



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 38
Number 1

Article 23

October 2019

Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction: A Cognitive Reading by Marek Oziewicz

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Recommended Citation

Dilbeck, Zachary (2019) "*Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction: A Cognitive Reading by Marek Oziewicz*," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 38 : No. 1 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol38/iss1/23>

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Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

Presented is a review of *Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction: A Cognitive Reading* by Marek C. Oziewicz.

Additional Keywords

Theory of Mind; Cognition; Justice

JUSTICE IN YOUNG ADULT SPECULATIVE FICTION: A COGNITIVE READING. Marek C. Oziewicz. New York NY: Routledge, 2018. 268 p. 978-1138547797. \$51.00.

THE FORMAT OF THE BOOK IS LIKE OTHERS IN ROUTLEDGE'S *Children's Literature and Culture* series. The chapters look and read more like discrete essays than smoothly integrated chapters, thanks in large part to the presentation of lengthy author notes and fully rendered bibliographies at the end of each chapter. This is helpful, certainly, to the teacher or student who wishes to use the book for pedagogical purposes—and it is very well suited for this application—though it can be a bit disruptive for scholars or fans who wish to simply read the book in its entirety for pleasure or personal edification. Similarly, the use of bolded headings and subheadings to divide the chapters is helpful for the reader needing to make a quick reference—as a student often needs to—and feels rather clinical, speaking to the critical framework of the study (grounded as it is in cognitive science) as well as the larger series. Neither of these should be seen as criticisms or deterrents for those interested in reading the book or in need of an accessible, interesting text to support a discussion of justice; however, readers of Oziewicz's earlier work may miss the ease and natural approachability of the author's rhetorical style (on display, for example, in *One Earth, One People*).

The introduction to Oziewicz's book presents compelling personal anecdotes from the author's childhood and early adulthood that exemplify his informal thesis about the "liberating and transformative potential" of speculative fiction, which he defines as "a galactic-span term for a great number of nonmimetic genres such as the gothic, dystopia, zombie, vampire, and postapocalyptic fiction [...] and so forth" (1-3). This is a more inclusive, or at least more delineated definition than simply speculative fiction as fantasy plus science fiction, and one that allows broader access to narratives from which Oziewicz can draw his examples for the later chapters. His definition of young adult is equally inclusive: "young people aged, say, ten and above" (2). If nothing else, these definitions serve to prepare the reader for the author's inclusive approach to the idea of justice not just as legal process but as "a youthful sentiment about what makes things fair and right" (23). Again, beautifully broad and seemingly tailored to classroom use, and just edgy enough to encourage critical discourse among scholars, teachers, and students of literature and justice alike.

Oziewicz uses his first chapter to present a bullet point history of the development of the concept of justice in Western civilization from ancient Greece to the present day, identifying three major movements (*Old Justice*, *New Justice*, and *Open Justice*), their philosophical origins (Ancient Greece, the

European Enlightenment, and Euro-America of the 1970s onward, respectively), and their major contributors (Plato and Aristotle, Beccaria and Kant, Alasdair MacIntyre and others). The chapter, despite highlighting useful growth points in the Western conception of justice, is dense and at times plodding, and intrudes upon the author's otherwise welcoming natural voice; it would serve as an excellent primer on justice for those readers outside of Western society.

Oziewicz leans heavily on Theory of Mind to establish his main objective in the second chapter: "the connection between the vehicle of the story and the human cognitive architecture [...] [which allows for] script-based narrative understanding [...] commonly referred to as stories" (53). This is again a broad approach that Oziewicz deftly applies to the act of consuming speculative fiction by young adults; an act that serves, in Oziewicz's argument, to inform our ideas about justice and allow us a "cognitive-affective mechanism" to respond to justice-taxing scenarios without the labor intensive efforts of "reflexive thought" (53). In short, young people develop a sense of justice from their consumption of these various scripts which in turn allow them to make instant assessments about the applications of justice in individual scenarios—a compelling and original application of Theory of Mind, and one that seems well suited, again, to classroom use.

The remaining six chapters are of a kind. Oziewicz focuses not on individual narratives or justice movements, but on scripts: *poetic justice scripts*, *retributive justice scripts*, *restorative justice scripts*, *environmental justice scripts*, *social justice scripts*, and *global justice scripts*. By focusing on the way justice is presented in various scripts, the author is able to maintain the breadth and inclusiveness he established in the introduction; this inclusiveness is imperative to any open discourse on justice, and it allows Oziewicz to avoid too much stumping, despite his intimate relationship to the subject. These chapters read much more quickly and are more user friendly—Oziewicz hits his stride here as a writer, and the myriad of primary source references is both stunning and fun, ranging from ancient text such as *The Odyssey* to modern speculative staples by William Morris and Philip Pullman to very contemporary animated films such as *The Nut Job*. Oziewicz also gives plenty of time to comic books, pulpy fantasy such as the Conan tales, and fairy tales from the French, German, and Norwegian traditions especially. Again, the tactic here is breadth, offering something for readers of nearly every taste—a form of justice itself; a way for Oziewicz to be inclusive towards his audience.

The most impressive feature of the book is without a doubt its timing. Oziewicz seems acutely aware of the necessity of this discussion in the present political and social climate. Discussions of Brexit and Trump-era policies, global climate change and environmental decline, and the effects of these on our

Western conceptions and applications of justice of all kinds are well contextualized in Oziewicz's work.

—Zachary Dilbeck



MARVELOUS GEOMETRY: NARRATIVE AND METAFICTION IN MODERN FAIRY TALE. Jessica Tiffin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009. 253 p. 9780814332627. \$59.95.

THIS WIDE-RANGING EXAMINATION OF MODERN FAIRY TALES, fairy tale-retellings, and fairy tale film provides a theoretical framework that positions the study of fairy tales within narrative theory, where fairy tales have been too often ignored or minimized in favor of the examination of the realist novel. Although Tiffin's book has exerted a significant influence on film studies and criticism of Angela Carter's short fiction since its publication in 2009, readers and critics of mythopoeic literature in general would also be well-served by familiarity with it. Especially in the opening chapter, Tiffin makes the case that "the patterns of fairy tale [...] are akin to the patterns of religious myth," and that "the patterns evoked by fairy tale are profoundly linked to human development and consciousness" (11). Although Tiffin does not, at length, discuss Tolkien, Lewis, or Williams, she does address numerous other authors with mythopoeic inclinations, particularly A.S. Byatt and Terry Pratchett. Tiffin's book provides a theoretical and critical grounding that serves to define the fairy tale as genre and suggests a number of pathways for analysis for mythopoeic literature.

In her opening chapter, Tiffin provides a useful summary of the trajectory of fairy tale criticism, from the rigid typological systems of Propp and Aarne-Thompson to the psychoanalytic approach of Bettelheim. In its place, Tiffin offers an elegant definition of the fairy tale, which is "characterized [...] by its deliberate removal from the real," and by its "characteristic simplicity [...] the extent to which it resists detail" (13). Most importantly, according to Tiffin, it is the "metafictional awareness" of fairy tale, more than any other trait, that differentiates it from other narrative (4). While responding to critics and researchers of the fairy tale, particularly Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar, Tiffin also situates her work within the discourses of critical theory, invoking the observations of Baudrillard, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno. As a result, Tiffin's discussions of fairy tale have equal relevance to students of folklore and theoretically-informed literary criticism.