

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Robert A. Latham, Robert A. Collins, eds. *Modes of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Twelfth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. xxi + 233 pp. \$69.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29085-5.

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*Modes of the Fantastic* is a well-formed response to fantasy as, in Collins' words, a "pervasive movement toward non-representational forms in 20th-century art." It is the "assumption of fantasy's intrinsic subversiveness" which serves as the thread that binds the text together. By far, the best feature of *Modes* is how the editors arrange the material to demonstrate that fantasy, because it refuses to play by the literary rules of Western civilization, functions as a filter by sifting out the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of Western thought.

This collection of 25 essays was gleaned from the 300 delivered at the Twelfth International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, from 20-24 March 1991. The eclectic topics represented—from math, myth, and metonymy to cyberpunk, hell, and the occult—have a kaleidoscopic effect which ultimately reflects and shapes this text's distinct thematic arrangement.

Second to the thematic arrangement as the highlight of the book is its selection of understandable essays. Most of the essays, though at times dense, are reader-friendly; this particular quality enables the reader—fantasy expert or not—easily to trace the thematic thread. Politics, Section 1, answers Attebery's initial challenge to think through the politics of fantasy by discussing how fantasy proves the impossibility of self-sufficient closed systems. In Section 2, Technique, two strategies of fantasy, collage

and the literary grotesque, are carefully addressed. In order to show fantasy's inherent refusal to be judged by Western standards, Section 3, Race and Gender, concentrates on the power struggle between the sexes. Nature, Section 4, demonstrates that nature and the artist are in constant dialogue and seldom function in harmony. To the dismay of many anti-fantasists, Section 5, Religion, shows that fantasy has a religious and/or spiritual dimension. Finally, section 6, Revisions, proves that especially for this genre context is essential. For example, fantasy remakes are seldom, if ever, better than the original work.

*Modes of the Fantastic* is a "fantastic" work. Undoubtedly, this is a key text for understanding two essential points about fantasy: first, that diverse topics and similar themes define fantasy and second, that science fiction alone does not. Indeed, in both ways, fantasy overlaps with realism and romanticism. The articles in this text, by demonstrating that fantasy filters out and exposes what many readers don't want to see, collectively prove what many editors of anthologies are obviously overlooking: fantasy has a *real* place in the literary canon.

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