

# The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre

*Tzvetan Todorov*

In *The Fantastic*, Tzvetan Todorov seeks to examine both generic theory and a particular genre, moving back and forth between a poetics of the fantastic itself and a metapoetics or theory of theorizing, even as he suggests that one must, as a critic, move back and forth between theory and history, between idea and fact. His work on the fantastic is indeed about a historical phenomenon that we recognize, about specific works that we may read, but it is also about the use and abuse of generic theory.

As an essay in fictional poetics, *The Fantastic* is consciously structuralist in its approach to the generic subject. Todorov seeks linguistic bases for the structural features he notes in a variety of fantastic texts, including Potocki's *The Sargasso Manuscript*, Nerval's *Aurélia*, Balzac's *The Magic Skin*, the *Arabian Nights*, Cazotte's *Le Diable Amoureux*, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and tales by E. T. A. Hoffman, Charles Perrault, Guy de Maupassant, Nicolai Gogol, and Edgar A. Poe.

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