

# ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

## *Fantastic Modes in Postcolonial Literatures*

Editors: Silvia Albertazzi and Oriana Palusci



(2021) Vol. N° 2 (dicembre) – ISSN 2723-8881

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# ContactZone

n. 2 (dicembre) 2021

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An International Peer-Reviewed

E-Journal

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### GRAPHIC LAYOUT

Nexus Advanced Technologies, Milano

[www.nexusat.it/digital-editing](http://www.nexusat.it/digital-editing)

*ContactZone* is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

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Authorisation n. 60 issued by the Court of Naples on 16/04/2019

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## Introduction

### The Life of Richard Parker

*Oriana Palusci*  
DOI: 10.26379/1680

Le fantastique [...] ne dure que le temp d'une hesitation: hesitation commune au lecteur et au personnage, qui doivent decider si ce qu'ils percoivent releve ou non de la "realite", telle qu'elle existe pour l'opinion commune. A la fin d'histoire, le lecteur, sinon le personnage, prend toute-fois una decision, il opte pour l'une ou l'autre solution, et par la meme sort du fantastique. (Todorov 1970:46)

Is Todorov's definition on "*litterature fantastique*" still valid today?" It is very difficult to define the fantastic or fantasy in the new millennium after the postmodernist age that has shred the boundaries between genres and deconstructed the literary (western) canon. Today, we still appreciate Christine Brooke-Rose's scholarly approach in *The Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981). A novelist and a structuralist critic, she compares different interpretations of *romance/fantasy/fantastic* by Northrop Frye, Tzvetan Todorov, Darko Suvin, and the different peculiarities of non-mimetic genres. However, we are actually more concerned with intertextual practices and generic hybridities.

# Ben Okri. A Way of Being Fantastic

*Silvia Albertazzi*

**DOI: 10.26379/1681**

## **Abstract**

In 1997 the Nigerian author Ben Okri published a small collection of nonfiction pieces called *A Way of Being Free*, whose value for the student of storytelling and fantastic literature appears to be inversely proportional to its size. In this sort of poetic claim for the primacy of storytelling (seen as fantastic by definition) in the Internet era, three sections are devoted to “the joys of storytelling”. The third section, which is composed of 101 aphorisms and fragments, is particularly interesting for the purposes of this essay. Okri’s aphorisms are commented in the light of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay on the storyteller and confronted with Salman Rushdie’s recurring pronouncements on the “unreality of realism”, from the interviews he gave in the early Eighties of the last century, on the wake of the success of *Midnight’s Children*, to his latest collection of essays, *Languages of Truth* (2021).

# A magical realist language? From the 'chutnification' of English to multilingualism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and its film adaptation

*Mirko Casagranda*

**DOI: 10.26379/1682**

In 1982, Salman Rushdie defined the language of *Midnight's Children* a literary idiolect derived from a process of 'chutnification', i.e. the incorporation of elements of Indian languages and dialects into English. Creatively resorting to inflection and derivation, borrowing, compounding, neologisms, and Indian expressions,

Rushdie's 'chutnified' English contributes to the magical realist narrative mode of the novel and its subversion of western paradigms of historical representation. In the homonymous film directed by Deepa Mehta in 2012, instead, parts of the novel have been 'translated' into Hindi and Urdu in order to provide the audience with a mimetic representation of Indian multilingualism. By privileging code-switching over an impossibly hybrid language, however, the film adaptation fails to convey the magical realism of the novel and its discursively disruptive power.

# Fantastic Tropes and Indigenous Female Gothic in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

Valerie Tosi  
DOI: 10.26379/1683

*The Swan Book* (2013) by Aboriginal author Alexis Wright is a novel with cultural, political, and ecocritical implications. Set in a dystopian future in which wars and climate change have destroyed the Western world, it tells the story of Oblivia, a mute Aboriginal girl who is torn away from her people and forced to become the first lady of a fictitious indigenous country named Broлга Nation. Based on Propp's model for the study of the fairy tale and Todorov's characterisation of the fantastic, I intend to investigate *The Swan Book* from a genre fiction perspective. Wright draws on uncanny elements typical of fairy tales and gothic fiction to depict Oblivia's abduction, her confinement in a post-apocalyptic city, her encounters with nonhuman beings, and her journey home. My focus will be on how the author uses fantastic tropes to produce multiple levels of reality that puzzle the reader and challenge a unique interpretation of the events narrated. The spectral entities that accompany Oblivia in her hallucinatory life in the city and during her long walk across the remotest areas of central Australia can be seen as inhabitants of different realities that overlap without melding, namely uncanny articulations of 'cultural difference' (Bhabha 1994: 60).

## Between the Fantastic and Myth in Aotearoa New Zealand: Tina Makereti's *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa*

*Paola Della Valle*

**DOI: 10.26379/1684**

Magic realism has been conceptualized as a mode that transgresses ontological, political, geographical, and generic boundaries. Māori writers, however, have always considered magic realism an “invention” of the West, an aesthetic approach that has nothing to do with the deep structure of Māori values and their metaphysical underpinnings. According to Māori *mātauranga* (understanding), the supernatural and the mythical are naturally part of everyday life. History and myth overlap in the literary genre of *whakapapa* (genealogy), which underlines the centrality of ancestry in Māori culture. In *Once Upon a Time in Aotearoa* (2010), Māori writer Tina Makereti follows this principle. Her short stories explore Māori myths and legends, which are rewritten to explain the present. At the same time, she depicts the gods living in a contemporary world and motivated by human concerns. Old and new worlds coexist, characters connect with each other through ancient wisdom.



# Between Faith and Irreverence: Magical Realism in Leone Ross's *This One Sky Day*

Valentina Chiesa

DOI: 10.26379/1685

This paper aims at exploring the connection between fantastic modes and indigenous cosmologies, in particular with reference to Leone Ross's third novel *This One Sky Day* (2021), whose fictional Caribbean archipelago setting, i.e. Popisho, is a community where magic is commonplace. After identifying the basic formal properties of magical realism in Leone Ross's novel, the paper uses the categories which Christopher Warnes identifies in his *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* (2009) to argue that both categories coexist in the novel, i.e. the anthropological, faith-based magical realism, and the irreverent, or discursive magical realism. On the one hand, Ross creates a fascinating portrait of Jamaican people and uses magical realism metonymically to grant access to the modes of perception (Warnes 2009) that characterise the Jamaican worldview. On the other hand, Leone Ross gives voice to those minorities who, for different reasons, have no voice. In *This One Sky Day* the supernatural is used to challenge received discourses the patriarchal and heteronormative discourse and the values that accompany it, how it is used in the perpetuation of privilege (men's) and oppression (women's and homosexuals'), how it takes on the status of truth.

## Eco-Crime in Randolph Stow's *The Suburbs of Hell*

*Salhia Ben-Messahel*

**DOI: 10.26379/1686**

This paper focuses on Randolph Stow's last published novel, *Suburbs of Hell* (1984). It analyses the transposition of real events into fiction and demonstrates how the narrative strategies of crime-fiction are reflected in the environment. In this novel, the displacing of real Australian events into the fictionalized space of the country-town of Harwich, Essex, designs a counter-space, a heterotopia that relies on processes of translation and a heterochronic vision of history. Taking into account the novel's postcolonial emphasis on place and intersection with the genre of crime-fiction, I argue that Stow designs a psychogeography tracing the danger and violence within the community so that the domestic and the familiar are nothing but mere illusions. Thus, home, the rural and urban (suburban) space, the self, surface as places of otherness subjected to the subversive and uncanny effects of gothic imagination.

# The Fantastic as Ecological Warning in Rudy Wiebe's "The Angel of the Tar Sands"

*Francoise Besson*  
DOI: 10.26379/1687

In Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe's fantastic short story "The Angel of the Tar Sands," an archaeological find becomes a supernatural figure denouncing the destruction of nature. Its fantastic presence revealing the destructive pollution of the soil affecting all creatures, denounces the destruction that takes place in Canada as well as in the United States, where the exploitation of tar sands and shale gas destroys wide areas and the populations, particularly the Native communities, living there. The opposition between nature and industry on which the story is based, brings about a new opposition between nature and supernature, in which the messenger whose fantastic body is found in the soil, speaks for all creature affected by industrial pollution. In this short story the fantastic is both a warning messenger and a poetic weapon making people aware of the threats on land, water and communities. A parallel can be made with photographs by Louis Helbig and Sebastiao Salgado showing "beauty sleeping in the lap of horror."