

Mo/Po-mo stuff

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Oct 1999

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Jonathan Laidlow — 29 Oct 1999, 09:25

Have to agree with Alex's epistemological/ontological theory. Indeed its the one that McHale puts forward in Postmodernist Fiction. The usual way I try to explain it to students (on a simple level) is that modernism was concerned with finding new ways to represent reality, because old models did not seem adequate (ie C19 realism). Postmodernism takes this a step further and suggests that reality cannot be successfully represented, so the alternative is to turn away from that and play with the form of fiction and the way reality can only ever be 'represented', not described.

I'm not sure I liked McHale's first book - like the work of Linda Hutcheon it seemed very good as a undergrad student but now seems to suck some of the excitement out of po-mo fiction. I believe McHale's 'Constructing Postmodernism' is better, but that could just be because he actually spends a lot of time on sf in that one.

The American early postmodernists like Gaddis, Barth, and Barthelme haven't really stayed in print over here (UK), and I must say that the most exciting postmodern fictions I've read recently have been Delillo's 'White Noise', Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' and 'Satanic Verses', and (an oldie) Pynchon's 'Crying of Lot 49'. I personally thought that the short version of Pynchon is not only the most accessible, but also the most focussed of his works. Still haven't got past the Baseball game in Delillo's 'Underworld' yet. Since I began the book early this year I've finally had the chance to attend a Baseball game and so must try again, just in case it makes more sense.

All this concentration on 20th century Modernism/Post-modernism ignores the fact that there have been modernisms throughout history. I've been attempting for a while now to put together a coherent argument that my man Sterne has to be considered as part of an 18th century modernism (as in an attempt to undermine and reformulate established models of representation and find a new way to express the 'real') rather than as a man out of time who prefigures our 20th century concerns.

And I haven't mentioned Wolfe once! Sorry....

So - to briefly add to the introducing Wolfe to others - I have successfully passed 'Shadow of the Torturer' to two of the Profs (and in the UK a Professor is the top job - you only get the title when you're a real bigwig) who both thoroughly enjoyed it. Indeed one of them has migrated to 5th Head and I've now just put him onto Long Sun.

And I haven't even begun to wade thru the Whorl stuff of recent months, so can I just say that OBW is a masterpiece which left me unable to read anything but comics and magazines for about three days, as nothing else I might consider reading would even come close....

Jonathan

Visit Ultan's Library - A Gene Wolfe web resource

<http://members.tripod.co.uk/laidlow/index.htm>
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