

Review article

Reconditioning the fantastic

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Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009. 346pp. \$23.95 (pbk).

What is fantastic cinema? Is it a catch-all term for a range of genres or does it refer to something more specific? Much depends, of course, upon whom you ask: in its contemporary colloquial usage, fantastic is an enthusiastic indicator of high quality (a meaning reinforced for viewers of Christopher Eccleston's tenure in *Doctor Who* (2005–) when 'fantastic' became the Doctor's signature word). Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, fantastic means something extravagantly fanciful, imaginative or remote from reality. That spirit of inclusiveness is at the core of the seminal *Cinefantastique*, founded by Frederick S. Clarke in 1970. For Clarke, the 'magazine with a sense of wonder' was open to reviews and in-depth studies from across the range of horror, fantasy and sf. At the same time that Clarke's pioneering magazine about fantastic cinema was establishing a following among film fans, Tzvetan Todorov's study of the literary fantastic, first published in French in 1970, began to take root in academic discourse. Todorov's central thesis is well known in fantasy scholarship: the fantastic is a specific register of fantasy rather than an adjective referring to fantasy per se. Flanked by the uncanny (natural explanation) and the marvelous (supernatural explanation), the Todorovian fantastic is on display in a text which prompts the reader 'to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described' (Todorov 33). Todorov's work would soon be transposed to film with Mark Nash's detailed analysis of Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (France/Germany 1932) proposing a film genre analogous to Todorov's literary fantastic: the cinefantastic (see Nash 30).

Despite the influence of Todorov's fantastic within academic discourse, his work is not without its complications. One of the drawbacks to the Todorovian fantastic and much of the work to expand on it has been the establishment of what Mark Bould has summarised as a canonical sample that is 'profoundly unrepresentative of fantasy' (55). Todorov's survey of the fantastic is narrow

– the focus, as Darko Suvin notes, is on ‘possibilities present in French fiction 1650–1950’ (220) with occasional adventures into German (E. T. A. Hoffmann) and English (Henry James) literature but an emphasis that nonetheless remains on European and canonical texts over more populist examples of genre fiction. With that Eurocentric emphasis in mind, Bliss Cua Lim’s *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* is an extremely welcome and exciting addition to studies of the fantastic. Lim expands the scope of enquiry beyond the Anglophone focus of the majority of studies, to take in production contexts as diverse as Filipino and Hong Kong cinema, Asian American video and both Japanese and Korean horror (and their Hollywood remakes). Lim distinguishes her approach from Todorov’s by liberating the fantastic from the restrictions of an implied reader and bringing it into contact with varied and multiple historical audiences. Yet the question that I began with, ‘What is fantastic cinema?’, haunted my reading of *Translating Time* without being as fully answered as I would have hoped, despite the book’s abundant strengths. There is the occasional need for a return to basics and a more wide-ranging consideration of the implications of the alternative approaches to the fantastic being proposed, which should not dilute the compelling and significant qualities of Lim’s work.

The book’s opening sentence establishes Lim’s central thesis: fantastic cinema encourages us to think differently about time. To think differently about time in the early twenty-first century is, in Lim’s core argument, to think about alternatives to the dominance of the homogeneous time that is an essential feature of global capitalism and was enforced increasingly through the spread of imperialist powers. Lim’s project is thus a postcolonial one and it operates out of two principles – that the persistence of supernaturalism in certain cultures *and* the existence of societies which experience time in different ways to the standardised units required by homogeneous time should be taken seriously rather than being dismissed as outmoded relics of a premodern world. For Lim, the form of fantastic cinema best placed to engage with the disruption of homogeneous time is the ghost film, ‘the quintessential embodiment of the fantastic narrative’ (190), with the figure of the ghost destabilising the distinctions between the ‘old’, the ‘new’ and ‘versions yet to come’ (190).

Following her introduction, Lim’s initial focus is on the concept of homogeneous time and the control it seeks to exercise over those societies and cultures which do not conform to it. Lim then addresses the concept of the fantastic and complicates Todorov’s definition through a study of a Filipino horror-film cycle which has flourished since the mid-1980s but can be traced back to the silent film *Aswang* (Musser Philippines 1932). The ghost film takes precedence

in chapter 3, which expands the discussion of time to include its significance for the concept of nostalgia and place. In two case studies, from Hong Kong and the Philippines respectively, the ruined places inhabited by ghosts provide the opportunity for a nostalgia that does not simply distort and romanticise the past but reclaims 'concerns so estranged or remote as to have almost vanished from memory' (160). The final chapter continues Lim's emphasis on ghosts through a study of Hollywood remakes of such 'Asian Horror films' as *Ringu* (Nakata Japan 1999) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (Shimizu Japan 2003) by drawing an analogy between the figure of the ghost, a figure of return, and the concept of genre as whole, which is founded on the principle of return.

Underpinning Lim's postcolonial analysis, then, is an interest in the potential of fantastic cinema to call into question and critique the dominance of homogeneous time. Lim is careful to note that this potential is not exclusive to fantastic cinema and that not all examples of fantastic cinema will necessarily offer a meaningful critique but that 'fantastic narratives, in contrast to secular historiography, might be best able to explore' (25) alternatives to homogeneous time. What is at stake here and why do alternatives to homogeneous time need to be explored? Lim's temporal analysis is informed by the work of Henri Bergson and Dipesh Chakrabarty, who both draw attention to the benefits of homogeneous time for imperialist expansionism. As Lim summarises, imperialist discourse 'depended on a temporal strategy in which radical cultural differences brought to light by colonial contact were framed as primitive or anachronistic' (13) with the result being that modern homogeneous time enabled the 'exercising of social, political, and economic control over periods of work and leisure; it obscures the ceaselessly changing plurality of our existence in time; and it underwrites a linear, developmental notion of progress that gives rise to ethical problems with regard to cultural and racial difference' (11). Lim charts the development of homogeneous time impressively throughout her introduction and first chapter, providing a robust plea for the acceptance of different ways of being in and perceiving the world that are at odds with modern capitalist societies. Although acknowledging the 'indispensable' benefits of 'synchronizing people, information, and markets in a simultaneous global present' (11), Lim is clear about the damage caused by homogeneous time. In homogeneous disenchanted time, premodern or pre-capitalist worldviews (or, as Lim notes Chakrabarty would argue, *non-modern* and *non-capitalist* worldviews, in that worlds containing belief in 'supernatural agency' are not 'capital's precursors but something other' (136)) are characterised and dismissed as primitive and irrational embarrassments from the past that have no place and value in a modern, temporally homogeneous world. In the face of such dominant thought,

what resistance or alternative thinking can be found in fantastic cinema? For Lim, fantastic narratives have a potent ability to present and explore 'immiscible temporalities' (32), which can thus undermine the notion that homogeneous time is reality, exposing it instead as an imposed construct rather than a 'natural' way of experiencing the world.

This juxtaposition of different temporalities is central to Lim's definition of the fantastic. That definition is sketched in at first and early in the book I found myself noting in the margin 'what *are* fantastic narratives?' or 'definition needed at some point'. I feel somewhat rudimentary in making such comments as there is no doubting the theoretical sophistication of Lim's work and her addressing of topics such as time, race and cultural imperialism through the medium of fantastic cinema makes *Translating Time* an impressive and pertinent study. Nonetheless, the book's structure does not always work to the advantage of Lim's material and the unpacking of her definition of the fantastic is, for me, the principal example of the book's prioritisation of its sociopolitical engagement over, occasionally, the need for a fuller discussion of the actual implications of its position on the fantastic. The fantastic is described as 'a form of temporal translation: narratives that represent enchanted worlds within the framework of secular modern homogeneous time but intimate a sense of discrepant temporality' (21) and is then defined more directly as

a narrative that juxtaposes two (or more) radically different worlds. This encounter with a forked world is registered within the narrative as an experience of limits, whether these be limits of epistemological certainty, cultural transparency, or historical understanding. Because the unfamiliar world most often takes the form of a supernatural realm in which the linear chronological time of clock and calendar does not hold, the fantastic has a propensity to foreground a sense of temporal discrepancy. (28)

It's a refreshing definition and set me thinking instantly, How does it relate to established notions of the fantastic? What's in and what's out under this alternative means of classifying the fantastic? Does, for example, Narnia qualify and are the Elves of Middle-earth barred entry? Neither Lewis's nor Tolkien's books, less so their film adaptations, would be considered obvious examples of Todorov's fantastic with its emphasis on hesitancy and epistemological uncertainty (are these extraordinary events, which obey new laws of nature, really happening?), yet Lim's defining principle of temporal heterogeneity might prove more accepting. In *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Adamson US 2005), the Pevensie children travel through a liminal space connecting their world of wartime England with the magical world of Narnia where time flows differently. But in what sense is 'radical difference' at work and on what level does the juxtaposition of worlds need to operate? *The*

Lord of the Rings film trilogy (2001–03) takes place within ‘one world’, Middle-earth, but within the diegesis there are several radically different worlds if one considers the Shire of the Hobbits, the Elven realm of Lórien and Sauron’s land of Mordor. Are the Elves of Lórien an example of Lim’s encounter with a forked world? The Elves experience time in an entirely different way to Hobbits and Men and are in the process of departing from Middle-earth as they are at odds with its temporality (the films also articulate the temporal tensions generated by a relationship between a mortal man, Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen), and an immortal Elven woman, Arwen (Liv Tyler)) – does that bring *The Lord of the Rings* into Lim’s category of the fantastic? And, if so, what is the significance of that shift in classification for our understanding of Peter Jackson’s films/Tolkien’s books?

How does the Limian fantastic relate to films such as Alex Cox’s *Walker* (US/Mexico/Spain 1987) or Peter Watkins’s *La commune* (France 2000)? Watkins in particular has provided a sustained and impassioned critique of homogeneous time and the spread of the universal clock. For Watkins, ‘we are all history, past, present, future, all participating in a common sharing and sensing of experiences which flow about us, forwards and backwards, sometimes simultaneously, without limitations from time and space’ (qtd in Lajtha 14). There are parallels with Lim’s discussion of ghost films like *Rouge* (Kwan Hong Kong 1987) and *Haplos* (Perez Philippines 1982) where she notes how ‘what is dead and long past comes to life’ and ‘a radicalized historical consciousness fathoms the past’s entanglement with immediate concerns’ (160). In that passage, Lim could be writing about Watkins’s film in which he encouraged his mainly non-professional cast to research and become actual figures involved with the Communards’ movement, to effectively be inhabited by the spirit(s) of the past, so as to rethink their sociopolitical agency and responsibility in the present of the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. Both *Walker* and *La commune* juxtapose historical events and eras over one hundred years apart in order to challenge the spectators’ historical understanding, encouraging connections to be drawn between the two worlds (e.g. the world of William Walker in the 1850s, during which he invaded Nicaragua, and the world of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and his administration’s intervention in Latin America) through the portrayal on-screen of a seemingly impossible world: helicopters transport Walker’s men out of the Nicaragua of the 1850s; television stations cover the events in Peter Watkins’s temporally heterogeneous account of the Parisian socialist uprising of 1871. Are these films fantastic? Lim’s earlier reference to ‘enchanted worlds’ might preclude *La commune* but Walker’s belief in the principle of manifest destiny and the act of God, which saves him and his men at the start of the film, is

not out of step with Lim's definition of enchantment as the 'felt mysteriousness and fundamental unknowability of the world' (22). An enchanted world is not necessarily one inhabited by goblins and elves. These questions might seem like evidence of an obsession for neat boundaries on my part (when I agree with Lucie Armitt's observation that too often 'ground has been lost in comparison with other fields of literary criticism while critics of fantasy have been futilely squabbling over whether a text is marvellous or fabulous' (13)) but my interest here is sparked instead by a genuine curiosity in the possibilities for the fantastic that Lim's definition opens up but does not pursue at length, including ways of rethinking familiar films and books that contain instances, however extensive, of temporal heterogeneity.

Lim makes it clear that a cartographic approach to genre (with Todorov as the 'great contemporary cartographer of the fantastic' (30)) is of little interest to her in contrast to the book's other concerns and that such a focus on categories is 'driven by the linked desires for generic purity and scholarly mastery, the desire for genre study to yield a definitive, historically invariable answer to a question posed in the singular: What *is* the fantastic?' (31). But although this question has less importance for Lim, her book would still benefit from it being addressed in a more developed way, especially if one of the purposes of Lim's work is to propose an alternative definition of the fantastic that enables a film like *Aswang* (Gallaga/Reyes/Escudera Philippines 1992) to be classified as a fantastic text when it would otherwise prove a problematic fit for Todorov. It would be disingenuous to suggest that Lim has no interest in classification, not least given that chapter two is based initially around the complications in Todorov's work on the fantastic, but having proposed an alternative definition to Todorov in the introduction, the book's focus soon shifts away from the fantastic until the second chapter and so the ramifications of Lim's definition are not able to acquire momentum or nuance. This structural decision does not do irrevocable damage to Lim's argument – the strands from the introduction can be woven together again (Lim makes use of a telling quote from Deleuze on Bergson in his observation that 'the essence of a thing never appears at the outset, but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured' (61)), but it is indicative of where Lim's priorities lie and underlines how the book is less geared towards the reader unfamiliar with theories of the fantastic and their attendant debates. Chapter 1 excels in its detailed summary of the development of the concept of homogeneous time but Lim is less expansive in her discussion of the concept of the fantastic, its development and various meanings. The book is situated, in part, in response to a *literary* definition of the fantastic whereas previous attempts to approach the fantastic in film are not given precedence.

There is, for example, no mention of Hans Richter who discussed the ‘fantastic film’ in the late 1930s as being something which sought to confound, distort and change reality in addition to ‘allowing the impossible and nonsensical to become visible’ (53) – a more inclusive definition than that proposed in *Translating Time*. Lim enters the fray bracingly with her own definition and moves purposefully on with only Todorov being brought in as a sustained contrast with her own approach to the fantastic.

That contrast takes place in chapter 2, which begins with a critique of the temporal problems in Todorov’s definition of the fantastic. For Lim, these problems centre on Todorov’s use of an implied reader and the implied reader’s hesitant oscillation between the laws of nature and the supernatural. As Lim notes, this dichotomy implies a linear progression from belief in the supernatural to a modern upholding of the laws of nature. One consequence of this assumed progression has been to equate Todorov’s registers of fantasy with historical periods so that, as Lim puts it, the marvellous becomes a ‘placeholder for medievalism, while the uncanny corresponds to Enlightenment or post-Enlightenment skepticism’ (108–9). Lim demonstrates the limitations of this linearity in a compelling analysis of Philippine *aswang* narratives (*aswang* are monstrous flesh-eating creatures in Philippine folklore that take on several guises, including the winged feminised *manananggal*) which were assumed to ‘belong to a fixed nexus of time, place, and class – the premodern world of the rural peasant’ (127) but resurfaced in news reports of *manananggal* sightings in Metro Manila in 1992, followed by a horror-film cycle, which implied that Philippine society, particularly its capital of Manila, was ‘traversed by multiple times and heterogeneous worlds’ (114). *Aswang* narratives thus complicate Todorov – *aswang* remain a living belief in parts of the Philippines and cannot be confined to a fictional genre: ‘First recorded in sixteenth-century colonial missionary accounts, *aswang* glide between journalistic reportage, sociological analysis, popular film, and literary fiction. Moving across the veridical regimes of genres, *aswang* highlight the porosity of story and history’ (99).

If *Aswang* points to the limits of certain aspects of the Todorovian fantastic, the first film that came to my mind as an example that engages directly with Lim’s concern for the survival of non-modern and non-capitalist cultures and beliefs was Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (US 1991). Dash acknowledges in her DVD commentary that ‘the production design is a syncretism of the two worlds . . . of tradition and culture and how things persist over years’. The film is set in 1902 at Ibo Landing on the South Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina but its temporality runs far beyond the confines of a single day in one particular year. Dash’s script focuses on the tensions within a Gullah

community and the Peasant family in particular, as they gather for a farewell picnic before several of their number leave for a new life on the mainland. As an island Gullah community, the Peasants have retained a distinctive culture with strong connections to their West African ancestors. For some, the move to the mainland is to be welcomed ('The first steps towards progress', enthuses Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce)), but the family's matriarch, Nana Peasant (Cora Lee Day), is concerned about the dangers for her family if they lose touch with their cultural roots. Her pleas are directed at her great grandson, Eli (Adisa Anderson), who is estranged from his pregnant wife and resists Nana's call to heed the past:

Eli, I'm trying to learn you how to touch your own spirit . . . I'm trying to give you something to take north with you, along with all your great big dreams. Call on those old Africans, Eli. They come to you when you least expect 'em. Let them feed your head of wisdom . . . 'Cause when you leave this island, Eli Peasant, you ain't going to no land of milk and honey.

None of this, however, has an overtly fantastic quality until the appearance of the Unborn Child (Kai-Lynn Warren) – a manifestation of Eli's yet-to-be-born daughter as a little girl, skipping along the beach and among her immediate ancestors. In voice-over, the Unborn Child tells us that she has been brought into being by Nana Peasant's prayers, fearful that her family was coming apart, and so 'the old souls guided me into the new world – I came in time'. Although Dash suggests that Nana can sense the arrival of the Unborn Child, it appears at first that nobody can actually see her. Is she really there? Is she 'just' an evocation of a belief system? Given that the film makes use of the character's voice-over narration ('I remember and I recall'), is the Unborn Child relaying to us a mental projection of herself into her family's past through memory and imagination? The film provides a moment of Todorov's epistemological uncertainty through the reaction of Mr Snead (Tommy Redmond Hicks) who, much to his bewilderment, briefly appears to be able to see the Unborn Child through the viewfinder of his camera as he prepares to take a photograph of the assembled men of the community. Snead is taken aback by the presence of the Unborn Child in the frame but, when he emerges from under the camera's canopy to verify with his own eyes if the little girl is there, all he can see are the men waiting for him to take the photograph. It is a significant moment for the viewer's understanding of the film. Snead has arrived from the mainland and represents, as Dash puts it in her commentary, 'the new world of science and technology', but this encounter with a spirit from the future brings about a transformation in his character as he becomes increasingly drawn to the Gullah community. This is not a straightforward anti-modern dualism between the

communal warmth of supernatural folklore and 'cold' science. As with Lim's example of *Aswang*, and echoing Watkins's thoughts on history, Dash does not fall back into reductive binaries and explores instead a strong sense of cultural and temporal continuum (reinforced by John Barnes's score which fuses traditional African instruments with electronic sounds) that blends dreams, memory, history and what Dash refers to as 'the magic of science' into a distinctive form of African American cinema. The Unborn Child, for Dash, stands at the crossroads between the secular and the supernatural and enables the cultural continuum to maintain its temporal flow (later in the film, Eli glimpses her and is led to a site containing markers of the previous families to live on the island; after this encounter he commits to sustaining his family's connection to their West African heritage). Dash draws parallels between the characters in her film crossing into one era (the twentieth century) and the experience of African Americans at the time of the film's release with another temporal crossing looming (the millennium and the twenty-first century) in order to stress the strength and healing potential available to individuals and communities through the continuation of cultural forms and beliefs that might guard against the social alienation that can be experienced in a homogeneous, hegemonic world.

Although detailing some of the limitations of the Todorovian fantastic, Lim does not dismiss Todorov's work out of hand and is generous in her acknowledgement of its undoubted merits. Throughout the book, Lim often refers to epistemological uncertainty and ambiguity as being on display in a particular text – she notes Judith Zeitlin's discussion of Chinese classical tales of the strange (*zhiguai*) which insists on the ambiguity of hearsay as a means of classifying these tales rather than as fictions that can be easily dismissed with an incredulous response and, later, the 'perceptual ambiguity' of Kim Jee-woon's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (South Korea 2003) which leads into a discussion of the ways in which cinematic ambiguity can be achieved (239–42). Lim's concern is not with the principle of hesitancy but how Todorov argues that hesitancy is perceived by the implied reader. Todorov's implied reader, integrated into the characters' world, forms the third of his conditions for the fantastic in which 'the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text' (33) but 'it must be noted that we have in mind no actual reader, but the role of the reader implicit in the text' (31). The problems generated by the implied reader have been addressed by Mark Bould and Jose B. Monleón as well as Lim. For Bould, the implied reader is employed by Todorov in 'an ahistoricising manner' (57) as an ideal well-behaved construct who possesses 'those attitudes necessary for the text to be effective' (57). This understanding reduces the reader into what Lim,

employing the work of Hans-Robert Jauss, describes as a ‘decoder of textual prescriptions rather than a productive force in the text’s own history’ (104). As Bould suggests, the reader of *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) might not necessarily opt for a natural or supernatural explanation of the events at Bly but prefer to enjoy ‘the ambiguity of co-existent but mutually exclusive possibilities’ (57) or devise alternative ways of reconciling the textual indeterminacy. In Lim’s case, the rejection of Todorov’s implied reader does not extend to a dismissal of Todorov’s identification of the formal features of the (literary) fantastic. Although critiquing Todorov’s implied reader for the assumption that he or she will passively follow formal indicators, Lim later notes the significance of *mise en scène* in fantastic cinema and the viewers’ recognition of formal properties as part of the way in which fantastic cinema operates due to the fact that ‘both filmmakers and viewers know that setting, light, color, and the look of the figures onscreen literalize the otherness of that world in comparison with the world of everyday life’ (122). Todorov’s principle of epistemological uncertainty and its realisation through certain formal strategies thus holds good despite the theoretical problems complicating other aspects of his work.

Where then does Lim’s study leave the fantastic? A genre of anomalous encounters and temporal translations of heterogeneity into homogeneity that expose the universalising terms of that process of translation – as with Todorov, this is not an account of genre with much pragmatic potential for the film industry and its relay. Lim acknowledges this point, admitting that ‘for all the productivity of the fantastic as a generic lens for temporal critique, the fantastic . . . is not a broadly legible category for film production or distribution’ (192). I finished Lim’s book enthused about the possibilities for temporal critique contained within certain approaches to cinematic fantasy but less than convinced that the fantastic is an effective label for such approaches, and I was prompted to question my own use of the term. To employ the word fantastic (whether Limian, Todorovian or any other inflection) for something so specific, when that word is being used with a very different meaning to its more familiar and frequent applications, seems to invite confusion and maintain a discrepancy between everyday and academic discourse that is not necessarily illuminating. Perhaps a more precise use of terminology – hesitant fantasies or ambiguous fantasies or temporally heterogeneous fantasies or the Todorovian/Limian fantastic – would be more helpful than a catch-all term with multiple meanings. Noting the unsuitability of her definition of the fantastic for film production and distribution, Lim endorses Rick Altman’s call for a pragmatic approach to genre study and supports Fredric Jameson’s principle of generic failure (a comedy might not generate laughter, a horror film might not horrify,

a fantastic film might not induce hesitancy). Given this pragmatic awareness, it seems somewhat strange that Lim retains what is, to a certain extent, a more hermetically sealed definition of the fantastic. Lim augments an existing scholarly definition, elaborating and refining its 'rules' in order to alter the genre's scope and enable other non-canonical texts to be admitted to the category of the fantastic (which is a harsh characterisation of Lim's achievements in the book). The goalposts are moved but restrictions and parameters are nonetheless still being imposed. Lim complicates Todorov but an attempt to control the borders of the fantastic is still at work, which sits incongruously with the book's postcolonial and sociopolitical perspective. The fantastic cannot be confined so easily and mingles with all manner of genres. Jack Zipes is far from alone in noting the impossibility of categorising fantasy as a genre (Zipes refers to Theodor Adorno and Lucie Armitt in this respect) and, similarly, argues that the fantastic, defined in a broader sense as a 'projection of fantasy/imagination', refuses 'to define itself or to be defined as the genre of fantasy . . . because it is in every genre that matters' (82). I was reminded of Harmony Wu's discussion of genre theory in relation to horror film and her recommendation of developing 'a way of approaching horror that attends to its subtleties and nuances, its movement between and across different texts, and its ability to emerge, seemingly out of nowhere, in a narrative that did not seem at all to be horror before' (3). As a step towards a possible new approach to horror, Wu employs Peter Brook's study of melodrama and his account of its transition from the nineteenth-century stage into realist novels, which distinguishes between melodrama the noun and melodramatic the adjective. Wu notes Brook's use of melodrama to refer to a 'historically bounded generic formation' and melodramatic, the adjective, as a 'function of melodrama conceived as operating as a mode, at once suggesting a connection to the historically specific melodrama, as well as movements away and transformations of the original generic manifestation' (3). Wu applies this principle to horror with a similar distinction between horror the noun and horrific the adjective so that horror would 'refer to "known" articulations of the horror genre' (e.g. German Expressionist horror, Hammer, Italian *giallo* films, 1980s slashers) and the horrific would 'signify a migration of elements of horror . . . whether in new configurations that constitute their own horrific sub-genres, or more subtle horrific appropriations in otherwise "non-horror" texts' (3-4).

Could such an approach work for fantasy and the fantastic? Todorov, of course, uses the fantastic as a noun rather than an adjective and, as noted earlier, tends to think of the fantastic in more historically specific parameters (e.g. nineteenth-century ghost literature) and the term fantasy has its own wealth

of definitions (see, for example, Butler 17–42). Following Wu, however, fantasy might refer to known articulations of fantasy (1980s sword and sorcery, *Arabian Nights* fantasies, fairy-tale films etc.) and the fantastic to elements of fantasy migrating into new fantasy subgenres or being appropriated in what might be more often thought of as a ‘non-fantasy’ text (e.g. the late shift to elements of fantasy in the otherwise bleak, naturalistic drama of *Lilja 4-ever* (Moodysson Sweden/Denmark 2002)). Such an approach would fly in the face of much of the established scholarly literature on the fantastic: Lim notes Neil Cornwell’s critique of writers such as Kathryn Hume, Linda Hutcheon and Rosemary Jackson for being imprecise in their implication that Todorov conflates fantasy with the fantastic when Todorov is in fact clear that he uses the fantastic to refer to a specific register of fantasy (102). But maybe a more radical untangling of the fantastic is required that returns the word to a more widely recognisable usage without discounting the features on display and at work in certain types of fantasy films as identified by Lim and Todorov.

Early in *Translating Time*, Lim refers to the fantastic’s ‘reservoir of possibilities’ (29). One of the major strengths of Lim’s book is its expansion of the scope of the fantastic so that it moves far beyond the geographical and temporal parameters of Todorov’s emphasis on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European literature. Although much needed in its focus on films outside the traditions of Western cinema, *Translating Time* tends only to allude to the reservoir of possibilities available to the fantastic and instead clusters around horror and ghost narratives (a focus Lim acknowledges and defends). There is much more to be done with the exciting theoretical possibilities that Lim explores here. If the book’s structure does not fully satisfy in the unfolding of its position on the fantastic and a wider consideration of the implications that Lim’s augmented definition has for the genre, Lim is at her frequent finest in her thought-provoking and sophisticated case studies. The book’s undoubted qualities for me are in the sociopolitical potential that Lim identifies within certain approaches to fantasy on screen and her advocacy of the benefits of temporal critique. Referring to Bergson’s belief that homogeneous time is ‘a necessary illusion’ (247) best able to answer the requirements of social life, Lim’s epilogue calls defiantly for a ‘political-ontological commitment to radical temporal heterogeneity’ (251). I would be genuinely fascinated to read a piece of speculative fiction by Lim which suggests ways in which the temporalities of different societies might interact and co-exist. How might such a world operate? That, as they say, is another story but one that Lim’s significant study should encourage its readers to return to with greater purpose and insight.

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