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REFERENCES

Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011. Pp. 205. ISBN: 978-3-8376-1841-9.

- 1 Petra Eckhard's book seeks to examine the ways in which American writers of the late 20th century have incorporated the "uncanny" into their novelistic discourse. The writer, who is now Assistant Professor in the Department of American Studies, University of Graz, Austria, reads two American novels of the late 20th century using the theories of Freud, Todorov and Bakhtin. The title itself is quite suggestive, as the words "chronotope" and "uncanny" set the tone of the analysis and introduce to us the psychoanalytic discourse of Eckhard's study. However, the author uses the idea of the "return of the repressed"¹ and its spatio-temporal bearing in a more general manner than the title alone suggests. The evocative picture on the cover also makes it obvious that the book will deal with urban space: a big city street, an American city street by the feel of it, perhaps even New York city – judging from the yellow cab and the vertical topography. Besides, the novels mentioned in the title—*City of Glass* and *Jazz*—are two distinctly urban novels: Auster's novel deals with New York in the late 20th century, while Morrison places her story in Harlem during the roaring 20's.

- 2 The term “chronotope,” coined by M. Bakhtin, describes the ways in which time and space is described by language and more specifically literary language. As for the “uncanny,” it is the familiar Freudian *Das Unheimliche*ⁱⁱ which describes an instance when we deem something familiar, yet foreign at the same time and which results in a feeling of uneasiness. In the book’s introductory notes the writer explains the reasons why she regards the Freudian notion of the uncanny as the appropriate analytical tool to read urban novels. She suggests that the uncanny is a primarily urban phenomenon and supports her position with quotes from such theorists as Benjamin, Simmel, Bachelard, Lefebvre and Sassen arguing that there is an affinity between urban space and the inner mechanisms of our mental life that is of a purely spatio-temporal nature. Next, the author mentions a vast array of modernist writers (such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald or John Dos Passos) whose texts represent the modern city as a dark, monstrous place, full of incoherence and confusion that affects the characters’ movements in it and shapes their cognitive perception and overall personality. Moving on from modernism, Eckhard discusses postmodernity and its literary products, concluding that postmodern writers paint the city in the same gloomy colors as their modernist counterparts but end up acknowledging the fact that the post-modern perceptions of the city are governed by illusions and unconscious forces.
- 3 The book is divided in two main parts. The first part, “Orientations,” consists of Chapter 1, entitled “The Uncanny: Towards a Definition” and Chapter 2, entitled “Chronopoetics,” wherein the author provides the reader with definitions and literary examples of her analytical tools. The second part – which is the main part of her study – includes Chapter 3, entitled “Uncanny Architectures: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*” and Chapter 4 entitled “Haunted Harlem: Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*.” In these two last chapters, Eckhard uses the novels in question so as to “put forward a definition of the uncanny along the lines of spatio-temporal relations characteristic of the post-modern period” (20).
- 4 Thus, in the first part of the book Eckhard juxtaposes Freud’s and Todorov’s definitions of the uncanny in order to set the theoretical framework of her study, but also to point out the limitations of using the uncanny in literary discourse. Moving on with her analysis, the author discusses the notion of the “chronotopos” as put forward by Bakhtin and applies it to the Gothic genre. She traces the development of eighteenth century gothic fiction (Schlosszeit) to gothic post-modernist works (Stadtzeit) reaching the conclusion that the “unheimlich” stemming from the former (Schlosszeit) is based on clearly delineated notions of space and time, whereas the uncanny related to the latter (Stadtzeit) is associated with a complete loss of ordered and continuous chronotopic structures.
- 5 In the second part of the book Eckhard explains how both *City of Glass* and *Jazz* deal with post-traumatic effects that “can only be captured convincingly through discontinuous chronotopes” (184). In Auster, there is the trauma of the break between word and meaning as well as the traumata suffered by Peter Stillman Jr. and Daniel Quinn. In Morrison we encounter “personal memories or, rather traumata [...] radically challenging traditional slave narratives” (131) while the traumatized past of a love triangle (Violet-Joe-Dorcas) is presented to us as a painful history of dispossession and loss. According to Eckhard’s analysis, these characters cannot but come to the conclusion that “urban identities are built upon the tropes of homelessness, dislocation and aberration” (184). Their psychic wounds can begin to heal only when they come to terms with the fact that temporal and spatial fragmentation “is the one and only reliable structuring principle of

their lifeworlds” (184). The chronotopes of the uncanny explored in Eckhard’s book are “materializations of repressed memories and histories” that offer us access to late twentieth-century subjective and collective terrors linked to life in the Western (post-modern) Metropolis. Ultimately, Eckhard argues that both *City of Glass* and *Jazz* provide the reader with touches of hope “so that the city cannot, unlike in most modernist accounts, be viewed only as a destructive and disenchanting force” (186).

- 6 In conclusion, this book contributes to the growing body of critical thought on Urban Literature by integrating Space Studies and Psychoanalytical texts. Furthermore, it is a solid achievement and a valuable contribution to the field of both Auster and Morrison scholarship.
- 7 i. SigmundFreud,*The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003) 121–162.
- 8 ii. The unheimlich can be roughly translated as the opposite of what is familiar, the unhomely.

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