, the reader's response constitutes his first requirement of the fantastic, and two of the three guidelines he proposes deal with the reading process. In other words, the reader becomes the centre of the defining process of his study.[8] The reader, in a sense, becomes the main protagonist, not simply through his or her identification with the main character, but through interaction with the fantastic itself (Armitt, 1996:32).

It is surprising that Todorov refuses to take the supernatural as a benchmark of the genre, as the range of works which make use of the supernatural is far too wide. One would only need to think of placing Homer's *Iliad* alongside Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Todorov, 1975:34). The extension is likely to be infinite and covers all ranges of fiction in the end. Fear on the part of the reader is also rejected by Todorov to be a requirement of the genre since to relegate a point of reference to a reader's reaction is likely to undermine the foundation of the genre, rendering its existence subjective. In other words, Todorov (1975:35) is reluctant to have his genre depend on the *sang-froid* of its reader. What he regards as important in the formation of his fantastic narrative lies in its ambiguous element. This element is deeply intertwined with the reader's and the main protagonist's hesitation.[9] Ambiguity in the narrative can be generated by two stylistic devices: imperfect tense and modalization showing incertitude (Todorov, 1975:38). The former can be found in the use of imperfect, usually past, tense such as "J'aimais",[10] which does not specify whether this love still continues in the narrative time.[11] Modalization expressing uncertainty can be found in the use of such words as "seem", "perhaps", "believe", and "possible".

For Todorov, genre is a notion that calls for a diacritical approach. A genre cannot stand on its own; it needs to be differentiated from other genres adjacent to it. Todorov suggests that the emergence of the fantastic be analysed alongside its two related elements: the uncanny (*l'étrange*) and the marvellous (*le merveilleux*) as the following diagram illustrates:

pure uncanny	fantastic uncanny	fantastic marvellous	pure marvellous

Fig. 1 Todorov's fantastic diagram

Pure fantastic, Todorov (1975:44) argues, is represented by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvellous, both of which become sub-genres of the fantastic.

The fantastic-uncanny refers to the narrative in which the supernatural is explained in a rational manner at the end. Such explanations may include dreams, the influence of drugs, apparent chances explained as determined events, tricks and prearranged apparitions, illusion of the senses and madness (Todorov, 1975:45). The idea of the uncanny is undoubtedly derived from the famous study by Sigmund Freud, published first in 1919. Freud develops his notion from the etymological roots of the two German words "heimlich" and "unheimlich", both of which are ambiguous in their meaning. The word "heimlich" basically means "familiar" and "amicable" since etymologically it originates from the sense of "homely". Yet one strand of meaning can mean "secret" and "concealed" as what happens "at home" is normally withdrawn from the eyes of strangers. This meaning is later adopted by writers to convey a sense of imminent danger, usually ascribed to its opposite, "unheimlich." The meaning of these two words, therefore, points towards semantic ambivalence since the boundaries of their meaning overlap (see also Freud, 1985:341-347). In literature, the uncanny denotes a type of work in which strange events are given rational explanations, yet impose an incredible and disturbing effect upon the reader. Thus, the uncanny is basically not a clearly delimited genre, rather an element, as its effect is also characteristic of some realist works (Todorov, 1975:46). Yet, the uncanny produces a rich impact on the fantastic genre. It opens a space where the imaginary mingles with the real, thereby placing the real into question as Freud (1985:367) clearly states:

"an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on."

This interesting trend would subsequently be used by later theorists of the fantastic as one of the generic benchmarks.

The fantastic-marvellous, on the other hand, refers to the narrative in which the supernatural is kept after the ending and the reader is transported into another world with another set of ground rules.

What distinguishes the fantastic-marvellous from the pure marvellous is that in the former ambiguity on the level of narrative is kept until the ending where irrational and marvellous explanations are supplied whereas the imaginary world intrudes into the real world from the start in the latter. Todorov (1975:54), however, feels reluctant to include the fairy tale in his pure marvellous even though it contains marvellous elements. The fairy tale, a type of literature that deserves a specific study of its own, does not generate the feeling of surprise in the reader with its supernatural elements. For Todorov, the tales from *Arabian Nights* best exemplify the pure marvellous since the reader's surprise is provoked throughout the narrative.

Limits of Todorov's Model

Transgressive Work

Towards the end of his study, Todorov confesses a drawback to his generic theory, i.e. his fantastic genre cannot explain the emergence of modern fiction. He cannot impose his paradigm on Kafka's *Metamorphosis* or Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose*. In the former, the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, is transformed into an unspecified insect at the beginning of the story. Yet, no rational explanation is given during the course of the narrative as to why this transformation occurred. What is even more errie is that the protagonist overcomes his surprise and is able to live with his physical degradation until his brutal murder at the end. Todorov's rules cannot apply here, even though the reader is nonplussed by what is happening in the story. In the same way, Gogol relates the story of a man whose nose falls off and has a life of its own. What distinguishes these two stories from Todorov's fantastic is their structure. Fantastic narrative, according to Todorov, hints at the supernatural by giving the reader a series of indirect indications, creating the continuing feeling of mystery towards the climax; the fantastic, in other words, starts from a natural situation to reach its climax in the supernatural (Todorov, 1975:171). In these two stories, however, preternatural situations are supplied at the very beginning and during the course of the narrative an increasingly natural atmosphere takes over. They represent the *generalized* fantastic, in which "what in the first world was an exception here becomes the rule" (Todorov, 1975:174).

In fact, perhaps these modern tales which Todorov excludes from his fantastic study may still be labelled as fantastic-marvellous. Since the feeling of hesitation on the part of the reader, which is the benchmark of the fantastic, is still generated whilst reading these tales, they should not be altogether jettisoned. One of the reasons why Todorov does not consider them to belong to his fantastic genre is that the protagonist, with whom the reader is supposed to identify, is not surprised by the strange situation. There is no reason why the real reader's feeling should be linked with the protagonist's, apart from the fact that Todorov's structuralist stance demands that he analyse the fantastic in strictly literary terms. This can be solved simply by identifying the reader's feeling with that of the implied reader, the one that the text creates.[12] By

such means the reader's hesitation that a series of textual expectations demand can still be kept and these modern tales can still be incorporated into Todorov's schema as the fantastic-marvellous since the reader is transported into a world foreign to him or her at the end.

The Generalized Fantastic

The fact that characters respond to supernatural elements in an indifferent manner and that the reader no longer identifies himself or herself with the nonchalant protagonist also signifies certain shifts in terms of psychology. In such modern tales, what is dominant is not an outward supernatural element, but an inward anomalous shift that happens in man. Therefore, a distinct transformation occurs: the fantastic no longer focuses on inexplicable elements that occur from outside; instead, perhaps it is human psychology that breeds these strange irregularities. It should also be noted that the emergence of the generalized fantastic was contemporaneous with the rise of studies of psychoanalysis. Without irrelevance, Todorov (1975:173) quotes Sartre as saying:

"There is now only one fantastic object: man. Not the man of religions and spiritualisms, only half committed to the world of the body, but man-as-given, man-as-nature, man-as-society, the man who takes off his hat when a hearse passes, who kneels in church, who marches behind a flag."

In the generalized fantastic, human beings themselves, not external supernatural phenomena, become a centre around which the fantastic revolves. Bearing this in mind, Todorov (1975:166) loses no time in proclaiming the death of his fantastic genre in the face of this emergent branch. For him, now that human mentality becomes an object of wonder, human beings can no longer differentiate between the real and the imaginary, by that means demolishing the boundaries, themselves exactly the place where his fantastic genre flourishes. In other words, without the distinction between the realms of the real and the imaginary, his fantastic paradigm cannot exist. The literature of the fantastic, for Todorov (1975:168), is nothing but "the bad conscience of the positivist era of the nineteenth century."

This generalized fantastic, an emergent branch of fantastic narrative, reminds us of the definitions of the genre given by two North American critics, W. R. Irwin and Eric Rabkins. For Irwin (1976:4), the fantastic (or what he terms as a fantasy[13]) is "a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself." In the same manner, what defines the fantastic genre, for Rabkins (1976:8), is that "the perspectives enforced by the ground rules of the narrative world must be diametrically contradicted". What characterizes the defining theory of these two critics is that fact that, unlike Todorov, they look at the fantastic in teleological terms of how the genre serves the reader, rather than in formal terms. Both critics justify the genre by its *ontological* subversion of reality and by its influence on the reader to revise his or her per-

ception of the world. The fantastic, for them, can lead to a revision of what we assume to be truth and illusion.

It should be pointed out that both Todorov and the North American theorists consider the affective quality as a defining element of the fantastic genre. Yet, they emphasize this in different manners. For Todorov, the fantastic is characterized by the hesitation felt by the reader, who identifies himself or herself with a protagonist in the text. For Irwin and Rabkins, it is rather marked by the ability of the narrative to make the reader question the borderlines between the real and the imaginary.

Jonathan Culler (1981:58-63), however, brings both strands of generic framework together. In a sense, he admires Todorov's privilege of the reader role in his genre theory and he also believes that the hesitation felt on the reader's part is generated by the tension between at least two interpretive codes. By using Roman Jakobson's theory of metaphor and metonymy, Culler is able to develop the idea of two key interpretive codes: the metaphorical and the metonymical worlds. The former is separate yet analogous, functioning as a paradigm of conceivable worlds, whereas the latter is contiguous with our world or with part of it, unexplored but governed by similar ground rules. Reading "realist" texts such as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, readers are naturally prone to adopt the metonymical interpretive code; however, the same code cannot be used with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which requires the use of the metaphorical code. For the fantastic, the feeling of hesitation on the reader's part originates from the inability to choose an interpretative code. In fact, the reader is always exposed to this selective process as it is fundamental to reading and criticism; however, Todorov's fantastic is the genre in which this hesitation is privileged and figures as a criterion.

Criticisms of Todorov's Model: Three Examples

Because of the shifts both in the spheres of literature itself and its social context, the fantastic *à la* Todorov is destined to be short-lived. Yet, what it actually reflects is the fact that numerous literary theorists have followed and developed his model to accommodate literary works of later periods. In a sense, this exemplifies his notion that the formulation of genre constantly needs dynamic development and that a new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination (Todorov, 1990:15). In this essay, three examples, themselves forming just a fraction of critical works on Todorov's paradigm, suffice to display how the fantastic genre has developed since Todorov's study.

(1) Neil Cornwell, for instance, develops Todorov's schema and tries to include Kafka's and Gogol's tales in the picture. He places *Metamorphosis* and *The Nose* under his category of the marvellous. The marvellous, therefore, undergoes certain shifts in meaning from one critic to the other. For Cornwell (1990:40), the category is considerably widened to subsume three sub-divisions: the what-if, the fairy story, and the romance/fantasy. Kafka's and Gogol's

problematic stories fall into the first sub-division, the what-if[14], since they are set in what seems to pass for our world, but with a single (or a small number of) element(s) of the manifestly impossible. The three sub-divisions are by no means equal in degree: they are ranked according to their referential degree to the primary world, i.e. our world empirically perceived. The what-if is represented as "secondary world +", the fairy story as "secondary world ++", and the romance/fantasy as "tertiary world." Belonging to the what-if category, the two puzzling stories are closest, if not almost identical, to the primary world; yet, due to certain supernatural conditions, they diverge from it.

(2) Sometimes, a new word is invented to take issue with the changing historical scene. In this case, "neo-fantastic" was invented by Jaime Alazraki in 1983 to do just that. Based on, yet divergent from Todorov's schema, his theory stipulates that fear is prescinded from neo-fantastic work since *the other* emerges from the new postulation of reality, from the new perception of the world, which modifies the organization of the work and its functions, whose purposes differ considerably from those of the fantastic (Alazraki, 1983:28). In the neo-fantastic, what fascinates us is that not only does it claim to transgress a naturalized order, transgression itself becomes *the* norm. Furthermore, the centre of the neo-fantastic is no longer the world but *our* perception of the world. After Freud introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century the notion of the unconscious, a virtually unknown space inside us which can be a source of innumerable events, human beings become a new ground on which the fantastic focuses. In this way, Alazraki's postulation is able to include the tales of Kafka and Gogol.

(3) According to Todorov (1975:160), one of the reasons why his paradigm of the fantastic no longer operates after the works of Kafka and Gogol is the advent of psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century, when the themes which gave rise to fantastic literature in the nineteenth century, such as sexual desire and homosexuality, became the very themes of the psychological investigations. In contrast to Todorov's view, Rosemary Jackson weaves key psychoanalytical ideas into her study of the fantastic. She is in company with Alazraki, thinking that the fantastic no longer comes from outside. Rather, human beings become the *raison d'être* of the fantastic. For her, psychoanalysis emphasizes, rather than demolishes, the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap where the imaginary transcends our rational faculty. She explains this problematic space in a linguistic manner, taking her cue from post-structuralist thinkers: the fantastic, in its attempt to visualize the supernatural, i.e. "the unnameable" or, in this case, "the signified", is to portray the impossibility of such an act, thereby leaving the reader in a state of incertitude. It shows how the signifier, in its attempt to "re-present" the signified, only refers back to itself. Charting this fruitless process, the fantastic, therefore, deals with the realm of non-signification, where "the signifier is not secured by the weight of the signified: it begins to float free" (Jackson, 1981:40). The Freudian uncanny is also highlighted in her study of fantastic literature; she (Jackson, 1981:67) believes

that the uncanny lies at the heart of the fantastic since it reflects how human beings develop their anxiety and objectify them in shapes external to themselves. Therefore, the fantastic is closely linked with the character's externalizing projection of qualities or traits which he or she refuses to recognize and keeps repressed.

These ramifications of the fantastic show how generic shifts reflect the different emphasis or concern each theorist places on different elements. In other words, it shows how any theory of genres is based on the privileging of certain abstract properties and their relations to literary work (Todorov, 1975:14-15). For instance, in Todorov's paradigm, his construction of genre is closely linked to the notion of literary structure and its interpreting process. However, Irwin, Rabkins, and Alazraki define the fantastic genre by using the purposes of the fantastic as a key factor. For them, a work belongs to the fantastic once it encourages the reader to question the limits of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary.

Why is the fantastic genre subjected to such a continual series of shifts? To answer this question, we need to look at the configurations of the genre itself. The fantastic *always* functions as a marginal genre, adjacent to the realist genre. Yet, what characterizes the fantastic is its ability to expose the reader to the limits of the real and the imaginary. One may argue that involvements in both realms is the character that all literature shares; however, what distinguishes the fantastic from other genres is that the play on the limits or the borderlines is the centre of fantastic narrative, creating the sense of ambiguity on the level of text and the sense of hesitation on the level of reader.

The fantastic genre operates on the boundaries between the two polarities: the realist and the marvellous, both of which have as their dominant part reality and imagination respectively. However, this does not mean that the limits of both genres have never been contested. What we mean by realism in the eighteenth century and in the twentieth century differ in accordance with shifts in time, social context, and literary styles. The generic configurations of the fantastic change even faster since they need to take into consideration the parameters of both the realist and the marvellous genres at the same time. Even though the real and the imaginary are usually defined as what is normally accepted as empirical possibility and impossibility respectively, it should be observed that the constituents of the real and the imaginary have always been changing, especially now that the media and technology have come to play a much more significant role for human beings. The fantastic as a genre, if properly defined, should be a useful index identifying contemporary ideas of the real and the imaginary.

Genre Theory and the Fantastic

The development of the fantastic genre provides us with various observations that can be applied to studies of other genres. The foundation of the generic development leads us to believe that

genre should not at all be taken for granted; on the contrary, every generic shift reflects each theorist's stress on certain literary or non-literary elements and their relations among themselves. Thus, genre itself can be viewed as a discursive practice, no less important than the material which it classifies. The relatively recent interest in the fantastic genre, for instance, shows an increasing preoccupation with the realm of the real, which has been constantly challenged and subverted by the imaginary. Genre is also considered to provide a form of historical continuity, which in turn becomes a foundation from which historical changes can be viewed (See also Cohen, 2000:298). Without this structure of continuity, the variety of works cannot be justified (see also Todorov, 1981:61). In other words, genre study enables literary critics to perceive changes in literary history and to understand these shifts in their proper social context.[15]

Genres, especially Todorov's theoretical genres, function as groundwork on which writers base their work. They can be compared to Ferdinand de Saussure's elements of *langue*, whereas literary work can be thought to resemble individual *parole* (Dubrow, 1982:106; Fowler, 1982:20). However, what is characteristic of genre is that individual work is able to transform the genre, at a pace much quicker than when a particular use of language changes its grammatical rules. Kafka's work, for example, has compelled literary scholars to build new paradigms in order to accommodate his work. Genres, therefore, have this double character, being both a foundation for writers to follow as well as a platform from which writers depart. In this manner, the existence of genre is necessary since it is paradoxically these generic conventions from which a work of art departs that allow it to be recognized as unconventional. Without genre and its conventions, literary transformations or innovations, themselves forming the essence of literary history, would not have been acknowledged.

This two fold task of genre should be viewed in conjunction with the reader's response to the genre. There is no doubt that genres provide the reader with generic expectations, not totally dissimilar to (and probably part of) Hans Robert Jauss's "horizons of expectations"[16], and instruct the reader to read the text according to certain norms and not otherwise (see also Fokkema, 1984:6-9). The concept of generic reception is complex, especially when taking into account that sometimes the writer makes use of these expectations consciously, by tricking the reader into believing that his or her work conforms to a specific genre but subsequently disobeying and transgressing generic rules, thereby catching the reader off-guard.

Genre theory, therefore, should take into consideration the relationships of genres with works of art as well as the collaborations of the reader and the writer, be they conscious or unconscious. It should also be borne in mind that genres are not autonomous entities and, therefore, must be placed in their social context in order to understand the significance of their evolution. Amidst the current lit-

erary atmosphere that venerates the transgressive or the unique character of a work of art, genre theory may seem outmoded and unlikely to yield a practical result; however, when examined closely enough, the study of genres becomes an enriching experience, providing not only a consolation that there are at least some forms of continuum in our increasingly fragmented history, but also a foundation from which we can perceive and make sense of how transgressive and unique one work is in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

References

Abrams, M. H. 1953. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Abrams, M. H. 1993. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College.

Alazraki, Jaime. 1983. *En busea del unicornio: Los cuentos de Julio Cort?zar*. Madrid: Grados.

Apter, T. E. 1982. *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality*. London: Macmillan.

Armitt, Lucie. 1996. *Theorizing the Fantastic*. London: Arnold.

Barrenechea, Ana María. 1972. Ensayo de una tipología de la literatura fantástica. *Revista Iberoamericana* 80: 391-403.

Brook-Rose, Christine. 1976. Historical Genres/Theoretical Genres: A Discussion of Todorov on the Fantastic. *New Literary History* 8: 145-158.

Brook-Rose, Christine. 1983. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Calvino, Italo. 1987. *The Literature Machine*. Trans. by Patrick Creagh. London: Picador.

Cixous, Hélène. 1976. Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "uncanny"). Trans. by Robert Dennom?. *New Literary History* 7: 525-548.

Cohen, Ralph. 2000. Do Postmodern Genres Exist? In *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Niall Lucy, pp. 293-309. Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Cornwell, Neil. 1990. *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Culler, Jonathan. 1981. *The Pursuit of Signs*. London: Routledge.

De Man, Paul. 1986. *Blindness and Insight*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Dubrow, Heather. 1982. *Genre*. London and New York: Methuen.

Easthope, Antony. 1989. *Poetry and Phantasy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eliot, T. S. 1975. Tradition and the Individual Talent. In *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode, pp. 37-44. London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Flores, Ralph. 1990. El ambito del realismo. In *El realismo mágico en el cuento hispanoamericano*, ed. by Angel Flores, pp. 11-16. 2nd ed. Mexico: La Red de Jonas.

Fokkema, Douwe W. 1984. *Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon.

Fowler, Alastair. 1974. The Life and Death of Literary Forms. In *New Directions of Literary History*, ed. by Ralph Cohen, pp. 77-94. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Fowler, Alastair. 1982. *Kinds of Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Freud, Sigmund. 1985. The 'Uncanny'. In *Penguin Freud Library XIV: Art and Literature*, ed. by J. Strachey, pp. 335-376. London: Penguin.

Frye, Northrop. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Genette, Gérard. 1992. *The Architext: An Introduction*. Trans. by Jane E. Lewin. California and Oxford: University of California Press.

Guillén, Claudio. 1971. *Literature as System*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hirsch, E. D. 1967. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Hume, Kathryn. 1984. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. London and New York: Methuen.

Irwin, W. R. 1976. *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy*. Urbana: University of Chicago Press.

Irwin, W. R. 1982. From Fancy to Fantasy. In *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. by Roger C. Schlobin, pp. 40-53. Brighton: Harvester Press.

Jackson, Rosemary. 1981. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. New York and London: Routledge.

Jameson, Fredric. 1975. Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre. *New Literary History* 7: 135-163.

Laplanche, J. and J.-B. Pontalis. 1973. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Hogarth.

Manlove, C. N. 1975. *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Massey, Irving. 1976. *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis*. Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press.

Murray, Penelope. (ed.). 2000. *Classical Literary Criticism*. London: Penguin.

Petzold, Dieter. 1986. Fantasy Fiction and Related Genres. *Modern Fiction Studies* 32: 11-20.

Rabkins, Eric S. 1976. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rabkins, Eric S. (ed.). 1979. *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Read, Herbert. 1928. *English Prose Style*. London: G. Bell and Sons.

Risco, Antonio. 1982. *Literaturay fantasia*. Madrid: Taurus.

Sandor, Andras. 1991. Myths and the Fantastic. *New Literary History* 22: 339-358.

Scarsella, Alessandro. 1986. Profilo delle poetiche del fantastico. *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 90: 201-220.

Schlobin, Roger C. (ed.). 1984. *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Brighton: Harvester Press.

Scholes, Robert. 1974. *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Siebers, Tobin. 1984. *The Romantic Fantastic*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

SteinMetz, Jean-Luc. 1990. *La Littérature fantastique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Strelka, Joseph P. (ed.). 1978. *Theories of Literary Genre*. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1975. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. by Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Todorov, Tzvetan. 1981. *Introduction to Poetics*. Trans. by Richard Howard. Sussex: Harvester Press.
Todorov. Tzvetan. 1990. *Genres in Discourse*. Trans. by Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tolkien, J. R. R. 1964. On Fairy-Stories. In *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 11-70. London: Unwin Books.
Wellek, René. 1963. *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Note

[1] I would like to thank Susan Bassnett, Michael Bell and Matthew Hunt for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

[3] See Eliot, 1975: 37-44, esp. pp. 38-39. "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new."

[4] These works include *Au coeur du fantastique* (1965) and *Images, Images: Essais sur le rôle et les pouvoirs de l'imagination* (1966) by Roger Caillois, *Le conte fantastique en France* (1951) by P. G. Castex, and *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1973) by H. P. Lovecraft. The reason why I chose the work by Todorov as an axle around which this essay develops is that most of the literary critics on the fantastic after Todorov base their ideas on Todorov's popular scheme, probably because the formalist paradigm of the fantastic posited by Todorov is clear and exact, thereby yielding itself easily to further studies.

[5] Part of the complexity of the genre is derived from the confusion around fantasy, the doctrinal core of the genre, itself. The meaning of fantasy varies in accordance to time and place. Stienmetz (1990:3) suggests the word comes via the Latin adjective *fantasticum* from the Greek verb *phantasein*, which means "to make an appearance", "to give an illusion", or even means "appear" when it is about extraordinary phenomena. With this equivocal and polysemic root, it is no wonder the word has been subjected to meaning shifts and used confusedly alongside such words as fancy, phantasy and even imagination.

[6] The original French title, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, pretends to a less ambitious result. It does not claim to introduce a new approach to a literary genre as the English title suggests.

[7] The designation of these terms is in disagreement with the system of Fowler (1982:107), in which "the terms for kinds [i.e. genres], perhaps in keeping with their obvious external embodiment, can always be put in noun form ..., whereas modal terms tend to be adjectival."

[8] However, what Todorov means by the reader is not the real reader who is actually reading the book; it is the reader implied from the verbal aspect of the text (Todorov, 1975:20).

[9] In his criticism of Todorov's focus on hesitation and ambiguity, W. R. Irwin claims that ambiguity should not be retained so that the

reader could establish a clear rapport of understanding with the writer. Irwin (1976:55) alleges that "the writer of fantasy avoids prompting those hesitations, uncertainties, and perceptions of ambiguity that Todorov takes to be essential in the experiencing of *littérature fantastique*. In successful fantasy all is clarity and certainty, as far as presentation goes." In claiming that the fantastic text should be deprived of ambiguity, I feel Irwin's criticism does not do justice to Todorov's theoretical postulation. Irwin stresses the role of the writer, not that of the reader. In his equation of text with its writer, his claim is not altogether valid since Todorov stresses the emergence of ambiguity on the level of the text to be felt by the reader, not on the level of the writer. In addition, an attempt by an author to write a clear and ambiguity-free text does not guarantee that a reader will understand the text as he or she intends.

[10] There is no exact correspondence of imperfect tense in English, which can render the sense of past continuity as used in Romance languages. In fact, Todorov here supplies a French example, "*J'aimais Aurélia*", which roughly means "I used to love Aurélia" in English.

[11] It should be noted that the use of the past tense is not common in the narration of events in French literature, hence the textual ambiguity. While the use of the past tense is predominant in narration in English literature, the present tense is preferred in French literature.

[12] By the "implied reader", I mean the reader whom the text creates for itself and which is a result of a network of structures that invite certain specific responses. For more details, see Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). Todorov (1975:31) himself comes close to this point: "The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated. It must be noted that we have in mind no actual reader, but the role of the reader implicit in the text (just as the narrator's function is implicit in the text)." Yet, in his conclusion, he (Todorov, 1975:157) still prefers to claim that "the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader – *a reader who identifies with the chief character* ..." (my italics).

[13] There are slightly terminological shifts in the words used. Irwin, taking his cue from Herbert Read, stipulates that fancy is a faculty and fantasy a product. For Rabkins, the word fantasy is used to denote a genre, by that means delegating the fantastic to be rather an element. In a work which attempts to study extensively the fantastic, terminological consistency is necessary. In this essay, fantasy is defined as a mode in any literary communication, as opposed to the mimetic mode. Every fiction needs to have fantasy as an inherent mode as well as mimesis, but not all fiction belongs to the fantastic, which for me is a generic label.

[14] Taking his cue from Rabkins (1976:121), Cornwell defines *what-if* as the narrative in which one assumption about its narrative world violates what is known about our world. Then the whole narrative is extrapolated from that difference.

[15] This idea is closely linked with that shared by new historicists. Michel Foucault, for example, believes in the study of forms of historical continuity because it "is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him ..." (Foucault, 1972:12)

[16] For more details, see also Hans R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982).